

ARMSTEAD G. JOHNSON APPOINTED EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF MERCER STREET FRIENDS



Armstead G. Johnson has taken the reins as executive director of Mercer Street Friends, succeeding Dr. Shannon Mason, who left the organization in early June to pursue new interests.

Johnson has a strong record of leadership at nonprofits similar to Mercer Street Friends (MSF) in mission, and a wealth of experience in youth development and anti-poverty programming. He comes to MSF from the United Community Corporation (UCC) in Newark, where he was executive director. Like MSF, the UCC is an anti-poverty organization that has been a cornerstone of its community for over 50 years.

Before leading the UCC, he was executive director of All Saints Community Service and Development Corporation, which serves at-risk youth in Hoboken and Union City. His professional experience includes working with the Boys & Girls Clubs and the Urban League, and advocating for people with disabilities. Mr. Johnson also served with social service agencies in Plainfield, Orange, West Orange, and Clifton.

Johnson received his Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from Howard University and a Master

of Arts degree in public administration from Rutgers University-Newark. He also received a certificate in Executive Nonprofit Leadership from Fairleigh Dickinson University.

Dr. Delia Pitts, Vice-Chair of MSF's Board and Chair of the Search Committee, said that the committee members were impressed with Mr. Johnson's fundraising, his engaging personality, his extensive supervisory experience in a variety of leadership roles, and his optimism about the future of Mercer Street Friends. Pitts added, "Armstead will be moving to the Trenton area and investing his enthusiasm, energy, and expertise in our community."

"I am excited to join the Mercer Street Friends team," Johnson said upon accepting the position. "I am thankful to the Board for selecting me as the next executive director. Together we will continue the good work MSF has been providing to those most in need in the Trenton Community."

*"Together, we will
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to those most in need..."*

Johnson will inherit a solid legacy from Dr. Mason. Under Dr. Mason, MSF launched Trenton's first community school, the Luis Munoz Rivera Community Middle School. That innovative program received a \$2.3 million federal grant last year.

Bob Anderson, Chair of MSF's Board, commented, "Armstead is an ideal choice to succeed Dr. Mason and to drive MSF's community school vision forward. The depth of his expertise and experience in combatting poverty, his disciplined management in leading agencies, and his contagious hopefulness will prove inspiring and effective. He will be a joy for our community." ■

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Dear Friends,

I am overwhelmed with excitement and gratitude. My excitement is for the opportunity I have been granted to head such a fine organization with a rich tradition of serving those most in need in our City of Trenton. My gratitude is to the Mercer Street Friends (MSF) Board of Directors for selecting me to continue the good work of the organization. I am particularly grateful for the guidance given me by my predecessor, Dr. Shannon Mason, who did a yeoman's work during her tenure as Executive Director. She will truly be a hard act to follow, but I am inspired by her leadership.

After only a few short weeks I have been impressed with the passion and dedication in which the MSF staff goes about their daily business. Helping families and communities make the journey out of poverty can be difficult and draining at times. Despite this, our staff meets the challenge of their jobs with enthusiasm and professionalism and I am honored to be working with such a fine group of people.

The Community Schools Initiative, which Mercer Street Friends serves as the lead agency, is so important to the young people and families of Trenton. I echo the words and opinion of Randi Weingarten, President of American Federation of Teachers and children:

"Community schools are a tangible, effective way to address the fact that poverty matters, and that it especially matters in our schools and for students' success. The community school movement – and the variety of ways it engages parents and provides an array of services to children and families – helps level the playing field to ensure students have the opportunity to learn."

The children of Trenton's public schools and their parents need the community school strategy. The partners of the community school initiative are dedicated to the concept and the education of Trenton's young people. As Executive Director of Mercer Street Friends, I am firmly committed and will work tirelessly to achieve our goals.



Armstead G. Johnson

CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL EARNS TOP HONOR IN STUDENTS CHANGE HUNGER STATEWIDE COMPETITION



Lieutenant Governor Guadagno presented the students with the Governor's Cup, awarded each year to the school that collects the most food and designs an exemplary campaign to educate and engage students and the community in the fight against hunger during the campaign.

At a ceremony held on June 6th in Pennington, Lieutenant Governor Kim Guadagno (third from right in photo) recognized the achievements of Cambridge School students who earned first place in **Students Change Hunger**, a statewide food and fund drive competition, organized by the New Jersey Federation of Food Banks.

