



Together We Cope . Bridging the Gap

708-633-5040

Volume 36

November 2014



Rolling out the Red Carpet for you!

We're planning a great evening of dining, dancing and exciting prizes during Together We Cope's annual Red Carpet Event on Friday, March 6, 2015 at Odyssey Country Club in Tinley Park.

As always, a delicious buffet dinner will be offered during an evening that also includes silent and live auctions of great prizes, plus other fun raffles. Fabulous items like jewelry, sports tickets and memorabilia, airline tickets and vacation condo stays are among the things guests can bid on during the evening. Auctions by Cellular again will conduct the silent auction via cell phone texts and online bidding. The popular

Connexion band will be back to provide music for dancing all evening.

Tickets are \$100 each, or \$950 for a table of 10 reserved in advance. Information is with Karen Moran at kmoran@togetherwecope.org or 708-263-0302, Ext. 6106.

"This event always is a fun evening with family and friends," Moran said. "It is also our biggest fundraiser of the year and we rely on this event to support our client programs all year long."

Several levels of sponsorship are available and include features like free tickets and sponsor advertising in the program books. More information is at www.togetherwecope.org.



Having lots of fun while posing for a "selfie" at last year's Red Carpet Event are, clockwise from top: Brendan Hackett, Cathy Moran, Maura Moran, Courtney Hackett and Evan Moran.

TWC Happenings
New Office Opens
Together We Cope's new Administrative Center is now open at 17728 S. Oak Park Avenue in Tinley Park. Hours are 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Thursday. Telephone 708-263-0302

TWC Board Meetings
November 10
January 12

TWC Office & Pantry Closed
Nu2u Shop Closed
Thanksgiving, November 27, 28
Christmas, December 24, 25, 26

Adopt a Child Gifts Due
December 9

Gifts From the Heart
Children's craft projects for siblings
December 13

Mardi Gras
Business After Hours at TWC
Tuesday, February 17, 2015

Food Pantry Challenge
Coming in January:
Culinary students cook with pantry food

Red Carpet Event
TWC Dinner & Silent Auction
Odyssey Country Club
Friday, March 6, 2015

TWC Golf Outing & Dinner
Odyssey Country Club
Wednesday, June 3, 2015

The Together We Cope Board of Directors and staff thank you for your donations and contributions this past year. We extend our best wishes for a happy holiday season.

From the Director ... Kathy

Giving thanks for your support



This time of year is busy for us at Together We Cope as we look forward to the upcoming holidays. We try to accomplish a great deal during this season, bringing an extra

level of support to our clients so they will enjoy the festivities at Thanksgiving and Christmas. We rely very much on the generosity of our friends, those who support us all year long but go the extra distance at this time of year to help us meet our goals.

We are grateful for the many donations of holiday food, children's gifts, and winter coats that we can give to families in our neighborhood who are experiencing a crisis this year.

We are reaping the rewards of an unusual donation right now as we settle into our new Administrative Center at 17728 Oak Park Avenue, a suite of offices donated to us by Raymond Busch. Other donors provided furniture, carpeting, ceiling tiles and their labor to paint the new offices. Moving our administrative staff to this new location has opened up room for our ever-growing operations at the 17010 Oak Park Avenue building.

Other special donations came from many local restaurants that provided food to our recent Pasta

Extravaganza fundraiser dinner. You can find a list of these generous businesses elsewhere in this newsletter, and we urge you to support these local establishments. We thank the many families who attended the dinner and participated in the raffles that brought additional revenue to us during this holiday season.

In another program, we were amazed at the outpouring of support for our annual Back to School campaign. The generosity of hundreds of donors provided new backpacks and school supplies to more than 1,300 area children in need this autumn. They are back in the classroom and equipped to learn because of the community's support.

One of the most delightful holiday programs we engage in is the annual Gifts from the Heart project coming up in December. Members of the local chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma Society International

donate their time and all of the materials needed for a Christmas craft program in which children of our client families can make holiday gifts to give to their loved ones.

We thank all of you for your thoughtfulness and generosity, and wish for you all good things during the holiday season.



Batman fan Antanas Griffin of Oak Forest heads to kindergarten with a new Spiderman backpack, courtesy of Together We Cope.

