

circle of friends



News from Mercer Street Friends A Quaker-Affiliated, Non-Sectarian Human Care Agency Summer 2008

HAPPY BIRTHDAY MERCER STREET FRIENDS!



Mercer Street Friends (MSF) turns 50 in 2008, a milestone that for people typically marks a time of slowing down and taking stock of what's been accomplished and what is yet to come. Though it is fitting to reflect on MSF's impressive first half-century, there has certainly been no slowing down for this vibrant human care agency. As energetic and compassionate today as it was when it was founded, it offers an array of programs that were not even dreamt of when the Mercer Street Friends Center first opened its doors to the neighborhood. What has been and what will remain a constant is an understanding of the considerable needs of the greater Trenton and Mercer County area together with a dedication to providing services to meet them.

Mercer Street Friends began with the healing of an old wound. After over a century in which the Religious Society of Friends (commonly known as the Quakers) was split

into two major branches—the Orthodox and Hicksite Friends—the rift was mended in the mid-1950s. Two Trenton meetinghouses were no longer needed, but because of its adjacent burial ground, the unused 1857 Orthodox meetinghouse on Mercer Street was unlikely to attract a buyer. Members of Trenton Meeting, who were concerned by the decay of the Mill Hill neighborhood in which the meetinghouse was located, decided to open a community center.

The first order of business was to make the old meetinghouse suitable for its new purpose. Privies made way for modern conveniences like running water and a heating system, and the interior was reconfigured to house classes and other gatherings. Following the model of the Friends Neighborhood Guild in Philadelphia, the young Mercer Street Friends Center became a place where Trenton's forgotten people, many of them recent immigrants, could learn the skills

they'd need to survive and gain the pride in self and community they'd need to succeed. Donors and volunteers, especially members of Trenton and Princeton Friends meetings, provided both resources and time to the fledgling center.

Many of MSF's early programs were specifically for women and children. Classes ranging from nutrition to English were offered, as was a babysitting co-op for working parents. Woodworking skills were taught in the basement with donated equipment. Clothing and food were given to those in need. The Friends Homemaker Service provided job opportunities for local women, and friends of the center who had houses with swimming pools opened their hearts and their homes to an informal summer program that gave urban children a safe recreation option. When neighbors expressed concern that youths were playing and hanging out in the center's cemetery, the practical Quakers laid the headstones

Fifty years since its humble beginning, Mercer Street Friends is still building futures by rebuilding lives.

flat and paved them over, making way for a playground and, eventually, the garden that now grows on the building's upper terrace.

It wasn't long before the center's all-volunteer workforce no longer sufficed, and Wilbur Kelsey, the first director and paid employee, was hired. Executive directors and countless dedicated staff members, too numerous to name, have all left their mark. With an

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Dear Friends,

Anniversaries, especially notable ones, tend to evoke memories and nostalgia. Mercer Street Friends (MSF) is celebrating a huge milestone this year - fifty years of service to the children, families and adults of Trenton and Greater Mercer County.

An agency like Mercer Street Friends can be successful over a fifty year span only if it both serves the needs of the community and is supported by the community. At this time in our history, I want to thank all of you who have supported our agency over these many years, helping us to “build futures by rebuilding lives.”

About a year and a half ago, there was a reunion of former Trustees of Mercer Street Friends. Present among the attendees were some of the founders of our agency. All shared their memories and recollections of the people and events that had an impact on them. It was quite moving.

And now, as we celebrate this 50th anniversary year, I would ask that if any of you has a story about your experience with MSF, please share it with us, even if anonymously, and allow us in turn to share it with our supporters. It is an excellent time to share your recollections of how Mercer Street Friends made a difference in your life or in the life of someone you know. And please include any photographs you might have that capture a ‘Mercer Street Friends moment.’

Over the course of the year, we will be telling the story of Mercer Street Friends’ first fifty years. Please share the information you receive with your families, friends and neighbors. Help them understand how Mercer Street Friends has served the greater Trenton area for half a century.

Sincerely,



Barry H. Cole, Ph.D.

50 Years of Success Stories

“We know we’ve made the difference in the lives of a lot of people.”—Bob Appelbaum, one of Mercer Street Friends’ founders

In a half-century of helping the community, one person at a time, Mercer Street Friends has received countless much-appreciated gifts. Among the most treasured are the stories of people whose lives have been changed for the better thanks to MSF. Here’s a small sampling:



“It was you who taught me my first notes on the piano. It was you who took me on my first trips to Philadelphia and New York, piquing my curiosity about the world. You have helped me cultivate my dreams...” wrote **Sanford Livingston** to Mercer Street Friends, 30 years after he attended after-school and summer programs and got his first summer job with the agency in the 1970s. Growing up in Trenton with his sister and struggling single mother, he not only benefited from MSF programs; he found a mentor in longtime staff member John Conley. A vice president of Wells Fargo Bank, Sanford attributed his success at least in part to the early assistance of Mercer Street Friends: “Because of your help, I have grown to become a leader and steward of my community.”



