



# FRIENDSTALK

NEWS FROM MERCER STREET FRIENDS

SUMMER 2020



## A Message from CEO, Bernie Flynn

Throughout my life—both personal and professional—I have been surrounded by individuals who, at their very core, are committed to the power of doing what is right and just. My siblings and I were taught to be inclusive and treat people fairly. In addition to my parents, extended family, many good friends and teachers were also strong role models for social justice. Those types of examples are needed now more than ever. During my career at NJM Insurance Group, I witnessed the compassion of my colleagues when a customer was faced with devastating injuries or a substantial loss of property regardless of race or creed or country of origin. And now, as CEO of Mercer Street Friends, I am bearing witness to the power of a mission that has existed for over 60 years and is now being called to respond to our neighbors in Trenton and Mercer County unlike any other time since its founding in a spirit of equity and social justice.

Each day at our Food Bank I see volunteers wearing masks and gloves while packing thousands of community food bags per week. At our esteemed Preschool and our Parenting and Family Engagement and Community Schools programs, I see staff members adapt their services to be sure that students and families receive support during what may be the most challenging moment in their lives. Outside of the organization, I see an extraordinary sense of humanity—new friends and longtime benefactors making financial gifts to Mercer Street Friends to help underwrite the increased costs to feed families in Trenton and Mercer County, and gifts to ensure support for Preschool, Elementary, and Middle School students we serve. Donations of food, diapers, and toilet paper happen weekly. What I see is what Mercer Street Friends was built on—a vision of compassion, service, and commitment to those in need.

In this edition of Friends Talk, you will read about Mercer Street Friends’ programs and the way our staff approached the evolving needs of our community. We cannot thank our philanthropic supporters enough for all they have done and continue to do for our neighbors. As stewards of each gift, we remain committed to seeing through our work to assist those who are underserved. We do this because of the confidence of individuals, foundations, corporations, and businesses who stand ready to help.

I am honored and humbled to be surrounded by those who support Mercer Street Friends, an organization that works to accomplish what is just and what is right.

Thank you,

*Bernie Flynn*



## A REFLECTION ON BOB APPELBAUM

“What will we do with this building? Let us put it to good, Quakerly use.”

In January, Mercer Street Friends lost a gentle giant. Our dear friend, Bob Appelbaum entered into eternal rest and we look back with gratitude for all Bob offered as a founder of Mercer Street Friends.

Bob was a good and kind man. He committed himself to Quaker values, and ultimately to the mission of helping the poor in Trenton and throughout Mercer County. He embodied humility and compassion for those around him as he reached his hand out to help renovate 151 Mercer Street to become a center for the community.

Mercer Street Friends has withstood the test of time—over 60 years of service to the community. Our Food Bank, education programs, and family resources are possible today because of Bob’s vision.

The Mercer Street Friends Board of Trustees, executive team, staff, and friends extend our thanks to Bob, one final time, for taking a building and making it into a place that stands as a testament to helping the poor, remaining true to the Quaker values—simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and stewardship. Undoubtedly, Bob’s vision holds firm today.

**Get to Know James “Butter” G. Allen, Mercer Street Friends Food Bank Director**

**Full Name:** James G. Allen

**Nickname:** Butter

**Title:** Director of Food Bank (MSF)

**What are your current responsibilities at Mercer Street Friends?** Public/Private partner relationships with the greater Mercer County community as it relates to food insecurities.

**When did you start at Mercer Street Friends?** About ten years ago I began as a board member. I took a leave of absence to assist at the Food Bank and somehow was selected to direct the Food Bank with a vision of service.

**What do you want people to know about Mercer Street Friends?** It’s a business of building and supporting community needs via teaching, supporting, and enhancing the quality of life.

**What do you like best about working at Mercer Street Friends?** The Food Bank staff and the awesome volunteers!

**What do you do with your free time?** My free time is supporting other community groups. On a personal level I love planting and caring for flowers all while listening to music, and more recently streaming movies that I missed over the years!

