

MERCER STREET FRIENDS LAUNCHES COMMUNITY SCHOOL INITIATIVE



Rivera Middle School

Since our founding 50 plus years ago, Mercer Street Friends has been committed to helping children and adults who live in poverty overcome barriers that impede their path to a better quality of life. As part of our recently completed strategic planning process, we asked ourselves: “How can we utilize the expertise and credibility of Mercer Street Friends in a way that would have the greatest long term impact for Trenton?”

THE ANSWER IS A COMMUNITY SCHOOL INITIATIVE

Most educational reform has focused on instruction and training, ignoring external factors that have tremendous bearing on student academic success. Family circumstances, poverty, poor housing, inadequate access to healthcare, unsafe streets all have an impact on and impede a child’s ability to learn. A community school strategy stretches the traditional use of a school house and transforms the facility into a place where the educational, as well as the physical and emotional needs of the students and their families can be addressed.

A full-service community school brings the assets of the community to the school, involving parents, teachers, students and community organizations equally. The school operates in a way that makes it a hub of the community.

It has been demonstrated that mature community schools improve academic performance, particularly in reading and math; improve student and teacher attendance; reduce dropout and increase graduation rates; improve student behavior and conduct; and generate greater parent involvement.

Community schools are a proven concept and operate successfully in many cities throughout the United States. Community schools make an impact now and save money in the longer term. Data shows that for every \$1 invested in community schools, there is a savings of up to \$14 in social costs associated with issues such as teenage pregnancy, juvenile incarceration, property crime, unemployment, etc.

FIRST STEPS

The Trenton Superintendent of Schools and Board of Education have signed on and the district has chosen the Luis Munoz Rivera Middle School to launch the community school in September 2015.

The Trenton Community Schools Initiative (TCSI) partnership has been formed between Mercer Street Friends (lead agency), Trenton Public Schools, the Rivera Middle School, YMCA of Trenton and Mercer Family Support Organization to provide comprehensive academic, social and health supports.

The TCSI partners will meet routinely to coordinate, integrate and implement evidence-based programming for the following five core services: 1) assistance to students who have been chronically absent, truant, suspended, or expelled; 2) family engagement, including parent training and involvement activities; 3) mental health services; 4) mentoring and other youth development programs; and 5) access to other community-based social service programs.

NEXT STEPS

Over the course of this school year, Mercer Street Friends will work with the TCSI partners and stakeholders, under the guidance of experts with The Children’s Aid Society National Center for Community Schools, to assess the community needs and line up the resources, logistics and expertise that will be needed for a sustainable community school. ■

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Dear Friends,

In my 11 years at Mercer Street Friends the question that has often been a source of trepidation is, "What does Mercer Street Friends do?"

I knew the answer, of course. I could cite research, program descriptions, case studies and outcomes for each of our programs, yet we have always been so multi-faceted that I felt pressure not to miss something.

Invariably, I'd later recall the conversation and have one of two thoughts. "Oh, I forgot to tell them about the ___ program"; or "I hope that I did not overwhelm them with too much information."

I am finding it a little easier these days. As we streamline the way that we describe our work, we are also streamlining the way that we communicate about it. Every staff person in every area, in every program is doing the same thing: "Bridging opportunity gaps...helping families and communities make the journey out of poverty".

Now, we will be talking about it in the same place. We have merged *Circle of Friends* and *Table Talk* into one newsletter – *Friends Talk* – that will provide more of the "big picture" of who we are and how we are impacting the Mercer County community. For us, the whole truly is greater than the sum of its parts.

We hope that the *Friends Talk* stories and news continue to inform and keep you engaged in Mercer Street Friends.

Onward,
Shannon M. Mason

FriendsTalk

Editor: Phyllis Stoolmacher

Contributors: Debbie Bronfeld,
Rucha Gadre, Shannon Mason,
Phyllis Stoolmacher and
Cynthia Vandenberg

A PUBLICATION OF MERCER STREET FRIENDS

BACK TO THE FUTURE... PRESCHOOL ALUMNA RETURNS TO VOLUNTEER

It's a typical summer morning at Mercer Street Friends Preschool. A group of 3- and 4-year-olds is outside on the playground climbing, skipping and playing ball. Another group is thoroughly engaged in filling buckets with water then slowly moving across the concrete patio to a water table where they carefully pour it out – then joyfully drop the bucket and splash in the water.

