



Together We Cope . Bridging the Gap

708-633-5040

Volume 35

May 2014

TWC

Happenings

Next TWC Board Meetings
Monday, May 12, 2014
Monday, July 14, 2014

U.S. Post Office Food Drive
to benefit TWC
Saturday, May 10, 2014

TWC 10th Annual Golf Outing
Odyssey Country Club
Shot Gun Start 11:30 a.m.
Wednesday, June 4, 2014

**Greater Chicago Food Depository
Hunger Walk**
Soldier Field
Saturday, June 21, 2014

Race Around the World Duathlon
Proceeds benefit TWC
Sunday, June 22, 2014

OPAMA Caribbean Block Party
'Pluck-a-Duck' fundraiser
Sunday, July 20, 2014

Pasta Dinner & Night at the Races
Wednesday, October 1, 2014
Orland Chateau

From the Director ... Kathy

A salute to volunteers: People who change the world



We took some time out of our schedules last month to honor our wonderful volunteers at Together We Cope during April's National Volunteer Month. It was fun walking around our agency and greeting all the people who keep this place running, giving

each a small gift to thank them for the critical services they provide every day.

Our volunteers, nearly 200 strong, have made a big difference in our ability to meet the needs of our clients every day. They work in every area of our operation, from the food pantry and resale shop to the front office and the fundraising division. Our volunteers are some of the most dedicated and generous people you will ever meet. They also are some of the wisest.

The legendary cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead must have had people like our volunteers in mind when she famously

proclaimed: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Our volunteers are of all ages and from all walks of life. Some are retired people who bring the wisdom of a lifetime to their work here. Others are teens who bring an awesome energy to their chores. Some are parents who want to teach their children the importance of serving their fellow man. Whatever their reason, their zeal always amazes us. We've witnessed some of them cancel personal plans because they promised to be here for their volunteer shift and that commitment is important to them. During

our recent "polar vortex" winter of howling winds and knee-deep snow, our volunteers were here on time every day and had no complaints.

You can read about a few of our volunteers elsewhere in this newsletter, including the Volunteer Spotlight and the article about the Reimer Award recipients. They are good examples of the volunteers I am privileged to know.



Cate Dietz (right), volunteer coordinator, presents gifts to Elaine Buck (left) of Tinley Park and Judy Sepic of Mokena during National Volunteer Month at Together We Cope.

Come on in, we're open!

Together We Cope's resale shop, **Nu2u**, is now open on Thursday mornings with a 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. schedule that day. Other hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday; 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday. The shop is located at 17010 South Oak Park Avenue in downtown Tinley Park. Come in and see what's new this spring!

New Hours!

Summer brings new pantry needs



The summer months are a challenging time for Together We Cope's food pantry. The wonderful generosity of holiday donors has met the pantry's needs for months, but now the stock is thinning just at the very time children are home from school for the summer and are looking for lunch and snack items.

TWC's pantry provides a week's worth of groceries to client families, but can serve those families only once per month. Thus, basic pantry items are all the more in demand during the summer. These include peanut butter and jelly, tuna, soups, applesauce, juice, cereal, macaroni and cheese, granola or snack bars, Lunchables or snack crackers.

Food drives by area schools, churches, businesses or community groups are critical to the food pantry's ability to meet the needs of up to 90 families per day who seek assistance. Anyone interested in donating to TWC's food pantry during the summer months can contact Gordon Collins, food pantry manager, at 708-633-5040, Ext. 7228. TWC can assist community groups who wish to conduct a food drive for the pantry.

We're getting ready for Back to School

Hundreds of generous people helped us revamp our annual Back to School program last year, and we're looking for their support in the 2014 campaign that begins now.

Donors provided funding last year for purchase of 1,300 pre-packed boxes of school supplies and new backpacks. It was a departure from the previous program format, in which we collected thousands of individual school supplies throughout the community and spent many hours bagging them by grade level, only to find we did not have the right number of items needed by students in each grade level. The new pre-packed boxes are ordered by grade level, ensuring children in our program get all the tools they need to have a successful school year.

"This is a very special program at Together We Cope," said Kathryn Straniero, executive director, "because we know how important it is for children to get a good education as they start out in their lives. So often, education is the factor that allows people to succeed in reaching their goals."

A donation of \$20 provides one child in need with a new backpack and a box of supplies. A \$500 donation sends 25 youngsters back to school ready to learn. Information on this year's program is with Tina Kessens at tkessens@togetherwecope.org or at www.togetherwecope.org.



Red Carpet Event a big success!

Our Red Carpet Event dinner dance in March was fun as always, and drew hundreds of supporters who donated auction items and the funding needed to maintain our programs for south suburban families in crisis.

A new format this year for the popular silent auction was mobile phone bidding managed by AuctionsByCellular. Guests bid on 100 auction items by cellphone throughout the evening, and people not present at the dinner were able to bid via a website set up by the firm. The result was increased revenue from that portion of the fundraising program. Likewise, bidding was lively on the live auction items this year.