**Is there something people might be surprised to learn about you?** Not really...I am who I am... where and whatever I’ve been assigned/requested to serve... Just “Butter,” the servant!



## Mercer Street Friends Food Bank Ready to Meet the Need

On March 16th, Mercer Street Friends leadership received notice that schools were closing, and New Jersey was preparing to shelter in place due to COVID-19. Mercer Street Friends was ready for what would transpire as the week progressed. Our Food Bank team and volunteers embraced the call to action that was sure to come—and with commitment to the mission, began planning to provide our numerous partner pantries and our families in Trenton with meal bags and supplies of food for all who would need it.

March 20th proved to be the moment that Mercer Street Friends recognized that the pandemic and its economic fallout was just beginning. In partnership with the Trenton School District and Aramark Food Services, Mercer Street Friends fanned out to six school sites to offer weekend emergency food bags to families of four—16 meals total for Saturday and Sunday of that week. Nearly 500 families and individuals stood in line, waiting for their bag. Within a week, after the initial emergency food bag distribution, Mercer Street Friends had to double the number of bags offered. A week after that, over 1,000 bags were needed.

Today, five months later, the line still grows. Thanks to the incredible support of our friends, foundations, corporations, and individuals who heard about our efforts from personal and professional networks, over 28,500 bags have been distributed and 456,000 meals have been offered. And there is much more work ahead.

Volunteers from all over New Jersey have generously given of their time to package meals and distribute them safely. The Capital Area YMCA has become a weekly partner in providing sites to hand out meal bags. Churches, fraternities, associations, and neighbors continue to come out strong and stand with the people of Trenton and the residents of Mercer County. We cannot offer enough gratitude for the ways in which people have responded to the call to action from months ago. The road ahead remains long, but we remain committed to ensuring that the basic need to feed our children and families in Trenton and throughout the County will be met.

**Get to Know Donna Jones, Mercer Street Friends Volunteer**

**Full Name:** Donna Jones

**Nickname:** Donna or DJ

**When did you first start volunteering at Mercer Street Friends?** October 2019

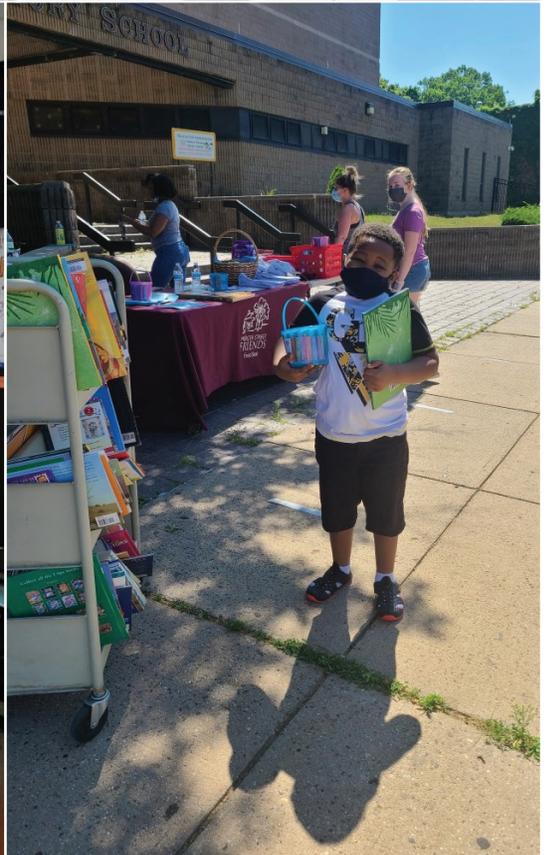
**Why did you start volunteering at Mercer Street Friends?** It breaks my heart to know anyone is deprived of the simplest basic need of food. No one should ever be hungry. Volunteering gives me a sense of purpose and gives me the opportunity to make a difference in someone’s life.