Right in the center of all this activity sits Shaurel Grainger, a 14-year-old summer volunteer at the preschool. She jokes a little with the kids, reminds them of the rules when the splashing starts to border on chaos, but mostly she just watches them play with a little smile.

"At some centers, the teachers treat the kids as babies, not students," she remarks. "What I like about Mercer Street Friends preschool is that we treat the kids like students and that means that we have expectations for them – but we still support them as little kids."

If it sounds as though Shaurel has been working at the preschool for years and knows the culture, it might be because her mother was once a teacher at the school. During that time, Shaurel attended the MSF preschool. She also knows some of the teachers at the preschool so when she decided to volunteer this summer, it was an obvious choice.

Shaurel attends Trenton Catholic Academy where she is on the track team. She plans to move from sprints to hurdles this year. She has been a dancer for most of her youth and currently teaches dance at Building Our Youth Development (BOYD), a Mercer County organization dedicated to enriching the lives of young people.

Shaurel also hopes to come back next summer to work at the preschool. "It's like a family here," she says, "The kids are so great here. They treat you like a parent and they trust you right away because they feel so safe at this school." ■



Shaurel helps her young students with storybook writing

TDI VOLUNTEER ON THE LEADING EDGE

Most retired executives would not choose to spend their days hunched over old computers in a non-descript office building located on the border of Ewing and Trenton. But Bill Sterling is not like most retired executives.

Bill volunteers with Mercer Street Friends' Trenton Digital Initiative (TDI), an innovative program that seeks to close the digital divide for people living in poverty.

The program is designed to remove several of the most significant obstacles for low-income families who want to get on the "digital highway." Kids and families in poor communities rarely have access to a reliable home computer and a reliable home internet connection. The TDI program bridges that opportunity gap by soliciting used computers, repairing the equipment, distributing and setting up the refurbished units in the homes of low income families, teaching the families how to use their computer effectively, and connecting them to the internet.

Earlier this year, Bill was contacted by his friend Dave Zboray, who directs the TDI program, and asked if he would be willing to help with the program. Bill jumped at the chance to begin working on the project they had dreamed about doing long ago.

And then he transformed the project. He has created a system that would be the envy of any project manager, replete with a process diagram for routing the computers and a systems function checklist that gives a detailed analysis of each computer's attributes and weaknesses.

Every computer donation is entered into the inventory database and then put through a series of benchmarking tests to determine if it is usable as is, needs minor repairs, can be used for parts or cannot be salvaged. All of this is recorded to make it easier for volunteers or students to know from where to pull the parts when they are repairing a computer. The database that Bill created tracks every computer in



Bill Sterling and son Austin

the inventory every step of the way until it is delivered to its new home.

In addition to providing families with a home computer and internet access via Comcast's Internet Essentials program for low-income households, the TDI program has a teaching component for teenagers in our Youth Services programs. Dave and Bill teach teens how to refurbish old computers with new operating systems and upgraded components. At the end of the program, each teenager can take home a computer that he or she rebuilt.

"Bill's background in database management has been integral to the success of this program," explains Dave Zboray. "Bill is the kind of talent that we could never afford to pay, so I'm glad he's volunteering."

Bill volunteers three days a week. This summer, he was usually joined by his 16-year-old son, Austin, who is learning more about computers as he assists his father in assessing the donated hardware.

Bill and Austin have set up an intake area, an assessment lab with workstations

to process as many as five computers at a time, a teaching and repair work area, and a storage room for the computers that are ready for delivery.

A published poet with a deep respect for language and the pursuit of knowledge, Bill utilizes his intellectual curiosity when looking at big system challenges. He is already looking ahead to address the potential problems that could arise when TDI computers are delivered to families who cannot afford to have them serviced if they break.

For Bill, creating a support system for these families and closing the feedback loop to find out how effective the computers are in delivering the service they are meant to provide is critical. He is always looking for ways to improve the system.

"The only place I really enjoy life is on the leading edge," Bill says with a grin.

To learn how you can donate a computer or volunteer, contact Dave Zboray at TDI@mercerstreefriends.org. ■

MSF FORMS A RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Mercer Street Friends is pleased to announce the establishment of its first Resource Development Council (RDC), formed to help increase awareness and support for the organization.

Members of the RDC offer input, insight, advice and counsel regarding strategic initiatives; identify individuals and give entrée to people and entities that may be able to provide philanthropic, professional, in-kind, or other means of

support; tell others about the work of the agency, and make personal contributions to the organization.

