



## Pittsburgh agency, Volunteers of America merge

### Working Order helps entrepreneurs with disabilities thrive



*Excited about the merger, Ruby Wilkosz (left), Alan Garner and Susan Chase share a vision to reach and uplift all people.*

**T**he fact that **Kathy Heart's** disability typically requires hospitalization several times a year doesn't keep her from living the American dream—earning a living by putting in a hard days' work.

Kathy is no ordinary entrepreneur. She is a success story of **Working Order**, a nonprofit in Southwest Pennsylvania that has merged with **Volunteers of America of Pennsylvania**.

Working Order helps individuals with physical, cognitive or mental health disabilities create meaningful work for themselves through entrepreneurship. It also helps persons without disabilities who encounter significant obstacles to employment due to long-term unemployment, inadequate education, or other socio economic disadvantages.

Working Order was founded in 1996 by former Executive Director **Susan Chase** and a group of volunteers who were looking for alternative solutions to the

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## Having more fun than ever

**A**t the **Children's Center** in Allentown, **Al Bonnici** feels like just one of the kids.

"I'm having more fun at work than I ever have," the retiree told Linda Rao, a contributing writer for **Lehigh Valley Hospital and Health Network's** Healthy You magazine.

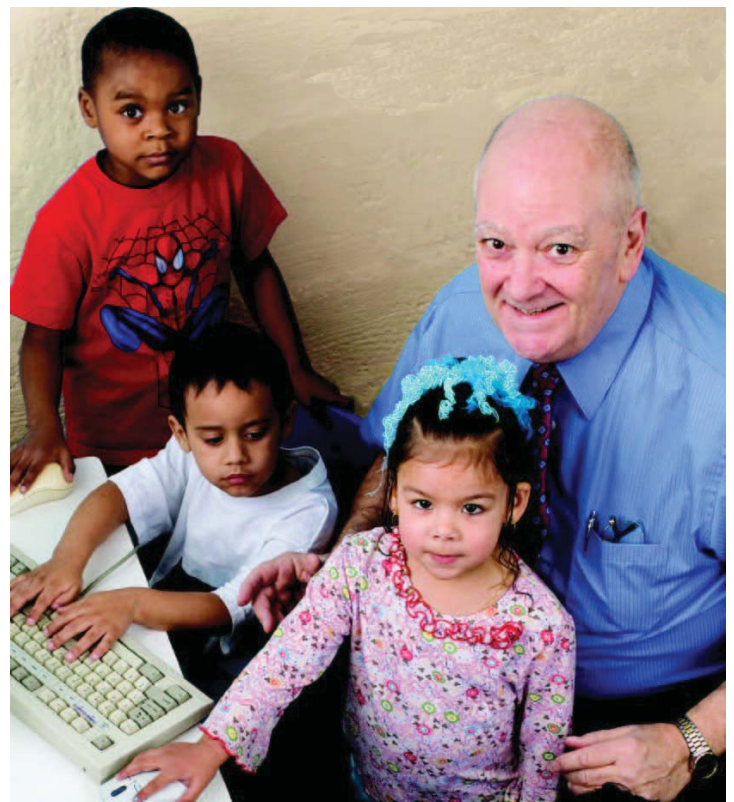
The July/August addition featured a smiling Al with a few of the kids who count on him to show them the magic of computers.

Al retired in 2003 after a long career in data processing and information technology. Now he's at the Children's Center every weekday, helping the children and staff use computers.

"I show them (children) once, and that's all it takes," he said.

The children and staff use computers Al arranged to have donated by **Air Products, PPL and Harleysville Bank**.

"Al is a great help at the center and the kids love him," said Dolores Swavely, director of the center.



*Al Bonnici shows kids at the children's Center learn about the magic of computers.*



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## From the President

Several years ago I received a phone call from a gentleman in Knoxville, Tennessee. He said he was retired, and told about growing up in Pittsburgh during the Depression.

He told how when their coal bin got low in the winter that Volunteers of America would send a load of coal. He gave Volunteers of America credit for helping his mother survive the Depression.

A year or two later I received a letter from a lady in Michigan who wrote a very similar story, of growing up in Pittsburgh, and how Volunteers of America helped her mother and family survive the Great Depression.

Yes, you guessed it, they are brother and sister.

Volunteers of America served Pittsburgh and its surrounding communities and neighborhoods from early 1897 until the mid 1970s with a variety of services such as a child care center, thrift stores, Sunday School, summer camps, prison parole services plus others.