**Do you have a favorite activity when it comes to volunteering with Mercer Street Friends?** With all the gyms closed, I like the physical workout. It’s fulfilling both mentally and physically.

**What do you want people to know about Mercer Street Friends?** Mercer Street Friends is a place people gather to do good for others. Everyone there is friendly and has the same goal, to help those in need.

**What do you do when you are not at Mercer Street Friends?** I am retired, married to a wonderful husband of 39 years and have three adult children and eight grandchildren. In normal times we love to travel and enjoy spending time with our children and their spouses and our grandchildren.







## Parenting and Adult Education and Workforce Development Update

Education and development don't stop for a pandemic; at Mercer Street Friends these services evolve.

"During times of uncertainty and increased need, the way we deliver services to individuals and families in our Parenting and Adult Services Programs may look different," explains Karen Hoppock, Director of the Center for Parent and Family Empowerment, "but our dedication to providing activities, support, and useful information remains steadfast."

To that end, the Center is committed to finding ways to keep safely in touch and remotely support clients—in many cases, via online Zoom meetings and telephone.

Clients focused on Parenting Education participate in virtual home "visits" where Family Workers organize ideas for parent-child activities, discuss stress management, assess food and diaper needs, and how to solve challenges. Pregnant and new moms at risk of experiencing postpartum depression are invited to stay connected via a weekly virtual "chat" hosted by our Family Case Manager. And, for our most at-risk families—some of whom are homeless or have children placed outside the home—staff ensure clients are made aware of additional resources that they can take advantage of during this especially difficult time.

Mercer Street Friends Work Readiness and Adult Education instructors have also been creative in developing remote strategies to continue servicing students. Those whose focus is on getting "job ready" are continuing their work with instructors on skills such as time management, mock job interviews, and telephone etiquette. Students preparing for their high school equivalency test can take part in group online study sessions, and safely obtain individual study packets that they work on and return for feedback.

Parenting and Adult Education and Workforce Development touches a range of clients, all actively trying to become more self-sufficient. Through Mercer Street Friends programming participants are able to continue the hard work they've committed to in order to reach their highest potential.

### Ms. Martha Worrell

In 2019, Ms. Martha Worrell came to Mercer Street Friends determined to earn her high school diploma. Committed from the beginning, she has consistently put in the work regardless of any obstacle that has arisen whether it was challenging subjects, new technology, or distance learning due to COVID-19. At 81 years young, Ms. Martha perseveres.

Before participating in Mercer Street Friends Adult Education program, Ms. Martha never even had an email address. Now, digital literacy is part of her academic focus. Thanks to the support of Amazon, Ms. Martha puts that knowledge to use on a new iPad for her schooling, allowing her to study on her own and with an instructor via Zoom as she continues her journey toward that diploma.





# HOW CAN I HELP?

To donate a one-time or recurring gift online, please visit:  
[www.mercerstreetfriends.org](http://www.mercerstreetfriends.org)

To donate by mail:  
 151 Mercer Street,  
 Trenton, NJ 08611

To match your gift through your employer, please contact your Human Resources Department and follow the company policy to double and possibly, triple your gift to Mercer Street Friends.

