



MERCER STREET
FRIENDS

NEWS FROM MERCER STREET FRIENDS

FRIENDS TALK

September 2025

MESSAGE FROM CEO BERNIE FLYNN

September's a fresh start – a season of promise and possibility. This Friends Talk newsletter highlights how Mercer Street Friends is seizing winds of change in every new season of need.

Our inspiring Fifth Annual Leadership Awards Celebration in June gave us a chance to kick summer off with an evening of recognition and connection. The chance to recognize Bank of America, Phyllis Stoolmacher, and Dan Rodgers alongside friends and supporters left us energized and carried us into summer.

Together, we'll continue to build a hunger-free future and the promise of a better tomorrow.

But there is no time for a summer learning break here – our Preschool and Community Schools Summer Bridge programs kept students discovering, laughing, and growing together. Students as young as 2 years old and through middle school were engaged in classrooms, parks, playgrounds, beaches, and on field trips during this special time to “bridge” their summer gap. The days were filled with joy, curiosity, and community – as summer should be.

Our Food Bank remains busy as ever, addressing increasing demand for nutritious food from our 100-plus pantries, soup kitchens, and other partners. In the face of uncertainty regarding funding for important programs such as SNAP and Medicaid, we recommit ourselves to supporting the families, seniors, veterans, and individuals with disabilities of Mercer County – no matter what. To that end, we're exploring new collaborations to streamline food delivery through partners like America's Grow-A-Row. Our Healthy Pantry Pathways initiative stands prepared to support our pantry network so together, we can offer healthier, community-centric services.

As always, I give my thanks to our incredible Board of Trustees, our dedicated partners and sponsors, our hard-working staff, and you, our amazing supporters, for always responding to our community with compassion, care, and dignity. Together, we'll continue to build a hunger-free future and the promise of a better tomorrow.

With gratitude,

Bernie Flynn



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Fun in the sun with Community Schools and Preschool

Leadership Meets Legacy

Honoring Community Advocates at the

Fifth Annual Leadership Awards Celebration

On June 10, 2025, we hosted our Fifth Annual Leadership Awards Celebration, where we honored community members who have helped shape Mercer Street Friends into the organization it is today. More than 200 guests joined to celebrate our honorees:

Long-time partner **Bank of America** was presented with the **Corporate Leadership & Public Service Award**.

Phyllis Stoolmacher, who launched and led the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank for 30 years, received the **Humanitarian Award**.

Dan Rodgers, Henry Charles Lea Professor of History Emeritus at Princeton University, served with distinction for 18 years on our Board and received the **Robert M. Appelbaum Service Award**.

Held in our new Food Bank in Ewing, NJ, attendees enjoyed live music and delicious food and drinks. Our creative staff transformed the fully-operational warehouse into an elegant event space, complete with balloon arches, floral arrangements, passed hors d'oeuvres and buffet dinner, and much more. Our thanks to our generous sponsors, including Presenting Sponsor Bank of America, for making this annual celebration so special.

Missed the event? No problem.
You can learn more about the event,
see photo highlights, or even
re-watch the whole ceremony here.



"On behalf of our entire organization, I want to thank our honorees, as well as our incredible staff, volunteers, and sponsors. Your support makes this annual celebratory event – and our mission – possible."

– **Bernie Flynn, CEO**



Meeting the **URGENT NEED FOR FOOD** with Innovation

Lt. Gov. Tahesha Way Volunteers at the Food Bank



New Jersey Lt. Gov. Tahesha Way visited our Food Bank for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service, to help volunteers pack food bags for the Send Hunger Packing (SHUP) initiative.



The need for food in our community only grows – and Mercer Street Friends is meeting the challenge with innovative partnerships and new programs.



Together with our fellow Feeding America New Jersey food banks (The Community Food Bank of New Jersey, The Food Bank of South Jersey, Fulfill, and Norwescap), we're keeping fresh produce grown in New Jersey on the tables of New Jersey residents in need. A new partnership with the MARC (Mid-Atlantic Regional Cooperative) and America's Grow-A-Row, New Jersey's largest nonprofit farm, gets produce to food banks quickly, so we can distribute it to our pantry partners.

