



Together We Cope

Volume 49

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BRIDGING THE GAP



Celebrate! 2018

Together We Cope is delighted to announce three presenting sponsors for this year's annual dinner dance and auction Friday, Feb. 9 at the Odyssey Country Club in Tinley Park. Hosting the Celebrate! 2018 event at the \$10,000 sponsorship level each are longtime sponsor C.D.E. Collision Centers, joined this year by C.J. Erickson Plumbing Company and Construction Concepts of Illinois. All are south suburban businesses that support TWC throughout the year. Specialized Staffing Solutions Inc. and Edwards Realty are this year's VIP sponsors at the \$5,000 level. More than a dozen other local businesses are sponsoring the fundraiser at other levels of support.

Adding to this year's fun is dancing to the music of popular local party band Five Guys Named Moe, which will play classic rock and roll all evening. Tickets at \$100 per person, with advance registration required, include a sumptuous buffet dinner and open bar for four hours. Reservations are available through Feb. 7 with Kathy Rogge, TWC's fundraising manager, at krogge@togetherwecope.org or 708-263-0302 ext. 6101.

As always, many fabulous items are available for purchase through live and silent auctions during the evening. Bidding on these items also is available online beginning in early February at www.TWC2018.gesture.com. During the evening guests can take their chances on a grand raffle featuring \$1,000 cash as top prize. Other raffles feature a collection of lottery tickets and the popular wine pull, where each ticket guarantees a bottle of wine and a chance to win a wine basket.

TWC's annual dinner dance and auction is the agency's major fundraiser each year, and draws hundreds of area residents who support our mission of assisting south suburban families in temporary crisis.

REIMER AWARD

Congratulations, Sue Leigh!

Sue Leigh, longtime volunteer at Together We Cope, is recipient of the Theodore H. Reimer "Volunteer of the Year" award for 2018.

An Oak Forest resident, Sue began her work at TWC about eight years ago by sorting clothing donations to Nu2u, our resale shop. Soon she was asked to join the band of merry elves who operate our Santa's Workshop in December, providing toys and pajamas at Christmas to hundreds of area children in need. This past holiday season, Sue took over the reins as the head elf and directed the program for two months.



"This is the perfect job for me," Sue laughs as she describes three joys in her life: shopping, Christmastime, and bringing smiles to people burdened by crises in their lives. She filled the pivotal role of shopping (sometimes with three carts in the checkout lane!) for specific items requested by children in the program. Then Sue and her elves set up the workshop of donated toys and pajamas by size and gender. Finally, they fulfilled each child's wish by packing bags specifically designed for them.

"There's something special about seeing the clients' appreciation, whether it's a 'thank you' or just a look on their face that shows their gratitude," Sue said. "And putting this program together is fun, though hectic. I love the crew that works on this event, it's the reason I keep coming back each year."

Sue became involved in many other aspects of TWC's operation when her daughter, Katlin Bewley, worked in our fundraising department. Katlin called on her mom to assist with the dinner dance, golf outing, pasta dinner, and other fundraising events. But it's the Christmas program that keeps Sue engaged. "It's just a rewarding experience," she said.

Sue is married to Patrick Leigh. She has worked for 25 years at her family's seasonal business, Masters Irrigation.



A better world, one step at a time

I look at the headlines on articles in this edition of Together We Cope's newsletter, and I marvel there are so many people

in our community who do good things for their neighbors in need. I'm inspired by the stories of our new interns, I chuckle at the Penny Fairy escapade, and I applaud our Volunteer of the Year winner. I think about the hard work done by our pantry and resale shop volunteers, and I smile at the joyful labor of our Gifts from the Heart sponsors.

It's the abundance of good things accomplished by so many good people in this region that gives me hope for the future of our agency and, especially, for the future of our clients who struggle to achieve their dreams against the odds.

As a new year begins, perhaps it's a good time to turn away for a moment from all of the bad news we get daily from all over the world. Instead, let's take that moment to salute the many people who give of themselves and make the world a better place – starting right here in our own little corner of the world.

--Kathryn Straniero, Executive Director

A very happy holiday!

Our generous community exceeded previous years' donations of holiday dinners in November and December by providing Together We Cope client families with well over 16,000 pounds of turkeys and hams with all the fixings for a complete meal. This past holiday our community partners donated 736 complete dinners, plus many turkeys given to families in their regular pantry visits. Last year's dinner total was 663 dinners.

We are especially grateful to customers of four local Jewel Food Stores who donated funds to the stores for many of these meals; to Miller Coors and Hayes Distributing for their annual holiday meal program for hundreds of our families; and to The Horton Group for a major holiday meal donation.

This dinner tally is in addition to literally tons of food collected in drives late in 2017 by churches, schools, businesses, civic groups and Scouts. These generous donations allow our client families to keep their kitchens stocked with everyday food staples to feed their families throughout the winter months.

