

Circle of Friends

News from Mercer Street Friends Winter 2006

A Quaker-affiliated, nonsectarian human care agency providing compassionate and practical solutions to the problems of poverty and health



MERCER STREET FRIENDS

The Streets Will Eat Your Soul



Kendall, now 18 and a student at Mercer County Community College, credits Mercer Street Friends with helping him turn his life around. What, in his opinion, would keep young people in Trenton off the streets?

“The YEP program,” he says succinctly. “Kids need something to do after school or they’ll end up on the streets, and the streets is going to eat their soul. You turn 18 and if you get in trouble, you do time. Then you’re stuck. You can’t do nothin’ cause you got a record. When I come home from school I stay in the house unless I have somewhere to go.”

YEP stands for Youth Event Programming, a yearlong after-school course designed by Shannon Mason, director of the Youth Services division of Mercer Street Friends, and funded by the City of Trenton’s after-school program, SCOOP. Kendall became involved with YEP in the fall of his senior year in high school, after spending the summer at the Back on Track program of Mercer Street Friends, which provides young people with academic tutoring and structured activities. Field trips are important

because many of those in the program have not had the opportunity to explore the world outside Trenton.

“When I was 16, I was hangin’ with kids I wasn’t ’sposed to be—a bad crowd,” he explained. “I got in trouble one day, and the police officer said if I went to the Back on Track program at Mercer Street Friends for 90 days, they would clear my record. I got there at just the right time because it was the beginning of the summer and I got to go on field trips. We went to cool places like the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia.”

That fall, in his senior year in high school, Kendall took a leadership role in

Free Tax Preparation for Low-Income Families

MORE THAN \$5 MILLION in tax credits went unclaimed in Mercer County in 2004, according to the Internal Revenue Service. “Many low-income wage earners who teeter on the brink of poverty are unaware that they are eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC),” said Terry Kiely, policy advocate for Mercer Street Friends. “That’s why we want to get the word out.”

To encourage eligible wage earners to apply for the EITC, Mayor Douglas Palmer of Trenton held a press conference in January at City Hall. Among the featured speakers was Kiely, who explained that, as an active member of the Greater Trenton Earned Income Tax Credit/Asset Building Coalition (GEA), Mercer Street Friends organized a two-day Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) IRS training course for nonprofits in Mercer County in order to provide free tax preparation for low-income families.

The EITC is “refundable,” which means that workers who do not owe income tax and file a tax return can receive a refund from the IRS. If they do not file a tax return, they cannot receive the credit. The amount of the EITC is dependent upon the number of children in the family and the amount of income earned through work. For 2005, the EITC is worth up to \$4,400 for workers who earn less than \$35,263 (or less than \$37,263 if married and filing jointly) and have two or more quali-

Your Care and Concern is Deeply Appreciated

Dear Friends,

Despite all my years of working in the field of human services in Trenton, I did not anticipate the holiday outpouring of generosity to our clients from individuals, civic organizations and companies; state, county and city agencies; schools and scout troops; and charitable and religious organizations.

Toys and books for children of all ages; warm clothing, including mittens, socks, scarves, hats and coats in all sizes; home baked cookies and handmade cards with thoughtful greetings; goodie bags, toiletries and food—all this and more arrived on our doorstep and were distributed to the clients in our programs. Some donors “adopted” whole families, who received warm bedding, furniture and computers as well as gifts and food; others sent Santa or sponsored holiday parties; one corporation made it possible for a group of children to see the “Disney Holiday on Ice” show at the Sovereign Bank Arena.

On behalf of the individuals and families we serve who have so little, we thank you who contributed so much. Some of those folks would have had little cause to celebrate if it had not been for your thoughtfulness.

The positive impact of your generosity on Mercer Street Friends as an organization cannot be overestimated. The staff members who work with clients day in and day out feel especially rewarded by the care and concern expressed by members of the community for the people in their programs.

We are well aware that your time is also a gift that Mercer Street Friends could not do without. In our next issue of *Circle of Friends*, we will focus on volunteers and their contributions, without which we could not accomplish the things we do.

Your generosity has launched us on a Happy New Year. All of us at Mercer Street Friends wish you the same.