In 1997 **Bailah Dainkeh** was a 17-year-old student living in war-torn Sierra Leone, when a harrowing series of events, including his near-capture by rebels and the destruction of his home, caused him to flee. By 2000 he had found his way to Trenton, where he realized he would need a high school diploma to get a decent job. For eight months he attended daily MSF classes with the goal of obtaining his GED. While improving his English, science, and social studies skills, he learned about American culture from his teacher, with whom he had long discussions. He was accepted into Mercer County Community College, where he got a degree in applied engineering. He was hired by PSE&G, which sponsored him to attend Drexel for a master’s in engineering. He stays in touch with his Mercer Street Friends teacher, Lesley Feldstein, whom he considers one of the “pillars that support me.”



With six children and recurring stints on welfare, **Ninibibi Bolt** was determined to change her life. Having dreamt of becoming a nurse, she enrolled in three Mercer Street Friends programs—parenting support, basic skills and literacy, and job readiness services—that helped her with several different, but important, facets of her life. With extensive mentoring by MSF staff, Bibi became a certified home health aide (with an eye toward getting her GED and enrolling in a nursing program), but she also became a better parent, improving the lives of six youngsters as well as her own.

A HEART FOR THE HUNGRY

Food Bank Director Honored As 2008 Woman of Achievement

Phyllis Stoolmacher isn't one to bask in the spotlight for long. When Jose Hernandez, CEO of the YWCA of Trenton, and a colleague, visited her recently to tell her she would receive the organization's 2008 Woman of Achievement Award, one of Stoolmacher's first questions for them was: "Is the YWCA a member of the Food Bank?"

Then, Hernandez recalls, Stoolmacher spent about 20 minutes telling them how the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank could enhance the local YWCA's services to homeless women. Later that week, the organization joined the Food Bank.

"Phyllis is single minded in her focus on the nutritional needs of the undeserved in our community."

*--MSF Director of Advancement,
Bob LeFever*

"We spent five minutes talking about her and 20 minutes talking about what she could do for us," says Hernandez, who presented the award to Stoolmacher at the YWCA's Annual Gala in May. "That's the heart of what she does and who she is. She is putting the focus on the needs of the community, putting the focus on the needy and everyone else but herself."

As director of the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank for the past 20 years, Stoolmacher has been a tireless advocate for the hungry, turning people's attention to the pervasiveness of hunger in America and its causes. Describing her as an energetic fund-raiser and a "ferocious" grant writer, MSF Executive Director Barry Cole says Stoolmacher's tenacity, intelligence and passion for the cause have enabled her to

garner broad support for the Food Bank.

"It goes beyond food," Cole says. "She just has a strong belief in social justice and doing what's right for people."

Under Stoolmacher's guidance, the Food Bank has grown from a fledgling program, housed in a closet space underneath a stairwell in the Rescue Mission of Trenton, to a vital community resource located in a 10,000-square-foot facility. In its first year of operation, the Food Bank distributed 80,000 pounds of food; by last year, that amount had grown to two million pounds.

Stoolmacher also has been instrumental in extending the Food Bank's outreach mission beyond food distribution to include nutrition education and advocacy. With bachelor's and master's degrees in political science, Stoolmacher is well-qualified for her role as a grassroots activist leading efforts to support legislation designed to improve conditions of hunger and poverty. Most recently, she led the Food Bank's efforts to support the Farm Bill that was passed by the U.S. Congress in June by writing an opinion piece that appeared in the *Times of Trenton*, making contacts with legislators and encouraging Food Bank members and clients to voice their support of the bill.

Realizing that hunger is a significant problem for children, affecting their performance in school and perpetuating a tragic cycle of poverty, Stoolmacher implemented the "Backpack Program" earlier this year. Through the initiative, which originated with the national food bank network America's Second Harvest, the MSF Food Bank was able to provide local schoolchildren from low-income households with a backpack full of nutritious and easy-to-open food for weekends and holiday breaks. During the past school year, the MSF Food Bank partnered with one local elementary school



"Phyllis' boundless energy and dedication inspire us all."

*--MSF Executive Assistant,
Maj Britt Smith*

as a test and Stoolmacher hopes to expand the program next year.