Beginning July 1, 2006 Volunteers of America was again serving Pittsburgh and Southwestern Pennsylvania with two services. As you can read beginning on page one, Working Order, which focuses on people with disabilities, but will help others also, became a program of Volunteers of America.

Working Order provides one-of-a-kind services. I don't know of any other organization whose primary mission for 10 years or more is to help people with disabilities set up their own small business.

We also began providing case management services to Hurricane Katrina evacuees in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Having lived in New Orleans for 11 years before moving to Pennsylvania I was glad to establish much needed services for evacuees who now live in Pennsylvania.

It is always great to hear from individuals Volunteers of America has helped. And, I am grateful for the generosity of our donors who partner with us to help and serve those in need. Contact me if you want to know more about how you can help.



Alan R. Garner

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## *'I am the best Mommy ever!'*

The following story was told by a young mother whose life has been changed by Volunteers of America's **Caring Alternatives** program in Northeast Pennsylvania.

**A**bout five years ago or so, I found myself praying as hard as I ever had in my life — for me, my son and my unborn baby. I was 8 months pregnant, was in an abusive relationship, and my husband was in and out of drug rehab.

I was living in a bad situation, had little family support, no money to count on, and above all, no hope that the next day would be any better. I was living a hard life of despair and desperation.

God heard my prayers, and sent Crystal, a case worker from Volunteers of America into my life, and for this, I will forever be thankful.

Without judgment, the Volunteers of America counselor ensured that I got what I needed to be safe, to not be hungry, and to keep the baby healthy.

The Volunteers of America pantry provided diapers, formula and clothes for my child. Without this support, which is only possible because of donations from good people like you, I don't know if I

would have been able to keep my children.

In addition to the material support, my Volunteers of America counselor gave support and friendship. Unlike anyone else, she believed in me, and treated me with dignity. She helped me to erase my doubts, and become strong enough to end my abusive relationship. She also encouraged and helped me enroll into nursing school.

To make a long story short, I finished second in my class and became a nurse. I am now working full time and proud to become engaged to a good man who will be an excellent father. My children know the value of an education and know that abuse is not ever acceptable. We live in a nice home, and my baby is now a healthy growing 4-year old. Every day she tells me she loves me and that I am the best mommy ever!

Please know how important your support of Volunteers of America is. They helped me when I needed it most and they gave me the precious gift of hope. I know right now, countless others are being helped by

*Volunteers of America as well. I am blessed, and because of God, Volunteers of America, and my counselor, Crystal, life is wonderful.*

Caring Alternatives is under the direction of **Crystal Parker**. The program serves women of any age who are facing an unplanned pregnancy. Compassionate staff members provide individual counseling, education and supportive services. Mothers in need are provided with diapers, formula, clothing and other necessities to help the newborn get off to a good start in life.



## Your travel plans can benefit Volunteers of America

If you like to travel, you'll like what you can do by using **UNIGLOBE Travel Management Consultants** to arrange your next vacation, cruise, tour or other travel adventure.

What's special is that with no additional costs to you, Uniglobe will make a donation to Volunteers of America each time your travel is booked through them. At the time of your booking, be sure to mention you're a friend of Volunteers of America or use the ID code VOAPA so Volunteers of America gets credit.

The travel company, located in Mechanicsburg, has a web site that can be accessed from anywhere in the world. Just go to [www.uniglobetmc.com](http://www.uniglobetmc.com). The full service web site allows you to make bookings, research destinations, select specials, and more. If you require assistance, agents are just a click away.

To talk with one of Uniglobe's friendly and experienced staff call 717-766-4862.

To contact Uniglobe by e-mail, use [Michelle@uniglobetmc.com](mailto:Michelle@uniglobetmc.com).

## *Citizens Bank supports expanding programs*



Citizens Bank officials Edward A. Tosti (left), vice president of commercial banking, and Lorraine Bowers vice president, present Alan R. Garner, president and CEO, with a \$7,500 check. Also on hand for the presentation in Harrisburg was Raymond L. Spencer, vice president and community investment manager. The contribution is being used to support expanding mental health and other programs in Central Pennsylvania.

## Working Order helps entrepreneurs with disabilities thrive *continued from page 1*

problem of unemployment faced by many people with disabilities.

"Working Order is a wonderful fit with Volunteers of America's mission to reach and uplift all people," said Alan R. Garner, president and chief executive officer. Working Order is a unique program and we are honored to continue Working Order's mission and outstanding service through Volunteers of America."