To make a gift of stock and appreciated securities, please

contact Stacy Mongold at Mercer Street Friends:  
 609-406-0503

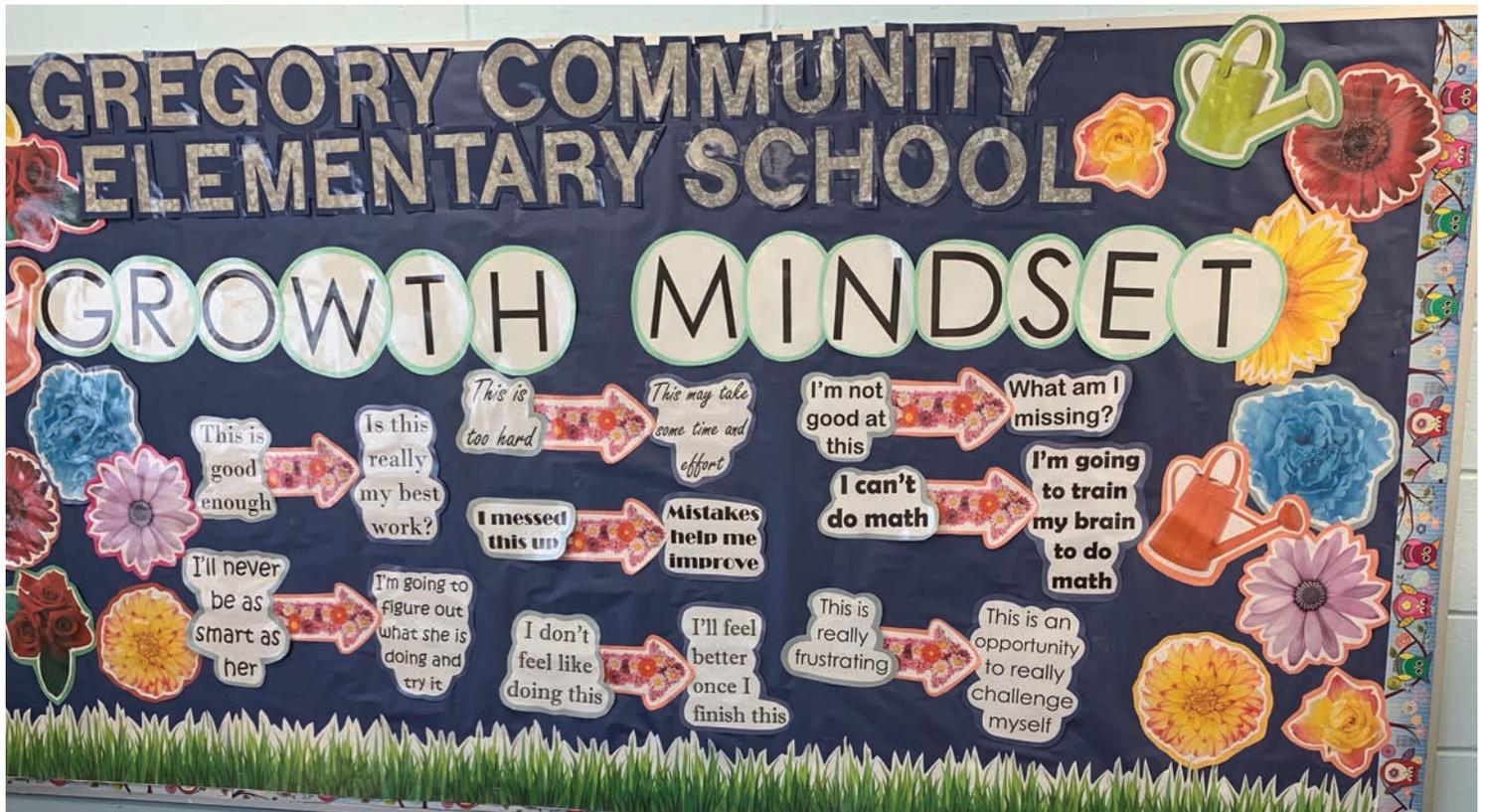
Planned Giving involves making gifts to Mercer Street Friends which will generally not take effect until sometime in the future, whether during your lifetime or thereafter. Such gifts provide an opportunity for you to leave a legacy by supporting Mercer Street Friends' mission for the long term. Many, if not most, of such gifts can provide significant tax benefits, whether to your estate and beneficiaries or to you if

made during your lifetime.

To learn more about becoming a "Steward of the Mission," please contact Stacy Mongold at Mercer Street Friends: 609-406-0503

To discuss coordinating a Crowd Funding initiative to benefit Mercer Street Friends, please contact Stacy Mongold: 609-406-0503

To volunteer at the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank, please contact Sherries Anderson: 609-278-5546



## Community School Response During COVID-19

Normally kids are in school through June. These were not normal times. As such, Mercer Street Friends Community Schools in Trenton—Luis Munoz Rivera Community Middle School and B.C. Gregory Community Elementary School—found innovative ways to continue working with and supporting students and families during the COVID-19 crisis.