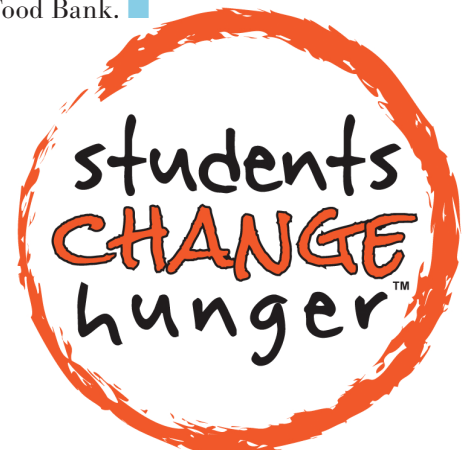
In the 2015 challenge, 234 schools participated in the statewide Governor's Cup competition, collecting a total of 174,023 pounds of food and \$44,287. Cambridge School collected 4,891 pounds of food and \$1,643.

The award brings a \$2,500 donation to the Food Bank from **Stop & Shop**.

Sixteen schools in Mercer County participated in the 2015 Students Change Hunger Governor's Cup Competition: Ben Franklin Elementary School; Cambridge School; Congregation Beth Chaim; Grace Dunn Middle School; Harris School of

Business; John Witherspoon Middle School; KinderCare Learning Center; Lewis School of Princeton; Notre Dame High School; Pond Road Middle School; Princeton School of Rock; Road Less Traveled Co-op; Saint Ann School; Seat of Wisdom Cooperative; Stuart Country Day School; and The College of New Jersey.

In total, the schools collected 19,275 pounds of food and \$5,417 for the Food Bank. ■



MOTHER OF THREE FINALLY GETS HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA; STARTS COLLEGE THREE DAYS LATER

As many students welcome the summer months as a break from school, Andrea Davis, age 48, is enthusiastically embracing her summer class schedule at Mercer County Community College.

For Davis, who enrolled in Mercer Street Friends' Adult Education program and passed the high school equivalency exam in April, starting college is the realization of a dream that she once held only for her three children.

Many years ago Davis dropped out of high school, just two months before her graduation, in order to care for her young children, "I spent the next 30 years determined not to let my children get in the position that I had been in as a child," says Davis, "My mother was a provider – she worked all the time. But I wanted to be both a provider and a supporter of my children."

Davis raised three children and put them through college. When she had successfully launched her children into the world, it was finally time to focus on her own goals, and getting her high school diploma was one of the most important.

Davis enrolled in MSF's Adult Education program in November 2015. Until the day she signed up, Davis kept the fact that she had no high school diploma from her children, her employer and everyone else she knew. Her children were surprised at the news, but pleased that she wanted to get her diploma.

"Andrea was a focused, diligent student from the start," says Gay Egan, Program Manager for Adult Education at Mercer Street Friends.

Davis went to MSF for tutoring five days a week, from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. In five months, she successfully completed the state's high school equivalency exams and received her diploma.

With encouragement and assistance from Ms. Egan, Davis successfully accomplished the three goals of Mercer Street Friends' Adult Ed program: Passing the NJ High School Equivalency Exams; Entering Post-Secondary Education/Training; and Finding Employment.

As part of the Adult Education registration, each student takes a survey that helps them assess their interest in academic areas and potential careers. Davis found that she had a strong interest in community development and planning, in addition to a life-long interest in caregiving.

Gay Egan introduced Davis to Dr. Shannon Mason, who was Executive Director of Mercer Street Friends at the time, and Mason served as a mentor to Davis.

Egan also connected Davis to Julia Taylor, Director of Community Planning and Development at ISLES, to help her explore possible careers in planning and community development.



"Mercer Street Friends gave me a new perspective of myself," says Davis, "What I learned was how much I wanted to learn."

In addition to her college classes and a full-time job, Davis is also participating in Trenton 250, a project spearheaded by the City of Trenton that brings together community members and other Trenton stakeholders to create a long range development plan for the city.

Davis sites her ability to keep herself open to opportunities throughout her life as one of her strongest traits.

Though she began this journey simply to finish something left unfinished from her youth, she now finds that she wants much more for herself.

For years, in addition to working with preschool children at Timbuktu Academy, Davis also did small jobs for people in the community, such as taking care of their kids after school and driving people to appointments.