Though she's pleased to have accomplished so much during her two decades at the helm of the MSF Food Bank, Stoolmacher points out that there's still much to do. While growth and expansion of services is a positive achievement, she dreams of a society where food banks, and her job, aren't necessary.

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MSF Board Welcomes Carl J. Cangelosi


Mercer Street Friends welcomes Carl J. Cangelosi to its board of trustees. During the past 40 years, Carl Cangelosi has been a general counsel of a major communications company, CEO of several corporations, a communications consultant and a mediator. He has been an officer and board member of both private and public corporations.

Mr. Cangelosi graduated from Georgetown University in 1964 and Boston College Law School in 1967. He started his career at the Federal Communications Commission and in 1971 became Washington counsel for RCA Global Communications. Subsequently, he was appointed general counsel of RCA American Communications.

In 1990, he became CEO and president of MicroNet Inc., a newly formed teleport and tower company. The World Teleport Association recognized him as co-recipient of the Teleport Executive of the Year in 1999.

In 2000, Carl formed the Communications Consulting Group and in 2001 he formed the New Jersey Mediation Group. He is an officer of, and sits on the board of directors of, the New Jersey Association of Professional Mediators (NJAPM) and is accredited by the Association for both civil



and divorce mediation. He has mediated civil cases privately and for the courts in New Jersey. He resides in Plainsboro, where he is also on the Planning Board, with his wife, Marge, a psychologist in private practice in Princeton. 

HAPPY BIRTHDAY Mercer Street Friends!

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entrepreneurial spirit, they accomplished many great things and weathered hard times, including a fire and the sudden departure of one director. According to Odie LeFever, a former board chair associated with the board for 20 years, "The quality and longevity of the staff is extraordinary. The understanding and love they have for people is so beautiful."

Ironically, the Mill Hill neighborhood that was disintegrating in 1958 is stable, desirable, and thriving today, while other areas of Trenton and Mercer County have not fared as well. Though a rear addition was put on 151 Mercer Street to house a Head Start program, eventually the need for new services—and the need to locate them near the people who required them—made the old meetinghouse an inappropriate home for MSF programs. Added to the National Register of Historic Places in the 1970s, it now houses the agency's administrative offices, while services are offered around the capital area.

Other notable initiatives in MSF history include help in getting Trenton's Village Charter School, modeled after Friends schools, off the ground in the 1990s. Today Mercer Street Friends' four divisions—Children and Youth Services, Parenting and Adult Services, Home Health Care, and the Food Bank—offer child care, food distribution, recreational opportunities, nutrition education, the teaching and modeling of nonviolent conflict resolution, home health care, literacy and job training, parenting support, counseling, mentoring, and advocacy. Lunch and Learn events, open to

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Yes!

I will join those actively supporting Mercer Street Friends through a contribution of:

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- \$250 _____
- other _____

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Please send your check, made payable to: Mercer Street Friends, 151 Mercer Street, Trenton, NJ 08611, or donate at www.mercerstreetfriends.org. Your contribution is tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

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 for Mercer Street Friends.

*Information filed with the Attorney General concerning this charitable solicitation and the percentage of contributions received by the charity during the last reporting period that were dedicated to the charitable purpose may be obtained from the Attorney General of the state of New Jersey by calling 973-504-6215 and is available on the Internet at <http://www.state.nj.us/lps/ca/charfrm.htm>. Registration with the attorney general does not imply endorsement.

Circle of Friends

Editor: Janina Akins
 Contributors: Janina Akins, Karen Doss Bowman, Andrea Lehman
 Photography: Dave Zboray, Betsy Schumann
 Design: Duane Potosky
 Masthead: Kati Sowiak

Would you prefer to receive this newsletter online?

Do you have a suggestion for a future issue?

If so, please contact Director of Communications Janina Akins, online at: jakins@mercercircleoffriends.org or by phone at 609.396.1506.

"PROJECT CONNECT" Launched

United Way Initiative Will Aid Seniors and People with Disabilities

Project Connect, a United Way of Greater Mercer County initiative of service coordination aimed at seniors and people with disabilities, has been launched with Mercer Street Friends as the lead agency. The collaboration is expected to deliver coordinated services to hundreds of seniors and people with disabilities in the next year.

The objective of the initiative is to assist seniors over age 60 who are experiencing age-related difficulties, and people of any age with physical, mental or developmental disabilities, to remain in their own homes, live in good health and with dignity, and achieve the greatest independence possible. Eight Trenton area service agencies, who are already providers for seniors and people with disabilities, will take a "no wrong door" approach to help them expedite access to services in order to meet a variety of needs. Funds from the United Way of Greater Mercer County will be used to support delivery of service when there is no other payer or to expand agency programming if gaps are identified when clients are screened and assessed.