In a coordinated effort to move everything forward quickly and smoothly, Mercer Street Friends CEO Bernie Flynn and Executive Director Dr. Anniessa Walker ensured the lines of communication with the community schools and district staff remained open so the organization could actively support staff and programming, and problem solve from a community partner perspective.

The objective remained the same: combine best educational practices with expanded learning opportunities while providing health, mental health and social services that promoted the well-being of students and families so that children were physically, emotionally and socially prepared to learn. It's a lot to accomplish in "normal" times. In these times, it's even harder. Here's how we met those needs.

For the remainder of the year, Mercer Street Friends had 150 K-8 students under case management who participated in the "After School" Youth Development and Enrichment program. Designed to extend the electronic school day, the initiative offered activities that enhanced students' academic knowledge and skillset. Creative programming included STREAM (Science, Technology, Robotics, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics), physical activities, and more.

For students who were chronically absent and needed additional support, a mentor portal was created in partnership

with TCNJ (The College of New Jersey). This initiative not only focused on at-risk students who needed extra encouragement to attend classes to reach their highest potential, but also exposed students to academic options beyond high school. Today the mentor program is managed directly by Mercer Street Friends staff who are committed to providing students and parents an added layer of moral support and encouragement.

Health, mental health and social services continue to be offered via telehealth appointments. Conducted online or by phone, families are able to "meet" with licensed clinicians to discuss problems, address issues and obtain additional support from the Children's System of Care or Crisis Management as needed.

No matter the situation—in person or from afar—our community schools remain dedicated to fostering student learning, stronger families and healthier communities.



## Preschool Amid the Pandemic

Each of the Mercer Street Friends Impact Centers was touched by the pandemic. At the Preschool, staff jumped into action once it was clear the school needed to close. With a restructured approach aimed at keeping kids engaged and supporting parents, the staff began helping the community navigate the new challenges ahead.

Quick thinking led to the creation of activity bags with supplies and projects so students could work on foundational skills while sheltering at home. For the first three weeks, activity packets with materials were included with the Send Hunger Packing weekend meal program.

However, this type of active learning soon transitioned to virtual platforms instead, much like school-aged children were experiencing elsewhere. Teachers found creative ways to engage students and parents like a “morning circle,” which provided an opportunity for kids to see their teachers and peers online. Staff also produced videos for parents featuring independent activities for early learners to stay motivated.

Parents were equipped with a list of free resources such as websites that offered activity ideas for kids at home, and locations to pick up Grab and Go meals from Aramark and the



Send Hunger Packing Emergency Weekend Bags.

Parents and staff stayed connected across multiple communications channels including the Preschool’s Facebook page, and our team of Family Workers set up a protocol for notifications about food pick-ups and other important information.

As always—during this difficult time and beyond—the Mercer Street Friends Preschool is committed to making a positive difference in the lives of the children we teach.

