



## Children's Center earns national accreditation

Volunteers of America's **Children's Center** has earned accreditation from the **National Association for the Education of Young People (NAEYC)**, the nation's leading organization for early childhood professionals.

"We're proud to be accredited by NAEYC and recognized for our commitment to reaching the highest professional standards," said **Dolores Swavely**, director of the Children's Center. NAEYC accreditation lets families in our community know that children are getting the best in care and early learning experiences.

"We are a United Way agency and have been providing children's services in downtown Allentown since the early 1900s," Swavely said. "Our staff ensures that today's children develop the skills, values and confidence necessary to become successful adults, parents, citizens and community

leaders. Each child is guided to achieve his or her full potential with individual assessments and a curriculum that addresses his or her unique social, intellectual, emotional and cognitive development."

The Children's Center, located at 730 Union Street, Allentown, provides 11 hours of developmentally appropriate child care daily for an average of 150 children, ages 13 months to 10 years. For school-age children, transportation is provided to and from four Allentown public schools.



"By earning accreditation, the Children's Center has become a leader in a national effort to raise the quality of early childhood education, and help give all children a better start," said **Mark Ginsberg, Ph.D.**, executive director of NAEYC.

## Home Depot volunteers brighten lives



One of a dozen Home Depot volunteers attaches baseboard at the Hartman Home.

Unless a construction worker is in a great deal of pain, it is not often that you see one in tears after completing a hard day's work.

Yet, **Deb Kohut**, the leader of "**Team Depot**" for our **Hartman Home** project needed a couple of tissues after helping us renovate two bathrooms at the group home in Wilkes-Barre.

Why? As one of the teenage residents came home from school and checked on the progress of the Home Depot volunteers, she immediately looked around and started asking, "Is this really our bathroom?" She repeated the question several times with tremendous excitement and called for her housemates to see the work that had been done. Then she actually called "dibs" on the bathroom and said she wanted to move in!

"While we, as an organization, are very, very grateful for the work of Home Depot during their Corporate Week of Community Volunteerism, the kids at the home are ecstatic," said **Bill Jones**, vice president and chief operating officer. "It doesn't get more rewarding than helping those in need and knowing that what you do is genuinely appreciated! Thus, Deb's tears."

"I am again reminded of the line attributed to St. Francis of Assisi," concluded Jones — *Go and preach the gospel; if you have to, use words* — "Home Depot reached out and served people in need. Their actions do not need words."



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## From the President

I am excited!!! A meeting of our program directors just a few days ago was full of good news.

Those of you who provide the money and other resources we need to serve others expect us to use it wisely. The Scriptures clearly teach us accountability and stewardship.

I hope the following confirms your faith in us and validates the quality of the work we do in serving those in need.

Dolores reported our Children's Center in Allentown has received a five-year accreditation from NAEYC, the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Dave reported we have provided emergency clothing and household goods from our Thrift Store in Mechanicsburg to over 1,000 families this year. And, the donations of goods for the thrift stores continue to increase.

Shannon at Laurel Towers, our elderly housing apartments in Harrisburg, reported she successfully completed a program through the Ohio State University Office of Geriatrics and Gerontology, passed her exam, and is now certified as a Professional Service Coordinator.

Dan reported we have received more in bequests from donors this year than any time in the past.

Bonnie reported that two of the families who were host families in our Summer Dreams Program and are adopting children from Russia, are so excited that they want to host children again this coming summer.

Lynn reported her professional presentation on Urban Single Parent Families for Dauphin County Family Service System Reform led to a request from a large mental health agency that she make the presentation to their staff.

Bill reported that we are being funded to buy a house in Wilkes-Barre, as we begin to provide housing, training and therapy for young adults ages 18 to 25.

It is only because of you, those who provide the donations and other resources, that we can serve those in need.

Please, remember Volunteers of America in your will and your giving.



Alan R. Garner  
President & CEO

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## Christmas tradition brings joy to needy children

Dolls of all kinds were hot items. So were footballs, Hot Wheels, stuffed animals and board games like Candyland. A stage full of toys brought smiles and joy to more than 450 children at Volunteers of America's annual Christmas party for needy children in Harrisburg.

Held in conjunction with **Hope Worldwide**, whose volunteers served up food, fun and fantasy, the annual event is made possible with the help of businesses and organizations, which serve as collection sites for their employees and others to donate toys. Also helping this year was the **East Shore Kiwanis Club**. The Kiwanians provided a variety of gifts from which children could select and then wrap for their parents.

In addition to making the Christmas season a bit happier for those who attended this year's party, an estimated 250 other children of low-income families in Central Pennsylvania will also benefit from the generosity of the toy drive donors.