“We are very fortunate to have so many community oriented people making themselves available to us and appreciate the time, a precious commodity, RDC members are giving to Mercer Street Friends. We know their efforts will result in increased resources for the organization,” said Executive Director Shannon Mason. ■

MEMBERS OF THE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL:

Kristin Appelget

*Director of Community & Regional Affairs,
Princeton University*

Bob Anderson

*Vice Chairman,
Mercer Street Friends Board of Trustees*

Jack Ball

Manager, Trenton Farmers Market

Sybil Chahbandour

Bloomberg

Sheila Gallagher-Montone

*Publisher & Advertising Director,
The Times*

Hal English

*VP Regional Manager,
Grand Bank*

Andy Forsell

*Deputy General Counsel,
Church and Dwight*

Dawn Hiltner

*Associate Director for Organizing and
Community Building,
New Jersey Education Association*

Chris Kane

*Vice President/Chief Counsel,
AECOM*

Odie LeFever (RDC Chair)

*Director of Communications and Marketing,
George School*

Jim Nawn

*Owner,
Agricola*

Deborah Osgood

*Vice President/CRA Officer,
Hopewell Valley Community Bank*

Annie Pott

*Member,
Mercer Street Friends Board of Trustees*

Peter Sargent

*Executive Vice President/
Wealth Management,
Janney Montgomery Scott LLC*

Stephen K. Shueh

*Managing Partner,
Roundview Capital*

Gerald R. Stockman, Esq.

Hartsough, Kenny, Chase & Sullivan

Peter Taft

Taft Partners

Jerry H. Walther

*Senior Vice President,
Brick & Kyle Associates*

Ross Wishnick

*Vice Chairman, Board of Directors
Bank of Princeton*

STEWARDS OF THE MISSION

Mercer Street Friends is honored to welcome **Heinz Heinemann** as the newest Steward of the Mission. A Steward of the Mission is someone who has provided for Mercer Street Friends in their will, transferred assets to the agency; or participates in the agency's charitable gift annuity program.



Heinz was motivated to become a Steward of the Mission upon visiting the MSF preschool last summer. “I was very impressed with what I saw at the preschool site and left with the feeling that this was a good place to help beyond my own lifetime,” said Heinz.

Heinz, 89 years old, is a resident of Pennswood Village in Newtown, Pennsylvania and the father of MSF Board chair, Bill Heinemann. Prior to his retirement 29 years ago, he worked for 35 years with Sears Roebuck, initially in the retail and merchandising side and then shifting to data processing where he led a team that installed computer systems in stores located from Ohio to the Atlantic Ocean and from the top of New York state to Virginia.

Stewards of the Mission provide the organizational and financial bases for giving and growth for decades to come. It is the financial arm serving our mission to bridge opportunity gaps and help families and communities make the journey out of poverty.

We thank Heinz for this demonstration of faith in the future of Mercer Street Friends.

Planned giving may include gifts of appreciated securities, life insurance, real estate, charitable trusts and bequests. Bequests to Mercer Street Friends are entirely free from federal estate tax, and there is no limit on the amount you can leave to Mercer Street Friends.

For information about becoming a Steward of the Mission, contact Phyllis Stoolmacher, Director of Advancement. ■

Bridging opportunity gaps... Helping families and communities make the journey out of poverty.

Mercer Street Friends is a Quaker affiliated, nonsectarian human care organization that works to reduce hunger and food insecurity, close education gaps, and improve the physical and emotional well-being of at-risk populations through its three divisions:

- Children and Youth Services
- Food Bank
- Parenting and Adult Services

To learn more about the programs and services of Mercer Street Friends, please visit our website at www.mercerstreetfriends.org.





MSF PARTNERS WITH TASK TO FEED HUNGRY CHILDREN

From the start of the Food Bank over 25 years ago to present day, Mercer Street Friends and the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen (TASK) have worked together in numerous ways to advance a common mission to alleviate hunger in the greater Trenton community.

And now yet another collaborative venture is underway – one that specifically addresses the issue of child hunger. The Trenton Area Soup Kitchen will be a major underwriter of the Food Bank’s Send Hunger Packing program for the 2014-15 school year. NRG Energy, Inc. provided the seed money and program expansion support for Send Hunger Packing and we thank them for being our partner in the community response to child hunger.