## Interactive Food Service Map debuted by Mercer Street Friends and Trenton Health Team

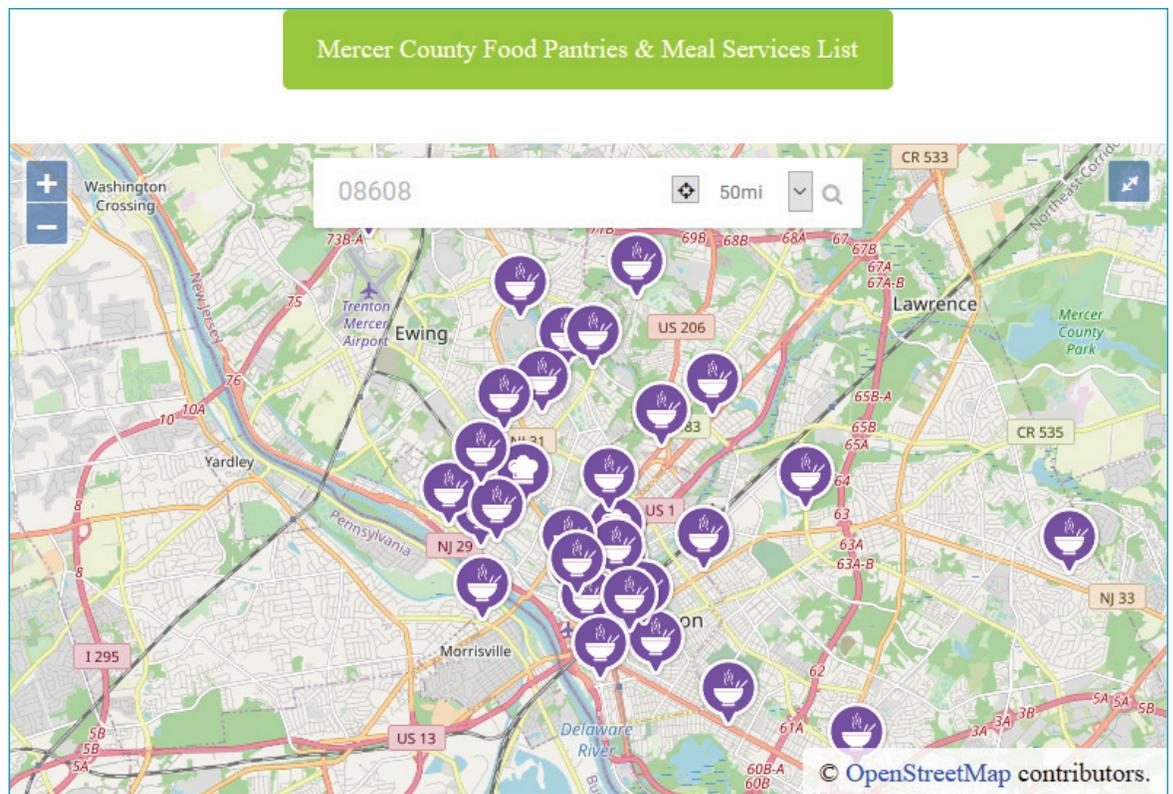
For years, Mercer Street Friends has provided summer meals to students who are 18 years and younger, committed to its work that children will be fed despite the summer closure of schools. In collaboration with the City of Trenton Department of Recreation: Natural Resources & Culture and the Capital Area YMCA, Mercer Street Friends continues to distribute those meals, underwritten by the Food and Nutrition Service, US Department of Agriculture.

As Mercer Street Friends continues to offer weekend Community Food Bags in response to the pandemic, the organization is pleased to partner with Trenton Health Team in unveiling a newly designed online directory of food services that includes an interactive map.

“It is critically important that the community is

aware of where and when they can access food this summer,” said Mercer Street Friends CEO Bernie Flynn. “I’m proud of the nonprofit leadership who came together to work with the Trenton Health Team to provide usable, accurate food site information and we greatly appreciate the support of the Mayor, his team and County officials.”

More information about the directory may be found at: [www.mercerstreetfriends.org](http://www.mercerstreetfriends.org) & [www.trentonhealthteam.org](http://www.trentonhealthteam.org)



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# WE ARE GRATEFUL



A big thank you to ONE Project and Chairman Raymond Wang for organizing a fundraiser that helped us purchase and distribute 24,416 meals for our Community Food Bags.



Our thanks to Rena Song and Family for donating hundreds of masks that staff and volunteers used while working at the Food Bank and handing out food bags.



Thank you to Cayla Lempkin, who launched a food drive to help children who would not receive breakfast and lunch daily due to school closures during the pandemic. Cayla collected 261 lbs. of food and \$525.00 in donations, helping Mercer Street Friends underwrite over 1,000 emergency food bags.