Sincerely,



Barry H. Cole, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Starbucks Hamilton-Trenton 'Adopts' Center

STARBUCKS district managers Mike Mazza and Bill Nies are not afraid to get down and dirty. Last fall, they brought art supplies and got down on the floor with the children of the Hamilton Avenue Early Childhood Education Center to encourage them to paint and draw. The result was an art exhibition at the opening of Starbucks Hamilton-Trenton. Mazza and Nies were also on hand for the Halloween party and the Cheer party held in December when the children of the center were treated to lunch and activities at the store.



Hamilton Mayor Glen Gilmore, Nancy Fasanella, director of the Hamilton Avenue Early Childhood Education Center, and Sheri Kurdakul, manager of Starbucks Hamilton-Trenton, display a check representing a Starbucks Make Your Mark Grant at the opening.

Computer Literacy for Children



Children at the Mercer Street Friends Early Childhood Education Center on West State Street enjoy new computers donated by the United Way of Greater Mercer County and community partner IBM.

fyng children. Families with one qualifying child who earn less than \$31,030 (or less than \$33,030 if married and filing jointly) are eligible for a credit of up to \$2,662. Single workers without a qualifying child who earn less than \$11,750 (or less than \$13,750 for married workers) are eligible for a credit of up to \$399.

Many of these families either are not applying for the EITC or they are losing a big percentage of their refund by paying high fees to commercial tax preparers. In 2002, according to estimates, low-income taxpayers lost more than \$1 billion in fees related to commercial tax preparation. In addition to paying fees for such services as tax preparation, documentation preparation and electronic filing, a low-wage earner may be encouraged to take out a Refund Anticipation Loan (RAL). The wage earner pays a fee to obtain an RAL, which is based on his or her anticipated tax refund. Interest continues to accrue until the wage earner receives the tax refund and repays the loan. However, if the IRS denies part of the refund for any reason, or even withholds it temporarily for audit purposes, the wage earner continues to be responsible for the cost of the loan. These fees leave many workers worse off, thus undermining the intention of the EITC to assist low-income families.

Nonprofit and government organizations participating in the VITA site training included the Crisis Ministry of Princeton and Trenton; United Progress Inc.; J.O. Wilson Neighborhood Center; Trenton Head Start; City of Trenton Division of Community Relations and Social Services; City of Trenton Division of Recreation and Mercer Street Friends, which will provide free tax preparation and EITC outreach to low-income



Mercer Street Friends policy advocate Terry Kiely spoke at the press conference on the EITC at Trenton's City Hall.

wage earners in Mercer County during the months of February and March.

Statistics for Mercer County show that Princeton Borough and Township are among the areas where many eligible taxpayers have not taken advantage of the EITC. For more information on free tax preparation for low-income wage earners, please call Terry Kiely at (609) 396-1506.

Mercer Street Friends Welcomes New Board Members

Stuart Wisse, retired principal of the Arthur R. Sypek Center at the Mercer County Technical School, has joined the board for a three-year term. A long-time member of the Solebury Friends Meeting and a volunteer at Mercer Street Friends, Wisse worked for many years with young people from all over the county and became aware of the needs of its youth, especially in the Greater Trenton area. "When I retired, I wanted to connect with a serious agency involved with meeting these needs," he said in a telephone interview.

Alan J. Meinster has rejoined the board for another three-year term. Meinster, who served previously from 1996 to 2004, has been vice chair of the board and chair of the Advancement Committee. He is the owner of Marsilio's Restaurant in Chambersburg in Trenton and is listed on the PoliticsNJ.com Power List as one of the "Top 100 Insiders Who Influence Politics in New Jersey."

Last October, in a Minute of Appreciation, the board expressed its deep gratitude to **Odie LeFever** for her service on the board over a period of 20 years. LeFever joined the board in

1984 and was secretary from 1988 to 1991, when her first term ended. She returned to the board in 1993, and was elected to the positions of vice chair in 1995 and chair in 1997. In 2004, she stepped down as chair and became associate chair until the end of her term.

Mentioned in the Minute were her sensitive and strong leadership and her challenge to both board and staff to examine issues, evaluate programs and be relevant to the needs of the people served.

LeFever's time, talent, skills, careful chairing and facilitation of meetings will be missed by the board, but her dedication and devotion to the mission of Mercer Street Friends continues as strong as ever.