Donations to other TWC holiday programs also were generous. Our Santa's Workshop program for children in need generated thousands of dollars in contributions, as well as a mountain of toys, pajamas, hats and gloves. We also received many new coats for adults and children, making the holidays even brighter for scores of our neighbors.



VOLUNTEERS

Help us feed 5,000 people in February

Nearly 5,000 people receive groceries each month from Together We Cope's food pantry at 17010 So. Oak Park Avenue in downtown Tinley Park. It takes a lot of people to run that kind of operation, and the great majority of them are volunteers. We could not do the job without them.

If you'd like to be part of the small army that unloads trucks, stocks shelves, packs grocery bags, sorts donations, greets the clients, or helps clean up the pantry at the end of the day, have a conversation with George Rumbaugh, our food pantry manager, at 708-633-5040 ext. 7228 or grumbaugh@togetherwecope.org.

Volunteers must be at least 16 years old and able to do moderate lifting. Their help is needed Monday through Friday, but especially on Thursday and Friday. Food pantry hours are 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday; from 2 to 7 p.m. on Thursday.

There are lots of volunteer opportunities at Together We Cope in the food pantry, resale shop and office – even a chance to help run a bingo game on Wednesdays in Orland Park! Further information on the TWC volunteer program is with Cathy Trongeau at 708-633-5040 ext.7221 or ctrongeau@togetherwecope.org.

Loads of surprises for Nu2u volunteers

Every day brings a surprise for volunteers at Nu2u, Together We Cope's resale shop at 17010 So. Oak Park Avenue. As area residents drop off their gently used clothing and housewares, volunteers open the bags and sort through the donations to prepare them for sale in the shop.

Sometimes, there's a gem of a find: maybe a designer bag, or a pair of trendy jeans, or even a \$20 bill someone left tucked in a jacket pocket. Sometimes people donate odd items found in a departed relative's home, items that can have great value. Such was the case with a top-quality professional meat slicer found in a relative's basement! Once, an engagement and wedding ring set slipped off a woman's finger unnoticed as she packed her used clothing for donation. Luckily, TWC often can track down such a donor and return their "accidental donation" to them.

Donations from the community keep the resale shop up and running, generating income for TWC client programs and filling a need in the community for affordable clothing and housewares. The shop is always in need of children's clothing, and larger size clothing for men and women.

Nu2u hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 10 a.m. to 4 pm. on Saturday. Information is at 708-633-9180.



Volunteer Sheila Stahr sorts through clothing and houseware donations at Nu2u.

Welcome, Christa and Yessenia

Together We Cope is fortunate to have two dedicated and energetic interns this winter from Governors State University's social work program, both working toward bachelor's degrees.

Christa Hill of Matteson is launching her second

career, going back to school after working for a time as a makeup artist.



Yessenia Nieto and Christa Hill

"My mom always wanted me to go back to school, and when she passed I honored her wish," Christa said. "I found a whole new passion in life in the midst of honoring her. I've always been a compassionate person who cares about social justice, and this work we do at Together We Cope is so fulfilling." Christa said she learns from the people she helps and added: "I admire our clients who are working toward being self-sufficient."

Yessenia Nieto of Hickory Hills works part-time with children at a local park district, a job she loves because she enjoys being with people. "I'm also a little nosy, I guess, because I'm always trying to get insights into other people's lives," she said with a smile. "This work at TWC is gratifying because I can work one-on-one with people, hear their stories and try to help them through their problems," she said. Yessenia believes her experience with TWC clients has taught her to plan better for her own future, learning lessons from those she helps.

TWC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- FRANK TROMBLEY, President
- KEVIN PATRICK, Vice President
- PATRICK McKERNAN, Secretary
- ROB GALE, Sergeant-at-Arms
- THOMAS FISHER, Director
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- DONALD MERTIC, Director Emeritus
- KATHRYN STRANIERO, Executive Director

'Pennies from heaven' land on kind lady's doorstep

It started mysteriously one day last fall when Nancy pulled up to her garage and noticed a couple of pennies lying on the ground. She picked them up and wondered where they came from, what it could mean. The next day there were more pennies, then still more the day after that. The total was anywhere from 12 to 50 each day and it would continue for months. Once, when she was away for a few days, she returned to find a big bunch of pennies had gathered in her absence as if they'd multiplied each day.

"I started asking my neighbors about it, but nobody had ever heard of such a thing or experienced it at their homes. I have great neighbors, and it became a joke as each pointed the finger at the other," she recalls. So Nancy posted her story about her "Penny Fairy" on Facebook, and got lots of responses and "pennies from heaven" comments. She vowed to her family and friends that she'd match the pennies and make a donation to Together We Cope, her favorite charity, in support of the agency's Christmas program. That's when the pennies really started pouring in!