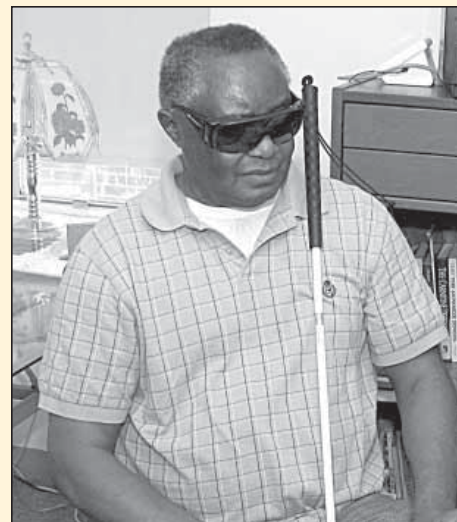
Along with the Mercer Street Friends Home Health Care division, participating agencies include Catholic Charities, Mount Carmel Guild, Jewish Family and Children's Service of Greater Mercer County, Enable Inc., The ARC/Mercer, Mobile Meals of Trenton Ewing, and Interfaith Caregivers. All individuals with disabilities entering

Project Connect will be referred to Enable Inc. Case management services and care coordination for seniors who have short term needs will be provided by Jewish Family and Children's Service.

The key to this collaborative project is that clients will no longer have to wait for needed services, be put on waiting lists, get turned away for lack of eligibility or resources, or "fall through the cracks." These eight agencies will "wrap" services around clients, prioritize those services, and provide care coordination and case management that will allow clients to live with dignity in their own homes and avoid costly and often degrading nursing home placements.


The United Way of Greater Mercer County's mission is to improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of communities. Project Connect is part of UWGMC "Caring for Seniors and People with Disabilities" Vision Council, one of three "Community Impact Agenda" areas aimed at "Advancing the Common Good" in Mercer County through focusing on underlying causes of problems, partnering to create long-term solutions, and measuring results that change lives and improve our neighborhoods..

Mercer Street Friends Home Health Care division strives to promote health and wellness by providing comprehensive services that include skilled care, education, support and advocacy. It is licensed by the State of New Jersey to provide skilled



Trenton resident Rudolf Clark is the recipient of home health care services through Project Connect.

nursing, rehabilitation therapy, dietary counseling, medical social work, and assistance in activities of daily living via our home health aides, who are certified by the state, licensed by the Department of Community Affairs, insured, and bonded. Please visit www.mercerstreetfriends.org to learn more about Mercer Street Friends and the other programs and services it offers.


To learn more about how Project Connect can assist persons with disabilities or senior citizens please contact Julie Feibush at 609.987.8100 or online at JulieF@jfcsonline.org. 

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all, are great opportunities to learn about Mercer Street's programs.

Fifty years since its humble beginnings, Mercer Street Friends is still helping neighbors in need raise themselves up, building futures by rebuilding lives. Thanks to its dedicated staff and volunteers and incredibly generous donors, MSF has built a strong foundation for its own future. Though all would be happy to see a capital region that no longer needs the agency by 2058, that seems unlikely. In the present

economic climate, the challenges have never been bigger. With sharp rises in the cost of necessities like food, people who used to donate are now utilizing food pantries. The need for a high school diploma or GED in order to obtain work is greater than ever. Collaborating with other local organizations, Mercer Street Friends is dedicated to addressing the issues facing the area's poor—child health and well-being, hunger, family development, the health needs of seniors, and increasing youth violence—and being on the lookout for new ones. As long as the need is there, so will Mercer Street Friends. 

A HEART FOR THE HUNGRY

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"There are still hungry people—we've done nothing to alter the condition of poverty, and that's frustrating," says Stoolmacher, who has been married to her husband, Irwin, a consultant to the non-profit sector, for almost 40 years. "We will eliminate hunger in this country when we eliminate poverty, and that will happen when we have the political will to do so. And until such time, I will be here." 



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FIELD TRIP!

Students from the Mercer Street Friends West State Street Abbott Program stand with their instructor, Debbie Funari, at the Adventure Aquarium in Camden, New Jersey. The program provides Abbott preschool classes—which are state sanctioned programs in urban districts that have traditionally demonstrated inadequate educational performance—for children aged three to five years. All teachers are certified, classrooms are equipped with computers and family outreach workers are on staff. As part of their curriculum and much to their pleasure, the students take a monthly educational field trip. 