Odie LeFever

Leave a Legacy That Will Lift Up the Community

“LAST YEAR, I WAS introduced to Mercer Street Friends through a Lunch and Learn program and quickly learned what a wonderful organization it is because of its many-pronged approach to the problems of poverty and health,” said Bruce B. Woodger in a recent interview. Woodger is retired from the position of director of planned giving at the American Cancer Society of New Jersey. “The staff members of Mercer Street Friends are impressive,” he went on, “not only because they are highly qualified but also because they are dedicated to their clients—they ‘feel’ their work as well as do it. The agency serves those in need in order to lift up the community as a whole. Since not everyone has the time to do that, Mercer Street Friends is doing it for us all. I felt it was only natural that when I reviewed my will I should include a bequest.”

A legacy is a gift that extends beyond one’s lifetime, and will help Mercer Street Friends continue its life-affirming work throughout the Greater Trenton area. You may do this through a bequest in your will or through a deferred gift.

If you use your will to designate a gift to Mercer Street Friends, you have a number of options. You may choose to give shares of stock; leave all or a portion of what remains of your estate after other commitments have been satisfied; or designate a specific amount or a percentage of your estate.

A deferred gift provides you with the opportunity to make gifts in support of the work of Mercer Street Friends, while at the same time preserving continuing income during your lifetime or that of another income beneficiary. The principal remaining at the death of the income beneficiary will then transfer to Mercer Street Friends. Services are provided through the Friends Fiduciary Corporation, a Quaker nonprofit corporation, which supplies financial services to other Quaker nonprofit organizations and Meetings.

When considering these types of gifts, you should obtain the advice or assistance of an attorney or other professional advisor.

For more information on how you can make a difference for Mercer Street Friends through a planned gift, please contact Bob LeFever, director of advancement, at (609) 396-1506.

Mercer Street Friends was honored to be the recipient of the Barnes & Noble Holiday Book Drive this year. Eight hundred books (a value of \$8,000) were collected for the children in Mercer Street Friends programs, and volunteer gift wrappers collected more than \$1,000 in cash donations for the agency.

Kendall, cont. from page 1

the YEP program, which began with an initial six-week training course on employment skills training and career exploration. At the end of the session the 81 students in the course were interviewed and 24 were chosen to assess the needs and interests of youth in their community, then plan and implement programs to meet those needs.

The first event the group planned was a coffee house at one of the schools with an open mike session for singers, rappers and others who wanted to display their talents. Unfortunately, the last 10 minutes of the event were marred by a fight that ended the program early. “We had some serious crisis counseling to do after that one,” said Mason. “The kids were so upset and disappointed because they had worked so hard to make the event a success. The incident did give us an opportunity to talk about violence in the community, how it affects them personally and what resources are available to help them deal with it.”

“We got to do cool things that keep kids off the streets.”

The other events the group planned, including a four-day tour of colleges on the East Coast and a day trip to Harlem, went off without a hitch. Attended by 150 people, the final event was a banquet at the end of the year for all of the teens in the SCOOP program.

“YEP was good. That’s why I want them [the City of Trenton] to fund the program again this year,” said Kendall. “We got to do cool things that keep kids off the streets. This year I hope to be a junior counselor.”

In the summer after he graduated from high school, Kendall worked with the Urban Gateway Enhancement Program of Mercer Street Friends in collaboration with the State Department of Transportation and the City of Trenton. The program provides jobs and vocational counseling for young people, who work on beautifying the gateways to the city. Along with pruning and lawn mowing, they learn about landscape architecture.

Kendall is enthusiastic about his courses at college and the diversity of the students. “I’ve met people from all over the country,” he said. When he isn’t studying, he enjoys reading mysteries and novels on urban themes, such as those by Wahida Clark, a native of Trenton now in federal prison. Her books, *Thugs and the Women Who Love Them* and *Every Thug Needs a Lady*, have garnered rave reviews from readers on Amazon.com.

Does Kendall want to leave Trenton at some point? “I don’t know,” he said. “I want to graduate from college and get a realtor’s license,” he continued, “so I can buy and sell property and build my own record label.”

Christmas on Escher Street

ON CHRISTMAS EVE, Tim, a medal winner in the Special Olympics New Jersey, and Thomas, who recently obtained a janitorial job through ARC of Mercer County, were eagerly awaiting Santa's elves at the door of the SRO (single-resident-occupancy) building for low-income people next to the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen on Escher Street.

The elves are Mercer Street Friends Home Health Care nurse Malarie Beam and her sister Tracy who, for the third year in a row, came bringing cheer, gifts and food to Malarie's clients and to the other residents at Escher Street, people who are outside the American mainstream.