More than a bag of groceries

'It doesn't take much for things to fall apart'

Getting a new job is always exciting, even when it means waiting for background checks and new paychecks to come through. For Cindy, a 45-year-old single mother, a new position paid considerably more, enough so that she would be able to switch from paying rent every two weeks to paying monthly.

Just before she gave notice, Cindy was laid off. But she couldn't begin her new job until she could provide her high school diploma. The school had closed and it took her six weeks to find a copy. With no income, she fell behind in rent. Since she was a good tenant, the landlord allowed the delay.

Cindy was glad to start her new job, catching up financially. But when a bug bite on her arm sent her for medical care, she learned she had contracted MRSA, the infection that is resistant to antibiotics. Treated successfully and cleared by a doctor, she was eager to return to work. But fellow employees were afraid of contagion and it took two weeks for the employer to completely disinfect the workplace, two more weeks unpaid for Cindy, since she had not been employed long enough to accrue sick time.

Unable to catch up with rent, she came to Together We Cope for help. The agency was able to provide the the money for the rent as well as groceries from the pantry and assistance seeking child support for her 13-year-old son.

"It was such a strange sequence of events," said Tina Hennis, client service manager. "She had been working and supporting her family for years. Sometimes, it doesn't take much for things to fall apart. We were glad we were able to help."

Volunteer Spotlight

When it comes to volunteers, Together We Cope draws people from different backgrounds who do a wide range of tasks. But they all say the same thing: They want to help TWC make a difference for their neighbors in need. Here are three volunteers who were "on the job" over the summer.

Carmen Bagnola of Tinley Park can be found in the food pantry almost any time you look. He started in April and works four to five days a week, putting in nearly six hours a day. The retired banker has switched from collecting debt to sorting meat and serving as pantry manager Gordon Collins' right-hand man, unloading trucks, filling shelves and picking up donations. "I like the people," he said. "I feel like I'm part of the family." And he is – literally. Carmen's daughter, Melanie Bagnola, is one of the caseworkers who help clients up front.



Vernadean Sweat of Tinley Park is a familiar face to anyone who's attended a special event at Together We Cope in the past two years. She retired from PepsiCo after 32 years as a facilities manager; part of her job was managing special events. "After a year, I wanted to give back," she said. "I wanted something interesting and fun, where I could really make a difference." A friend mentioned TWC. "What this agency is doing is so worthwhile. I saw people were treated with dignity, and I was impressed." She has found her niche serving on the fundraising team. "What's great is that everybody has the same goal."

Vera Christian of Alsip was surprised to receive a warm "welcome back" when she began sorting clothes for Nu2u last spring. She had volunteered in the food pantry a couple of years ago. "I couldn't believe people remembered me," she said. Now volunteering Monday and Friday afternoons, she enjoys seeing what comes in for the shop. "From designer clothes to cute stuff for kids, there's a little bit of everything," she said. Being at TWC, Vera added, "You realize how many people are in need. And you realize how lucky you are."

TWC 'outperforms most other charities in America'

Charity Navigator granted Together We Cope a four-star rating for the fourth year in a row, commending TWC for sound fiscal management and commitment to accountability and transparency.

"Only 7 percent of the charities we rate have received at least four consecutive four-star evaluations, indicating that Together We Cope outperforms most other charities in America," wrote Ken Berger, president and CEO of Charity Navigator. "This 'exceptional' designation from Charity Navigator differentiates Together We Cope from its peers and demonstrates to the public it is worthy of their trust."

Kathryn Straniero, executive director at TWC, said the agency was thrilled with the recognition. "Of every dollar donated to Together We Cope, 92 cents goes to programs and services for our clients," she said. "While the need continues to grow, so does our community support. Our focus on 'neighbor helping neighbor' has brought out the best in so many people. This rating from Charity Navigator helps us as we strive to deserve the trust so many have placed in us."

Interns drawn to TWC's mission, values

Becoming a social worker means serving an internship and learning how to help solve real-world problems. Fortunately for Together We Cope, **May Salman** of Evergreen Park and **Brianna Stelmaszek** of New Lenox are getting that experience at TWC.



May Salman and Brianna Stelmaszek on duty in Together We Cope's client services department.

Both are assisting the client services staff from August through May, when they will earn a bachelor's degree from Governors State University.

May, who speaks English, Arabic and Spanish, plans to become a forensic interviewer who works with abused children. "I love helping people, and working at Together We Cope has reassured me that I've chosen the right career path," she said. "Together We Cope has a great reputation for services, and also as a great place to work."