Frank Trombley, TWC board president, and Kathryn Straniero, executive director, honored several people for their service to our agency. Chuck and Donna Freiberg, owners of C.D.E. Collision Centers, were recognized for being the event sponsors this year. C.J. Erickson Plumbing Company was thanked for its VIP sponsorship. Outgoing board member Linda Lopez was honored for her years of service to Together We Cope.

Special thanks goes to longtime TWC supporters John and Pat Slack who provided to each guest at this year's dinner a luscious little box of fudge from Trinity Services Inc.

"We are so grateful for the support of all of our friends who come out each year and make the Red Carpet Event a big success," said Karen Moran, TWC fundraising coordinator. "Without them, we could not con-



Dianne Kleber of AuctionsByCellular demonstrates for Mary Ann Baer, TWC's director of development, the mobile telephone bidding procedure used at this year's Red Carpet Event dinner dance and auction.

Volunteer Spotlight

In this edition of our newsletter, we highlight three terrific volunteers whose time and heart make sure Together We Cope runs smoothly day after day. They are Diane Centner, Joan Onak and Carmen Gonzalez. We really appreciate your efforts!

Diane Centner of Tinley Park came to TWC more than four years ago, eager to give back. Her 22-year career at Joliet Junior College had ended with a high-pressure position: human resources director. "At Cope, it's nice to have a different pace," she said. Diane is a weekly presence in the food pantry, where she handles the breads, cakes, cookies and other desserts that pour in. "I like to do something for people who are less fortunate. When we have bakery goods in abundance, I like to give people a few things," Diane said. "Why shouldn't they get some enjoyment?" She also helps TWC wherever the need is, like manning the Pluck-a-Duck tent at Tinley Park's annual Caribbean Beach Block Party, or helping out with the Race Around the World Duathlon in Tinley Park. What keeps her volunteering? "It's the people," she said. "You get to interact with a lot of different personalities."



Thanks to a woman in Minneapolis, **Joan Onak** came to volunteer at TWC. The Palos Heights resident began volunteering nearly four years ago after losing her position at IBM. For 25 years, Joan had worked in the non-technical side of the business, from staff education to supervising employees to handling customer complaints. When she lost her job, Joan said, she decided to volunteer while she looked for a new post. "I was talking to a friend in Minneapolis, who knew someone in Midlothian who knew of TWC and recommended it, so I came in to volunteer," she said. While she hasn't met the Midlothian connection, Joan has met plenty of others, from fellow volunteers to clients. She answers the door at the food pantry, a job she loves. "People are so appreciative. They say, 'Thank you. God bless you.' When you're at the door, it's so personal. It allows you to put a face to those you're helping."

Carmen Gonzalez of Tinley Park is a familiar face to anyone who has ever walked through the back room behind Nu2u, TWC's popular resale shop. Although she began volunteering just one year ago, Carmen comes to TWC three days a week, spending five hours each day as part of the team that sorts through donations and prepares them for the shop floor. "We see all kinds of funny and surprising things," Carmen said. But the real appeal for her is the warm, friendly atmosphere and camaraderie among the Nu2u staff and the dozens of other volunteers. A widow, Carmen had been married for 60 years. "After I lost my husband, I sat at home for a year," she said, until her friend Karen French, a longtime TWC volunteer, urged her to join in. "She said it would be good for me, and she was right," Carmen said with a smile. "This is a wonderful place."



Win \$10,000 CASH - Win a Seven-Day Cruise for Two

Win a Set of Golf Clubs - Win a \$500 Golf Shop Credit

Calling all Golfers



**Wednesday, June 4,
2014**
Odyssey Country Club
Tinley Park
10:30 am registration
11:30 am Shot Gun Start

We're looking
for sponsors
and golfers!

Together We Cope's golf outing is the place to be! Is it your turn to get a hole-in-one and win a fabulous prize? Join us for a fun day and support a worthy cause. Lunch, golf, dinner and prizes are \$125 per person. Golf only is \$95 and dinner only for \$45.

Contact Karen at kmoran@togetherwecope.org

Two share 2014 Reimer Award honor

JoAnn Hillblom of Mokena and Mary Nolan of Orland Hills have been named the 2014 recipients of Together We Cope's annual Reimer Award for outstanding volunteers.

The award is given annually to agency volunteers who demonstrate the care and compassion that is the spirit of Together We Cope. It is named for Theodore H. Reimer Jr., a late member of the agency's board of directors and a long-time volunteer.

JoAnn has worked in our food pantry for several years, greeting clients at the door and distributing groceries as needed. She also helps coordinate two of our major client programs, Back to School and Adopt a Child. More than 1,300 children in need receive new backpacks and school supplies in the first program, and another 1,200 receive Christmas gifts donated by the community in the second program.

Mary has taken a leadership role in organizing those two client programs at Together We Cope each year, collecting the needed material and setting up distribution. In addition, she serves on Together We Cope's special events committee and works with staff to plan and implement the agency's major fundraising events.