Never before has our network of 100-plus pantries, soup kitchens, and other partners been more integral to the success of the entire Mercer County community. We're expanding and strengthening our partner network through **Healthy Pantry Pathways**, part of the statewide *Growing Healthy Pantries* initiative (a collaboration with New Jersey's five Feeding America food banks and Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey). Pantries have access to support tools to help them grow and flourish, such as training and networking opportunities, education and advocacy materials, grants, guidance, and much more.

Pantries will utilize capacity assessments, as well as social media and messaging toolkits, enabling them to offer **healthier, more dignified services** to clients.

Moving Families FORWARD

Families experiencing poverty face unique, compounding challenges. Mercer Street Friends believes every parent deserves support. Through our nationally accredited home visiting programs, we're helping parents navigate both everyday moments and complex issues by offering practical guidance, coping tools, and supportive care.

The **Parents as Teachers** (PAT) program is focused on parent educators guiding parent-child interactions, development-centered parenting, and family well-being. They're:

- Increasing early childhood development knowledge
- Improving parenting practices
- Providing resources for early detection of developmental delays and health issues
- Preventing child abuse and neglect
- Increasing children's school readiness and success

75%
→

Nearly 75% of families stay with PAT for at least two years – among the best rates state-wide! Our team's skills and dedication keep families connected.

Through **Healthy Families** (HF), part of Healthy Families America® (HFA), our family support workers visit families weekly, sharing parenting, health, safety, and infant/child development information and education. They're actively engaging families in activities that enhance parenting skills and nurture family relationships.

This summer we proudly earned five-year reaccreditation. During their visit, national HFA peers were impressed with the knowledge and number of resources we provide and how compassionately we help people access those resources.

"Whether they're guiding parents through a child's health concern or being a steady voice during uncertain times, our team shows up for families, bringing knowledge, heart, and care. They're building lifelong foundations for health and resilience."

– **Matthew Mayer**,
Senior Manager,
Family Support Services



Earlier this summer, we proudly celebrated four graduates who received their GED diplomas with help from Mercer Street Friends Adult Basic Education. Congratulations to these courageous adults who took charge of their futures and chose to further their education!

Enhancing the

LEADERSHIP TEAM WITH A

New Chief Administrative Officer

We recently welcomed Randall West as Chief Administrative Officer. Recognized for his integrity, professionalism, and ability to foster collaborative workplace cultures, Randall's career reflects a deep commitment to operational excellence and social impact.

In the past he has served as Dealer Affairs Manager and National Merchandising Manager at Ford Motor Company, before later becoming Owner and CEO of the Ford dealership in Lawrenceville, revitalizing that business by forging strategic community partnerships and emphasizing sustainable growth. He has served on

the boards of the New Jersey Coalition of Automotive Retailers (NJ CAR) and The First Tee of Greater Trenton, and currently serves on the Board of The Second Baptist Church in Moorestown.

Randall earned a bachelor's degree in Economics from Rutgers University and a certificate from the Advanced Management Education Program at Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. He and his wife Jaye reside in Moorestown.



"We are thrilled to welcome Randall to our leadership team. His distinct experience and his personal commitment to uplifting the people of Greater Trenton will play a pivotal role in strengthening our operations and expanding our impact." – **Bernie Flynn, CEO**

A LASTING LEGACY

Stewards of the Mission Program

Planning an estate is a deeply personal matter. Over the years, Mercer Street Friends has been the beneficiary of legacy gifts from many contributors. Individuals, couples, and families who make this gift are recognized as Stewards of the Mission, ensuring that our mission continues for many years to come.

WAYS IN WHICH TO INCLUDE MERCER STREET FRIENDS IN OUR PLANS INCLUDE:

Identifying Mercer Street Friends as a beneficiary of your estate in your Will

Establishing Mercer Street Friends as a beneficiary of Life Insurance Plan, Retirement Plan, IRA

Creating a Charitable Remainder Trust which provides income to you for life (or a set term) with the remainder of the Trust going to Mercer Street Friends upon passing

LEARN MORE ABOUT BECOMING A PART OF THE STEWARDS OF THE MISSION LEGACY PROGRAM

Please contact us at:
njankowski@mercerstreefriends.org

*Please contact your financial, tax, and legal expert to understand ways in which to include Mercer Street Friends in your plans.