Brianna was drawn to TWC because the values dovetail with her own. "I like the kindness, and people's willingness to give back to the community in any way," she said. The experience here will prove valuable when she becomes a social worker and – one day – opens an agency of her own. "The first day here was a big eye-opener," she said. "I saw what people are struggling with and I realized I'm blessed. I have so much."

Let's talk turkey!

There's nothing like a traditional Thanksgiving dinner with all the fixings. But what would it be like without the main course? You can put a turkey on the table for clients. Just purchase a \$10 gift card at one of your local grocery stores and send it to TWC at 17010 So. Oak Park Ave, Tinley Park, IL 60477. It's an easy way to make a big difference. Our clients will truly appreciate it!



Brighten the holidays through Adopt a Child

With the holidays on the horizon, Together We Cope is welcoming donations for the popular Adopt a Child program that brightens Christmas morning for nearly 1,500 south suburban youngsters in need.

"We're always grateful that so many people join us in making a difference for children during the holiday season," said Kathryn Straniero, executive director at TWC.

Monetary donations before December 9 will help stock TWC's Santa's Workshop, where our "volunteer elves" will select appropriate gifts for each child we sponsor. People who enjoy shopping during the holiday season are invited to donate toys, especially items on the list below. Thanks to those who remember that teenagers look forward to Christmas, too!

Questions? Contact program coordinator Tina Kessens at 708.633.5040 or tkessens@togetherwecope.org.



TWC staffer Kaitlin Aldworth offers some Christmas cheer to a little client.

Our wish list: board games, stuffed animals, cars and trucks, dolls and doll clothes, story books, play-doh, coloring books, Fisher-Price preschool toys, art sets, Legos, basketballs, footballs, craft kits



Teen favorites: flannel sleep pants, Axe toiletries, wallets and purses, makeup, fashion scarves, costume jewelry, nail care kits, T-shirts, hats and gloves, body wash/ lotion/ cologne, hair accessories

Gift cards: iTunes, Subway, McDonald's, Portillo's, movie theaters, Target, Walmart, Buffalo Wild Wings, Wendy's, Wing Stop, Game Stop, Simon Mall

Thanks for dinner!

More than 300 of our best friends joined us for the annual Pasta Extravaganza fundraiser Oct. 1 at the Orland Chateau. It was a fun family night of great food and exciting videotaped horse races that all enjoyed betting on with "fun money."

Karen Moran, fundraising manager, said this year's crowd was especially gratifying because the pasta dinner was canceled last year due to a conflict with other fundraising events. "We were so happy to see all of our generous supporters return to the pasta event this year," she said. "We are thankful for their loyalty and continued support."

The night was a success greatly because of the many volunteers who work hard behind the scenes. More than 40 of TWC's regular volunteers contributed their time and expertise, and they were joined by two teams of volunteers

from Kohl's stores in Tinley Park and Orland Park. Kohl's also contributed \$500 for each of their teams.

The following restaurants donated food for the delicious buffet dinner. We urge our readers to support these local businesses.

Angelo's Fresh Market - Aurelio's Pizza - Bailey's - Barraco's Pizza - Beggar's Pizza - Buca Di Beppo - Buffalo Wild Wings - Culver's - Durbin's - Ed & Joe's - Eurofresh - Famous Dave's - Fat Rickey's - Frankie's Ristorante - Gatto's - Hooter's - Isabella's - Jimmy Johns, Crestwood - Jimmy Johns, Tinley Park - Kennootz Pizza - Labriola Baking Company - Little Joe's - Mama Vesuvio's East - Marcotte's - Nancy's Pizzeria - Nick's Barbeque - Olive Garden - Papa Joe's - Patio - Rich's Pizza Joint - Rubino's Italian Imports - Salina's Pasta & Pizza - Subway - Winston's Market



TWC volunteers on kitchen duty

Celebrating our volunteers



"Together We Cope is only as good as its volunteers, and we have a fabulous volunteer base," said Executive Director Kathryn Straniero at the 2014 Volunteer Picnic in September. Among those recognized for most service hours were Len Schaafsma, Gordon Collins and Victor Vaca. Twenty-year service awards were presented to Robert Gale, Aurora Scaramella and Frank Trombley as well as Betty Riley pictured here and Kathy Straniero.