"Unemployment still hovers around 70 percent for Americans with disabilities," Susan explained. "Self-employment is a viable alternative for some people with disabilities who have not been able to find traditional employment or who do not choose to work in sheltered employment. Entrepreneurship can be a long-term employment option, or a bridge to more traditional employment.

Susan and the Working Order Board of Directors were looking for a way to meet their mission more effectively, serve more individuals and allow their unique program model to be replicated.

Volunteers of America of Pennsylvania welcomed Working Order into its large family of programs and services on July 1 by means of a merger of the two non-profits.

Working Order pairs participants with a business coach to help develop a business concept, test it for feasibility, develop a long-range plan, market, manage and sustain the business. Shared resources such as office space, computers, Internet access, meeting rooms, and marketing services are also available.

"The wide range of people we serve creates a diverse, vibrant work community with opportunity for growth and learning" Susan concluded.

"Working Order is the only small business incubator in the country designed to support entrepreneurs with and without disabilities in a fully integrated setting. With our new **Director Ruby Wilkosz**, and the support of Volunteers of America of PA, I know that the work we have done over the last ten years will expand to serve many more individuals with the skills and spirit to work."

The addition also returns Volunteers of America services to southwest Pennsylvania, Alan said. Volunteers of America served the greater Pittsburgh area from the late 1890s through the mid 1970s.

### *Woman puts her career in Working Order*

**L**iving with a disability that involves unpredictable good days and bad days, hospitalizations and atypical work schedules, made traditional employment almost impossible for **Kathy Heart**. But she had tremendous skills, years of experience and the commitment to productive work. Here is Kathy's story:

"I came to **Working Order** with a tentative business plan that I had written with help from the Small Business Administration (SBA) website. My dream job was to be a writer who would make a contribution to the individuals and organizations for whom I worked.

My business coaches at Working Order helped me to make my plans realistic by ensuring that I had the skills required to fit the job and the market was present for the serv-



ices I wanted to offer.

In 2004-2005, while working at my business part-time, I was able to help several non-profits raise over \$340,000 using my grant proposal research and writing skills. I have served both local and national clients.

Working Order has more recently assisted me with further business development and market planning. The result is that I moved my business from a sole proprietorship to a limited liability corporation (now called HEART Resources, LLC), and designed a new brochure that promotes my successes.

In every interaction with Working Order staff, I have received the high-

est respect, even on days when my disabilities prevented me from working at 100 percent of my capabilities. The staff is knowledgeable about every aspect of what it takes to start a business and succeed as an entrepreneur who happens to also have a disability. I cannot express how much appreciation I have for how Working Order has helped to transform my work life. My gratitude is limitless."

HEART Resources can be reached at 412-461-6640.

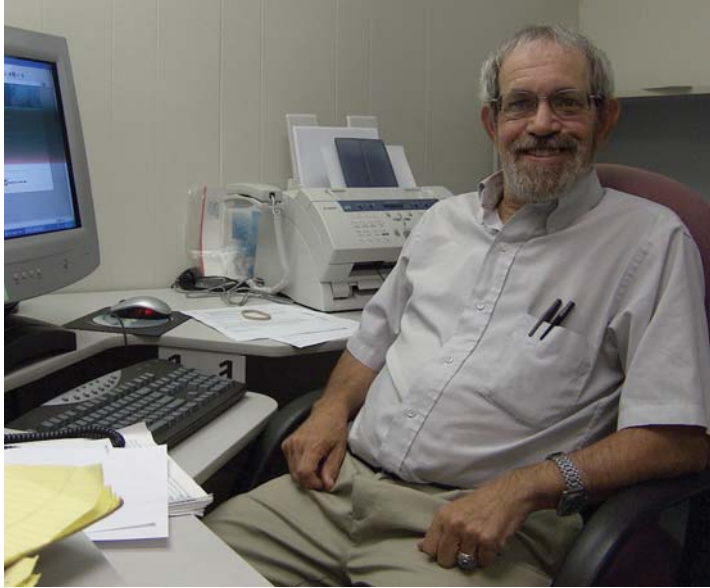
Kathy is just one of the hundreds of individuals Working Order has helped in the 10 years since its founding. Today more than 80 individuals are being served from Working Order offices at 1650 Main Street, Pittsburgh.

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## Helping Katrina Evacuees in Southwestern PA

**W**hen Sara (not her real name) saw the exit sign for Coraopolis, it was as if her whole world had changed. After nearly 50 years she was back home and it felt good.