JoAnn Hillblom



Mary Nolan

"Our volunteers are vital to the operation of our agency," said Kathryn Straniero, executive director. "We rely on their expertise and their steadfast commitment to our mission. Without them, we could not be nearly as effective as we are in assisting families in crisis."

Nearly 200 south suburban residents volunteer in various capacities at Together We Cope.

More than a bag of groceries

Helping professionals when tough times hit home

At Together We Cope, it can be impossible to tell the difference between someone who's dropping off a donation and someone who has come in seeking help.

Rick, 53, was just like many of his hard-working neighbors in a south suburb. A homeowner, he began working in computer technology nearly 30 years ago. Although he had suffered injuries in a car accident that took away some of the muscles in his upper arm, Rick's skills provided a solid income and he continued to develop them as the field exploded.

But the troubled economy finally touched Rick's employer, who responded by trimming his hours – significantly. Suddenly, Rick found it nearly impossible to pay basic bills, from his mortgage payment to his utilities. It was a turn he never expected his life to take. That's when he turned to Together We Cope. "He didn't like asking for help," his case manager

recalled. "You could tell when he walked in." She began the process of signing him up for a host of government-sponsored programs designed to bring the kind of relief he needed – programs Rick never knew about before, like LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program), which helps with winter energy costs, and those through CEDA (Community and Economic Development Association of Cook County, Inc.), which provide a host of other services.

But the agencies are scrupulous in making sure the need is legitimate and help is warranted. "It took a while to fill out documents," his caseworker said, "but Rick never missed an appointment and never minded turning over additional information."

Fortunately, some help came soon. One

program that provided help quickly was SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), also known as food stamps. Between those benefits and Rick's monthly visit to Together We Cope's food pantry, he was able to keep his kitchen filled. "We feel that life's toughest challenges are easier to meet when you get a good meal," his caseworker said. "It can really help keep you going."

Eventually, Rick's applications won approval and he received the financial help to keep his home. Despite the ordeal, he was so grateful for the help from Together We Cope that he stopped by to thank his caseworker in person.

"He was walking on air," she said. "He said, 'I couldn't wait to come in and thank you personally. It took such a long time, but there really was a light at the end of the tunnel.'"

"I couldn't wait to come in and thank you personally."



Together We Cope Bridging the Gap
17010 S. Oak Park Ave.
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They're running and biking for Together We Cope

Hundreds of area residents will run and bicycle to benefit Together We Cope again this year when the 12th annual Race Around the World Duathlon takes place Sunday, June 22 in downtown Tinley Park.

"The race was started with the goal of becoming the largest multisport event in the south suburbs," said Jen Hannon of the Hannon Family, organizers of the duathlon. "With the help of numerous volunteers, the race committee has accomplished this goal and continues to produce a great race for the community."

The committee expects to sell out this year's event for 650 participants. Registration can be made at www.tinleyparkduathlon.com, and anyone interested in volunteering to assist in this year's project also can sign up at the website. Help is needed in the post-race refreshment area as well as in early morning setup for the race that kicks off at 8 a.m.

Race participants can enter individually or as a team of two for the event, which features a two-mile run, 11-mile bike ride and another two-mile run all directed through scenic Tinley Park and the surrounding Forest Preserve area.



Prom and party dresses at Nu2u

Together We Cope's Nu2u resale shop is filled with bridal gowns, prom and party dresses this spring! The dresses were donated to us by a local bridal shop and are store samples.

Prom gowns and party dresses are priced at \$15 or two for \$25. There also are many bridal gowns for sale, priced at \$25 each.

Spring is evident in other areas of the shop as well. There are swimsuits, summer dresses and children's warm weather play clothes available. A large donation of new glassware and candles has filled out the shop's housewares section. There is always a steady supply of bicycles available in all sizes to help you enjoy the warmer weather. Local grocery stores periodically donate bouquets of fresh flowers for sale in our store, and each week brings a new supply of donated furniture. In addition, the shop now features all year long a display of Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas items.

The stock changes daily at Nu2u, as donations of new and gently used clothing and housewares come in the back door and are sorted by staff and volunteers. It's always a surprise to find a little treasure on the shelves, and there's something new to see each day.

Shop hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday; from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Thursday; 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday. Further information on Nu2u is at 708-633-9180.



Amy James of Together We Cope's Nu2u resale shop shows some of the prom and party dresses on sale in the shop this spring.

Financial Recovery

Together We Cope and First Midwest Bank offer a Financial Recovery workshop Wednesday, May 14 from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at St. Julie's Church, 7399 West 159th Street in Tinley Park.

The session is part of TWC's Financial Literacy Workshop series offered throughout the year for client families. Space is limited for the May workshop and reservations are required with Kaitlin at 708-633-5040, Ext. 7222. This is an interactive workshop to assess one's financial situation and develop a plan, including understanding banking relationships.