Financial Recovery

Free

"Financial Literacy Workshops"

Location: St. Julie's Church

7399 W. 159th Street

Tinley Park, IL 60477

Time: 10:30am-12:30pm

Day: Wednesday

November 12th, 2014

An interactive workshop that will assist you in evaluating your current financial situation, develop a financial plan, establishing and understanding banking relationships, implementing your plan, evaluating and adjusting your plan as needed and assist with giving you a better understanding of balancing your accounts to help keep you on track. This session will also assist in reviewing your credit report, building and/or repairing your credit and provide information on protecting yourself from identity theft.

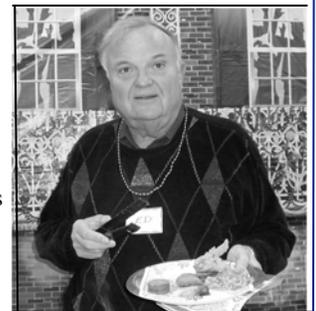
We're planning some 'Fat Tuesday' fun

Together We Cope will host a Mardi Gras themed Business After Hours event on "Fat Tuesday" once again in conjunction with four area chambers of commerce: Oak Forest-Crestwood, Oak Lawn, Orland Park and Tinley Park.

The fun-filled evening of good food, music and camaraderie is Tuesday, Feb. 17, 2015 at Together We Cope's Client and Pantry Services building at 17010 So. Oak Park Avenue in downtown Tinley Park. It is a business networking event for members of the four chambers. Those interested in attending should contact their local chamber of commerce to register.

"We always enjoy this opportunity to meet with members of our local business community," said Karen Moran, TWC fundraising manager. "They are very supportive of our efforts to assist our south suburban neighbors in need throughout the year, and this is a chance for us to thank them for their generosity."

Further information is with Moran at kmoran@togetherwecope.org.



Tinley Park mayor Ed Zabrocki enjoys the fare at TWC's Mardi Gras party earlier this year.



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 Tinley Park, IL 60477

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TWC welcomes talented new staff members

Three new staff members are putting a wide range of skills to work for Together We Cope.

James Brudnicki, maintenance associate, joined TWC last summer as a volunteer after a construction job ended. "I'd driven by and I knew it was a homeless prevention agency," the Frankfort resident said. "I figured it would be a good organization to volunteer for." His willingness to offer a hand wherever it was needed quickly made James a favorite both in the food pantry and the resale store. "I hadn't realized how big Together We Cope is, how many organizations it works with and how much is donated," James said.

Happy to share a variety of talents that help operations run smoothly at both of TWC's buildings, James also picks up furniture from donors and delivers it to Nu2u.

He was glad to join TWC's staff because of the people, both employees and volunteers, who spend their time at TWC. "I love how



kind and generous and caring people are here," he said. "When I'm at Together We Cope, it's like I'm home."



When **Erik Schimke** was earning his bachelor's degree in family services from Eastern Illinois University and looking for an internship, he discovered

TWC. "I looked at the website and I liked the mission," the Chicago Heights resident said. After graduating in May, he came back to TWC and joined the client services staff part-time. "I enjoy the atmosphere," he said. "It's kind of loose. You're dealing with a lot of documents and things need to be right, but you're dealing with people. And when you can help them, you think, 'This is good.'"

Erik also finds it satisfying to be able to provide assistance to clients in ways that surprise them. "A lot of times, people don't even know what they need or where to start. We get the ball rolling and get them back on their feet."

While he's happy to share his skills with the agency, he'll always remember TWC for what it gave him. "Interning at Together We Cope allowed me to get my degree," he said.

Patty Houlihan first heard of TWC as a reporter for Star Newspapers in 1990, when she wrote a story about the agency. She followed journalism with work in marketing at the University of Chicago, then the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, then came back to TWC as a volunteer in 2013 at the invitation of her former Star editor, Marge Seltzner.

Packing bags in the pantry gave her the idea for TWC's Food Pantry Challenge, the cook-off in which culinary students create recipes for our clients. Joining the staff last summer in marketing and communications, she's happy to bring it back "better than ever" in January. This fall, she lined up three personal care product drives, one from staff at Bremen High School District 228, one from Orland Junior High and another from Central Middle School in Tinley Park.

Patty loves the idea of bringing the public's attention more to TWC.

"There's always so much going on here and so many good stories to tell about Together We Cope, I feel lucky to be here," she said.