Davis says that she always thought that her career path would lead to a job in nursing or another type of service career. Now, however, she finds herself thinking of serving others in a different way. She is considering a degree in Urban Planning or Sociology.

"I don't like anyone putting me in a box and expecting me to stay there. I will choose my own story, and now I have more choices." ■



OUR MERCER STREET FRIENDS PRESCHOOLERS ARE MOVING ON UP!

On June 22nd, Mercer Street Friends Preschool held an end-of-year celebration for its 90 students and their families. Each class gave a short performance for the students' families. Although our preschool program continues through the summer, this special celebration recognizes the children who will move on to Kindergarten in the fall. This year, 41 students "graduated" Preschool. After the classroom celebrations, the party moved outside to the playground for a cookout.

Twenty-seven children will attend summer preschool.

We wish our young scholars all the best as they enter the next phase of their education. ■



RETIRED STATE PAROLE CHIEF MENTORS AT MSF'S RIVERA COMMUNITY MIDDLE SCHOOL

When Ed Oskay, 65, retired after working 32 years at the State Parole Board, he decided to commit some of his free time to helping youth in Trenton. Though Oskay started as an after-school tutor at Rivera Community Middle School, Anniesha Walker, Director of Clinical Initiatives and the Community Schools Initiative at Mercer Street Friends, quickly identified him as someone with a great deal of real life experience that might be useful to students.

"My experience working at the Parole Board made me very aware of the role of racism in the recycling of criminals in and out of communities," says Oskay.

He explains that after reading *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, a book that confirmed some of his anecdotal beliefs and gave them a larger context, he felt compelled to help kids avoid the school-to-prison pipeline as the book described.

Now, instead of tutoring, Oskay is mentoring a Sixth Grade boy who is struggling with multiple issues. They meet regularly and Oskay tries to be a good listener and to encourage the boy to talk – which can be quite a challenge since most kids his age don't like to talk much to adults. ■





On April 16th, **Princeton TruckFest** brought together Princeton University students and the local community to help support Mercer Street Friends' Send Hunger Packing program and Meals on Wheels. Over 15 food trucks parked in front of the eating clubs on Prospect Street and served their signature items. This charity event was organized by the University's Eating Clubs and hosted by the Community Service Inter-Club Council, in conjunction with the Pace Council for Civic Values. The Food Bank received \$16,878, one half of the proceeds. ■

Members of **Central: A Christ Centered Church** collected food and assembled 1,140 **Send Hunger Packing** meal packs. The bags will be distributed at our summer feeding sites, and in addition to the breakfast and lunch we provide, will help close meal gaps for low income children. The pouches of food contained oatmeal, a Chef Boyardee microwavable meal, fruit cup, and two granola bars. ■



RECENT GRANTS AND AWARDS

COMMUNITY SCHOOL:

- Merancas Foundation
- Northfield Bank Foundation

FOOD BANK:

- Bunbury Foundation

- Josephine Peiser Charitable Foundation
- Princeton Area Community Foundation
- ShopRite LGPA Classic

MSF FOOD BANK VOLUNTEER COUNTS

March 2016 through Mid-June 2016

Visits by Volunteers..... **563**

Number of Hours..... **1,593**

Thank you to the following groups for helping in the warehouse during this period.

- Accenture
- Bank of America
- Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Fox & Roach
- Bloomberg
- Bristol-Myers Squibb
- Cadwalader Asbury United Methodist Church
- Comcast
- Credit Suisse
- Deloitte
- Dr. Reddy's Laboratories
- Educational Testing Services
- Investors Bank
- Jewish Family and Children's Services
- Johnson & Johnson
- Learning Ally
- NALC and Mercer County Central Labor Council
- Navigant PACE
- Notre Dame High School
- NRG Energy
- Princeton Theological Seminary
- Salesforce
- Selective Insurance
- Serv
- State Street
- Stivala Family
- TCNJ – Alpha Phi Omega
- TCNJ Bonner Center – Health and Environment Team

If you would like to volunteer, please call the Food Bank at 609-406-0503.

SAVE THE DATE!

Mercer Street Friends A Taste-Full Evening

Friday, October 14, 2016

6:00 pm to 9:00 pm

**Food Tastings • Wine and Beer
Music • Silent Auction
A Little Magic • A Lot of Fun**



FriendsTalk

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Your contribution is tax deductible as allowed by law.



FriendsTalk

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Cynthia Vandenberg

A PUBLICATION OF MERCER STREET FRIENDS

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