Nurse Malarie, as she is known, is a psychiatric nurse who calls on 20 to 25 clients at least once each week. She helps them stay on their medications and makes sure they are eating regularly and attending day programs. Aides from Mercer Street Friends, which has the only ongoing home health program in the county for behavioral health clients, help people with coping skills such as cooking, shopping and handling money. The goal of the program is to keep clients healthy and thus avoid the disruption and expense of hospitalization.

"This is what Christmas means to me," says Nurse Malarie, who brings practical items she knows her clients need: sheets and towels; hats, scarves and gloves; shampoo, toothpaste and other toiletries; and packets of oatmeal and cocoa and sandwiches and Snapple for the next day, when the Soup Kitchen is closed.

Contributing to gifts distributed on Santa's Rounds were the nurses and other professional staff of Mercer Street Friends Home Health Care, as well as Brownie Troop 633 and Junior Brownie Troop 1430 of the Girl Scouts of Delaware-Raritan, who made goodie bags, and Ms. Caryl Pitt's fifth-grade class at the Lower Montgomery Middle School in Skillman, which provided Snapple, cookies, socks, gloves, scarves and handmade holiday cards with personal messages. "I hope you have a beautiful life, not only on holidays, but every day," wrote one fifth-grader.

In previous years, Malarie and her sister have gone room to room to deliver the gifts, but this year they had a party in the library, which was also attended by Mercer Street Friends home health aide Bessie Staley, a favorite at Escher Street. Delighted clients drank coffee and ate cookies while opening their gifts: a new hat for one, a frying pan for another; microwave cooking pots for another. At the

end, each received a stuffed animal. Tim immediately demonstrated a headlock on his.

And this year, Nurse Malarie received a card and a \$12 gift certificate to Sticky Wicket from "her people," as she calls them.

When the party was over, the clients headed back to their rooms, while the Beam sisters went around the building to distribute goodie bags and make the holiday special for other residents.



Santa's Elves Visit Escher Street: Left to right, back row: Russell, Jaumar, Nurse Malarie Beam, Tim. Left to right, front row: Otis, Mercer Street Friends home health aide Bessie Staley, Thomas, Tracy Beam.



Mercer Street Friends Youth Services

division helped Kendall get Back on Track, finish high school and start college. To continue providing counseling services, activities, academic tutoring and field trips that keep young people off the streets and give them hope for the future, we need your help.

Please add my name to the growing list of people actively supporting Mercer Street Friends. Enclosed is my contribution of:

\$30 \$50 \$100 \$250 \$500 Other \$ _____

Name _____

Street Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Day Phone/Evening Phone _____

E-mail _____

Please send your check, made payable to Mercer Street Friends, to 151 Mercer Street, Trenton, NJ 08611. Your contribution is tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

1/06

Your Workplace United Way Contribution You can specifically designate Mercer Street Friends as a recipient of your workplace United Way contribution by writing in our name or by using your company's Donor Designation Number.

Circle of Friends Editor: Scotia W. MacRae Designer: Sue Bannon

Programs of Mercer Street Friends

HUNGER-RESPONSE SERVICES

- Mercer Street Friends Food Cooperative
- Food Distribution
- Food Stamp Outreach
- Nutrition Education
- Policy Analysis and Advocacy

HEALTH CARE

- Mercer Street Friends Home Health Care
- Nursing Services
- Rehabilitation Services
- Physical, Occupational, Speech Therapy
- Nutritional Consultation
- Medical Social Services
- Certified Home Health Aides

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

- Mercer Street Friends Early Childhood Education Centers
 - 1201 West State Street, 18 months–4 years
 - 1337 Hamilton Avenue, 6 months–4 years (Includes placements for children in crisis)
 - 615 North Clinton Avenue, 18 months–4 years
- Mercer Street Friends School-Age Child Care, grades pre-K–5
 - Provided in 15 Public Schools in the Trenton and Hamilton Districts, including the Mercer County Special Needs District

YOUTH SERVICES

- Outpatient Drug and Alcohol Treatment Service
- Back on Track, ages 8–17
- Urban Gateway Enhancement Program, ages 16–21
- Youth Event Planning Program (YEP), ages 14–17

ADULT SERVICES

- Mercer Street Friends Parent Support Services
 - Healthy Families (Trenton, Citywide)
 - Children's Futures (Trenton, West Ward)
- Basic Skills and Literacy Development
- Job Search Services



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