TASK’s sponsorship of the program in Ewing, Hamilton, Lawrence and Trenton will help close meal gaps for at least 325 children who face food hardships at home. On Friday afternoons during the school year, the children will receive meal packs provided by the Food Bank to carry them through the weekend. Each pack will contain food for two breakfasts and two lunch/dinners – over 40,000 meals will be provided because of this collaboration.

“We are appreciative of this extended partnership with TASK and the meshing of our work and resources to feed hungry children,” says Rucha Gadre, Food Bank Director. “The expansion of Send Hunger Packing into more schools is just one indication of the extent of child hunger in Mercer County and the importance of this collaboration,” Rucha adds. ■



Will you help fill it?

FOOD BANK TAKES TO THE ROAD...BEGINS MOBILE PANTRY PROGRAM

The Food Bank van pulled up to the Lawrence Plaza Apartments loaded up with fresh produce as well as boxes containing nonperishable food staples. Inside were the low-income senior citizen residents waiting for the bounty.

The next day, the van made a similar trip to the Henry Pannel Learning Center in Princeton to bring food to residents of Princeton Housing Authority’s Clay Street, Spruce Street and Redding Circle complexes.

The Food Bank’s new Mobile Pantry Program targets families and senior citizens who are experiencing food shortages but cannot get to a local food pantry or meal site for assistance due to mobility issues, lack of transportation or work schedule conflicts. The Mobile Pantry removes these barriers by delivering preassembled food packs and fresh produce to where people who face food hardships reside.

This first official run of the Mobile Pantry delivered food to 64 households. All the recipients have annual incomes at or below 185% the federal poverty line. (Example: \$21,589 for a household of one; \$29,100 for household of two; \$36,611 for household of three; and \$44,122 for a household of four).

The food boxes contained canned tomatoes, pasta, kidney beans, rice, beef stew, cereal, orange juice, pancake mix and syrup, shelf stable milk, dried cherries, eggs, and a frozen whole chicken. Produce included peaches, cabbage, corn, cherry tomatoes and cucumbers.

The Food Bank is tapping into federal food commodities and donations of food products and fresh produce for the Mobile Pantry. Deliveries are once a month.

“Folks were super excited to see the fresh produce and the bags filled with food,” noted Rucha Gadre, Food Bank Director. “They were exchanging ideas on how they would prepare the vegetables. Some of them were sharing stories of their childhood days. It was so joyful to listen and observe.”

There will be much pressure to expand and grow the Mobile Pantry Program as the need is extensive. How fast it can accommodate demand will depend on funding. ■

STUDENTS CHANGE HUNGER 2014!

Students Change Hunger, a project of the NJ Federation of Food Banks, challenges all students, staff, teachers and parents to think of those less fortunate each fall, by organizing a food drive or raising funds at their school to benefit their local community.

Schools of like enrollments and grade levels compete with each other to collect as much food as possible for their local food bank. At the end of the challenge, schools that bring the most food are presented with awards by their local food bank. In addition, schools compete with same-sized schools across the state for recognition!

This year's Students Change Hunger campaign will run from September 15 to November 21.

How to join Students Change Hunger. Each school nominates and registers a non-student Coordinator, such as a teacher, parent, club advisor or PTA member, who will communicate directly with the Food Bank. The Coordinator will oversee and organize all aspects of the Students Change Hunger at their school. Coordinators must submit a completed Registration Form and agree to the SCH Rules. For further information, registration forms and competition rules, contact Brian Peterson at bpeterson@mercerstreefriends.org or visit www.studentschangehunger.org.



PHYLLIS STOOLMACHER HONORED BY TRENTON THUNDER



Strike, Phyllis, Thunder catcher Tyson Blaser and Boomer

Phyllis Stoolmacher was honored on Saturday, August 9 at the Trenton Thunder's 2014 Good Deed Game, which highlights Mercer County's non-profit organizations. The Thunder management selected Phyllis to receive the honor for her 26 years building the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank from a small program run out of a closet at the Rescue Mission to the supplier of 2.5 million pounds of food annually to people in need all across Mercer County.