That was Sara's reaction as this 67-year-old Hurricane Katrina evacuee left the apartment in Clairton she considered "a prison" and traveled to her new home in Coraopolis. **Mark Schwartz**, Volunteers of America's Southwestern Pennsylvania's case manager was helping



*Katrina Case Manager, Mark Schwartz, connects Gulf Coast evacuees with the human services necessary to help return their lives to order.*

Sara resettle after spending 11 months in that one-room apartment.

Sara, and hundreds of others, came to Southwestern Pennsylvania a year ago as **Hurricane Katrina** evacuees and were placed in whatever housing was available. Some of those evacuees are returning to the Gulf Coast, some will stay in Pennsylvania and others will move elsewhere.

What many have in common, Mark explained, is that they need help working through a myriad of obstacles including healthcare and the social and legal problems resulting from the devastating storm that changed their lives forever.

Mark helps evacuees connect with the services they need to find jobs, housing, churches, schools and other community resources as they cope with their loss and re-settle into a new living situation.

Individuals who relocated to Southwestern Pennsylvania following Katrina are referred to Mark through a variety of sources, including media announcements. Mark coordinates his work with **Rick Nelson**, technical supervisor of **Katrina Aid Today**, a nationwide program helping evacuees put their lives back in order.

Mark helped Sara return to her hometown, after she found a modest four-room apartment. Now her goals are to get help for her mental health issues, acquire dentures and glasses, and attend the 50th reunion of her high school class.

Mark can be reached at the Volunteers of America office in Pittsburgh by calling (412) 782-5344.

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## Celebrity Dinner supports at-risk youth

**N**ortheastern Pennsylvania was Philadelphia Eagles Country in May when all-pro middle line-backer **Jeremiah Trotter** tackled the audience's attention at the Third Annual Celebrity Dinner.

The fundraising dinner, held in Wilkes-Barre, benefits at-risk youth.

**The William Carey Education Trust** and **The Dakota Group** are lead sponsors for the event, explained Bill Jones, vice president and chief operating officer.

Special guests included the **Randy Everett** family, who became involved with Volunteers of America through the Summer Dreams Program, which matches families interested in adoption with orphans from former Soviet Union countries.

Another highlight of the evening was the presentation of the **Volunteers of America Spirit of Youth Award** to **John Thomas**, of Dallas.



*Taking a timeout for a photo at the Celebrity Dinner, Jeremiah Trotter (left) poses with Dee and Randy Everret and their adoptive son Vlad. At right is Bill Jones, vice president and chief operating officer for Volunteers of America.*

## Vice president addresses Global Village Program



**B**ill Jones, vice president and chief operating officer of Volunteers of America of Pennsylvania spoke at the recent 2006 **Global Village Program**.

The Global Village for Future Leaders of Business and Industry, held at **Lehigh University's Iacocca Institute**, is a

unique six-week educational program, for future entrepreneurs from around the world. Each year, the program admits about 90 Iacocca Interns from over 40 countries.

The program is designed for young professionals and mature students from the ages of 19 to 40 who share the dream of a leadership career in business and industry.

Bill spoke about the role of volunteers and the capability of the non-profit community.

He serves, or has served, on the board of directors of a number of organizations including the Catholic Youth Center, College Misericordia Alumni Association, Consumer Credit Counseling Services of NEPA, the Ethics Institute of NEPA, REACH Inc., St. Jude's School Advisory Council and was a founding board members of Wyoming Valley Habitat for Humanity. He is also the recipient of the United Way's 2003 Rose Brader Award for volunteerism.

## *I Remember Mama® is a hit with seniors*

**B**rad Crum, Elvis impersonator extraordinaire, wowed a crowd of 300 at Volunteers of America's annual **I Remember Mama®** luncheon in Central Pennsylvania.

Held in May at the **Hilton Harrisburg**, the event for elderly mothers who would otherwise be alone on Mother's Day, the luncheon is a treat that always brings great joy to guests.

In addition to Brad's repertoire of Elvis hits, guests were entertained by congenial weatherman **Chuck Rhodes**, of **WHTM-TV abc 27**, as well as the acapella group

**Fortitude**. A fabulous meal, door prizes and sunshine bags added to the excitement.

**Karn's Quality Foods** is the major sponsor of I Remember Mama, which also serves as a fundraising event.



*Brad Crum brought joy to area elderly ladies with his outstanding repertoire of Elvis hits.*

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