From Fruit Salad to Flight:

Students Shine IN SUMMER BRIDGE

Trenton Community School students had an unforgettable summer thanks to the Summer Bridge program offered through Mercer Street Friends. This program “bridges” the gap between the end of one school year and the start of the next one by providing both academic lessons and fun experiences.

This summer, more than 190 Summer Bridge students at our Community Schools made memories all season long:

At **Luis Muñoz-Rivera Elementary School** students expanded their skills with new projects and their horizons with amazing trips to local farms, Legoland at American Dream in Bergen County, and more.

B.C. Gregory Elementary School students explored healthy eating with a hands-on visit to America's Grow-A-Row in Hunterdon County where they made fruit salads, and experienced the science of flight at iFly through an exciting STEM-based indoor skydiving adventure.

In between trips to the Jersey Shore and other summer locales, students at **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School** celebrated their diverse talents and interests with opportunities to explore drumline, gardening, leadership, fashion, and more.

“Summer Bridge creates a wonderful opportunity for many of our Community School students to try new experiences – and importantly, to maintain lessons in Math, English Language Arts, and SEL (social-emotional learning) to avoid the ‘summer loss’ between school years.”

– Bernadette Trapp, Director of Community Schools





Water Play, Smoothies, oh, S'mores, and my! More,

Fifty "Tiny Turtles" (2.5-3 years old) dove into our six-week summer Preschool camp at no cost to their families.

Special activities provided opportunities for kid-friendly play:

Children created healthy smoothies in their favorite colors using fruit, yogurt, and almond milk during Color week.

Soccer Coach James O'Kore of WE Lead Sports, Inc. and Basketball Coach La'Keisha Sutton of Fan Favorite Club helped students learn to dribble up and down the court – and the field too!

Pajamas and S'mores Day showed kids the power of the summer heat! S'mores warmed in the sun while students napped in their Pjs, resulting in a post-nap treat!

Many of our young adventurers experienced a classroom for the first time, making friends, learning to share, and adjusting to new routines. They practiced independence through toilet learning, explored letters, numbers, and shapes, and built confidence while developing physical, emotional, and social skills.

"We celebrate our incredible staff, supportive families, and of course, our 'Tiny Turtles.' In nature, young turtles move toward light and warmth for safety. Our Tiny Turtles are moving toward the light of discovery in their first years of life. Kindness, curiosity, and play foster growth in these little ones."

– Lisa Banks, Preschool Director



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We are dedicated to **nourishing** minds and bodies and **empowering** families and communities.

Mercer Street Friends provides comprehensive programs to address poverty and the physical and emotional trauma it creates for children, families, and the community. Our work is focused on three critical areas: **food**, **families**, and **education**.

There are many ways to support our mission. Your involvement at any level makes an impact.

DONATE ONLINE Donating online has never been easier. Be it a one-time gift or recurring, simply scan the QR code or visit mercerstreefriends.org.



MAIL A CHECK Feel free to send a check made payable to Mercer Street Friends using the enclosed envelope.



GIFT MATCHING Designate Mercer Street Friends as the recipient of funds in your employer's gift matching program.



PLANNED GIVING There are many ways to leave a personal legacy to Mercer Street Friends. As a member of our Legacy Society, "Stewards of the Mission," your gift will have a lasting impact on the Greater Trenton community. Please speak with your financial or legal advisor to learn about ways to include Mercer Street Friends in your estate plans.



VOLUNTEER Time is one of the greatest gifts you can give to Mercer Street Friends. To inquire about volunteer opportunities, please contact Princess Jenkins at pjenkins@mercerstreefriends.org.



STOCKS AND SECURITIES By making this type of gift, you can avoid paying capital gains tax that would otherwise be due if you sold the assets. To make a gift of stock and appreciated securities, please contact Nancy Jankowski at njankowski@mercerstreefriends.org.