Phyllis, now Director of Advancement for Mercer Street Friends, was given a tour of the Thunder clubhouse and honored during the pre-game show. Then she threw a ceremonial "first pitch" – a curve ball no less! ■

6,672 MEALS DONATED TO MERCER STREET FRIENDS

On July 26th, volunteers gathered at Robbinsville High School to assemble 6,672 rice and lentil casserole meals that were donated to Mercer Street Friends for Send Hunger Packing. The **NJ Hunger Project** was organized by ONE Project, a faith and community coalition that brings volunteers together for activities that address social needs. The NJ Hunger Project was their first initiative. ■

THUNDER FANS MAKE DONATIONS TO FOOD BANK

As part of the **Trenton Thunder's 2014 Good Deed Day**, Thunder fans were asked to bring nonperishable food donations for the Food Bank.

Brian Peterson, Community Resource Liaison accepts food donations in front of Arm & Hammer Park





CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITY TO END HUNGER

RECENT GRANTS AND AWARDS

- **Bonner Foundation** – *SNAP Outreach/Send Hunger Packing Princeton/AmeriCorps Match*
- **Bottom Dollar Food Charitable Foundation** – *Mobile Pantry Food and Nutrition Assistance*
- **Feinstein Foundation** – *Hunger Relief*
- **Goldie B. Rojer Hunger Relief Fund at the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Mercer** – *Hunger Relief*
- **J. Seward Johnson 1963 Charitable Trust** – *Healthy Eating*
- **The Josephine Peiser Charitable Foundation** – *SNAP Outreach*
- **MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger** – *Advocacy and Outreach*
- **Princeton Area Community Foundation** – *Hunger Relief and Prevention*

MSF FOOD BANK VOLUNTEER COUNTS

Mid-March to July, 2014

Number of Volunteers..... **350**
 Number of Hours..... **958**

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

- Alpha Phi Omega at The College of New Jersey
- Bank of America (Hopewell Campus)
- Bloomberg
- Cambridge School
- Communication Workers of America Local 1036
- Cub Scouts Pack 759 – Plainsboro
- Gloria Nilson & Co. Real Estate
- Janssen Pharmaceuticals
- Jewish Family and Children’s Services
- Johnson & Johnson
- Lawrence Hammett Soccer Association
- Learning Ally
- Mercer County Central Labor Council
- NJ Youth Corps
- Notre Dame High School
- NRG Energy, Inc.
- Princeton University Faith in Action
- SERV
- State Street/Princeton Financial Systems
- TD Bank
- Trenton Half Marathon

If you would like to volunteer, please call us at (609) 406-0503.

OVER \$20,000 RAISED FOR MERCER STREET FRIENDS AND THE TRENTON AREA SOUP KITCHEN

On April 25th, **Princeton TruckFest** brought together Princeton University students and the community at large to raise funds for Send Hunger Packing. The charity event was organized by 11 of the Princeton University’s Eating Clubs and the Pace Center for Civic Values. The food trucks parked along Prospect Avenue in front of the respective Eating Clubs. The TruckFest raised over \$20,000 which was shared between Mercer Street Friends and the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen. ■

DANCE PERFORMANCE RAISES FUNDS FOR MERCER STREET FRIENDS

16 year old **Smiti Srinivasan** of West Windsor, celebrated her Indian classical dance debut on July 12 and asked her family and friends to make a donation to the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank in lieu of giving her presents. Since the age of six, Smiti has studied the art of Bharatanatyam, an ancient south Indian classical dance form that combines rhythm, expression and drama. She wowed her audience and raised over \$2,200 for the Food Bank. ■





FriendsTalk

NON PROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 370
TRENTON, NJ

151 Mercer Street
Trenton, NJ 08611
phone: 609-396-1506
fax: 609-392-8363
www.mercerstreetfriends.org

Executive Director

Shannon M. Mason, Ph.D.

Board of Trustees

William W. Heinemann, Chair
Robert E. Anderson, Vice Chair
Alan H. Crosman, Treasurer
John D. Spears, Secretary
James (Butter) G. Allen
Michael D. Bradshaw
Michael L. Carter
Glenda Garcia-Rivera
Joe Hulihan
Lisa Ogletree
Delia C. Pitts
Annie Pott
Daniel T. Rodgers
John R. Weingart
Bruce B. Woodger



Mercer Street Friends **A Taste-Full Evening**



**Friday, October 17, 2014
6:00 pm to 9:00 pm**

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

**Location: 824 Silvia Street, Ewing
(MSF Food Bank Warehouse)**

\$85.00 per person

**Tickets can be purchased online at
www.mercerstreetfriends.org**

**or by mail to Mercer Street Friends
151 Mercer Street, Trenton, NJ 08611
Be sure to write "Taste-Full tickets" on check**