So many pennies showed up outside her garage that some got frozen to the ground and she had to work to free them. One person left a whole roll of pennies with a note that said Nancy was getting too thin from bending over to pick up pennies. Facebook friends started sending her money, a friend from Texas sent a check, family and friends contributed. When she told her story at a townhome association meeting, a lady gave her a dollar for the campaign.

Because of the mysterious penny windfall and Nancy's matching donation, plus contributions from family and friends, Nancy was able to give Together We Cope a total of \$405 for our children's Christmas program. "It's been a lot of fun, but I hope the pennies stop now," she laughed as she told her story.



TWC honors Beta Beta society for 'Gifts from the Heart' program

Together We Cope will honor at its annual dinner dance a special group of women who have for 16 years presented a festive crafts day for children in need, little ones who want to share the Christmas spirit by making gifts for their families, teachers and friends.

"Gifts from the Heart" is offered to the children of TWC client families by the Beta Beta Chapter of Lambda State, Delta Kappa Gamma Society International. This is a society of women educators, both active and retired, who sponsor various projects and education grants in the south suburban area. But it's "Gifts from the Heart" that brings out their real creative flair. On a Saturday in mid-December the society sets up more than a dozen craft tables, a book table and a gift wrapping station and goes to work with 50 to 75 youngsters who make a wide assortment of Christmas gifts under the guidance of the teachers. Beta Beta members provide all of the materials to make fleece scarves, jewelry, keychains, candleholders, ornaments, or holiday mugs filled with candy and hot chocolate.



It started as a crafts table at a TWC children's Christmas party, and grew into its own program as more and more people got involved. "Now we've got a regular following of our members and their friends who come out to help the 'Gifts' program," said Carol Schaal, president of the chapter.

"This program illustrates the real meaning of Christmas," said Kathryn Straniero, TWC executive director. "It helps children give back to the important people in their lives. Thank you, Beta Beta Chapter, for all that you bring to families of Together We Cope."



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17010 SOUTH OAK PARK AVENUE
TINLEY PARK, ILLINOIS 60477

Client Service Center

17010 S. Oak Park Ave.
Tinley Park, IL 60477
708.633.5040

Administrative Center

17728 S. Oak Park Ave.
Tinley Park, IL 60477
708.263.0302

Nu2u Resale Shop

17010 S. Oak Park Ave.
Tinley Park, IL 60477
708.633.9180

Website

togetherwecope.org



A client's story

A little help with rent eases life for cancer survivor

Berta paid her own way all through her adult life, so it took a lot for her to ask for help with rent and utility bills when cancer changed all of her plans. She was referred to Together We Cope by the American Cancer Society where, as a breast cancer survivor, she received some support.

At 68 she was working as a full-time staff LPN at a nursing home when she took a medical leave in order to have surgery. Earlier, she'd taken time off during chemotherapy needed to shrink the tumor. After recovery from the surgery, she cut back to a part-time schedule because the job was too stressful in her condition. Eventually, she had to leave that job and took a lower paying job with less stress in order to cope. But she lost that job as her condition worsened. By the time she came to TWC for financial help, Berta had just landed a part-time job in the medical field at a greatly reduced hourly rate but had received only one paycheck to date. Her apartment rent was in arrears two months, her electric bill was overdue, and her medical bills were mounting. Some of her doctors indicated they would place her account with a collection agency.

Her independent and well organized life was unwinding rapidly. Berta was diagnosed with diabetes and cataracts, then she was told she also needs a hearing aid. There was no money for these new crises in her life.

Together We Cope was able to work with Berta on many of the issues facing her as she recovers from cancer, including financial assistance for the past due rent on her apartment and the overdue utility bill. She was given referrals to other agencies for other kinds of aid. She began receiving groceries immediately from TWC's food pantry, and was issued a voucher for clothing from our resale shop. Soon after, she began receiving paychecks from her new job and found she could just begin to make ends meet. Berta learned about the generous people in her community who donate money and material so Together We Cope can continue in its mission to assist people in crisis. She is very grateful, and optimistic about her future.

Check this out!

Together We Cope is honored again to be named one of five charities to benefit from the annual International Home and Housewares Show at McCormick Place in Chicago – and we need your help to collect and package the hundreds of donations that exhibitors will give us on the last day of the show.

Check out this amazing event on Tuesday, March 13 and help raise money for TWC at the same time. The show features 2,200 exhibitors from around the world. Items given to TWC will be distributed to families in need, and also sold in our Nu2u resale shop to generate revenue for our services.

We need about 100 volunteers for this effort. We will provide round-trip transportation by bus to McCormick Place from our office at 17010 So. Oak Park Avenue. The packing-up event is from noon to about 8 p.m., but volunteers can work part or all of the day. (Transportation will be provided only for those working the full day.)

If you are interested, contact us by Feb. 15 so your name can be submitted to show organizers and we can reserve a TWC shirt for you. Information is with Cathy Trongeau at 708-633-5040 ext. 7221 or ctrongeau@togetherwecope.org.