"The need seemed greater than ever this year," noted **Alan Garner**, presi-



Happy faces at the annual toy party were captured by **Tony DiSanto**, a member of Volunteers of America's Central Pennsylvania Regional Council.

dent and chief executive officer. "Fortunately we were blessed by a multitude of businesses and individuals who

opened their hearts to share with the children. It's something Volunteers of America has done in Central Pennsylvania for some 80 years."



Each year members of the **Susquehanna Area Woodworkers Club** turn blocks of wood into toy cars and buses, which are then donated to Volunteers of America to be given to area children. The club meets monthly at **Wood Craft** in Harrisburg. Posing with a few of their creations are (kneeling, left to right) **Herb Kern** and **Dan Bodan**, and (standing, left to right) **Lee Gayman**, **Gary Jones**, **Al Winters**, **Tom Bank**, **Kari Hultman**, and **Charlie Mark**.

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## Pennies from Heaven

Members of the **Busy Bees** got help from their families and friends when they held a "penny drive" to aid hurricane victims.

The class of kindergarten age children at the **Children's Center** certainly live up to its name, as they raised more than \$85 in pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters.

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## *Mack Trucks delivers \$25,000 community grant for renovation of Children's Center playground*

**M**ack Trucks, Inc. recently presented a \$25,000 check to Volunteers of America's Children Center during special ceremonies at Mack's World Headquarters in Allentown.

The Children's Center is one of four nonprofits to receive one of the first-ever contributions under the new **Mack Community Grants** program.

Mack President and CEO **Paul Viker** said the awards, totaling nearly \$100,000, are part of the company's year-long commemoration of its 100th anniversary of operation in the Lehigh Valley.

"The Mack Community Grants program is one of the most exciting and meaningful ways in which we can celebrate this important anniversary," he said. "It is in line with Mack's history and its responsibility as a good corporate citizen to support effective initiatives by

nonprofit groups to improve the quality of life for our employees and our neighbors in this community. We believe that through the grants...we can help our community secure that quality-of-life improvement for many years to come."

"Some 60 high-quality grant requests were received," said **Bob Martin**, public relations director for Mack Trucks. "The committee had a very challenging time making its selections."

The grant will be used for renovation and updating of the center's playground for school-age children.



*Children from the Volunteers of America's Children's Center visited Mack Trucks World Headquarters in Allentown for the announcement of a \$25,000 grant to the center. Standing with the children (back row from left) are **Paul Viker**, Mack president and chief executive officer; **Dolores Swavely**, director of the Children's Center and **Alan R. Garner**, Volunteers of America president and chief executive officer.*

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## *Helping people overcome obstacles of poverty focus of expanding Community Connections Initiative program*

**A** special program is helping hundreds in need in Dauphin and Luzerne County.

Volunteers of America's **Community Connections Initiative** (CCI) program has been helping hundreds of individuals in Dauphin County successfully transition from dependence on welfare to self-sufficiency. Now the program is proving its success in Luzerne County.

Individuals are referred to the CCI program by the Pennsylvania Department of Welfare, often they have not been able to obtain or maintain employment or are TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) recipients whose support is due to expire.

"Community Connections Initiative case managers work closely with clients

to identify and eliminate barriers that prevent them from reaching self-sufficiency on their own," said **Lynn Blackston**, coordinator of CCI for Dauphin County. "Clients feel overwhelmed by the situations in their lives, but with proper help and guidance, they are capable of conquering these obstacles."

Child care, transportation, learning disabilities, mental health or retardation issues, drugs or alcohol, domestic violence and language barriers are everyday problems clients must overcome with help from Volunteers of America of Pennsylvania.

Volunteers of America expanded the program, starting its Luzerne County program two years ago. Luzerne County's CCI program has already been

showing great success in the Wilkes-Barre region.

Luzerne County case manager **Georgeann Smith** finds great satisfaction in working with the CCI program.

"Each individual we serve has a unique background and situation," said Smith. "Some clients can reach their goals with limited assistance, others require a more involved approach, but in the end, the impact of the Community Connections Initiative program is life-long."

## *Affordable housing helps elderly, handicapped*

**T**he lack of affordable housing for the elderly and disabled is a significant hardship for low-income households, often preventing them from meeting their other basic needs, such as nutrition and healthcare.

That's why providing decent, affordable housing to as many individuals as possible is a big part of Volunteers of America programs in Pennsylvania and across the nation.

In fact, said **Alan R. Garner**, president and chief executive officer, "Volunteers of America manages more than 150 affordable apartments for low-income residents living in Central Pennsylvania, Northeastern Pennsylvania and the Lehigh Valley. Our goal is to provide affordable housing, along with security, comfort and a feeling of home."

Nationally, Volunteers of America is the largest nonprofit provider of affordable housing for the elderly, low-income families, and persons with mental or physical disabilities. More than 30,000 people live in Volunteers of America housing nationwide. This special mission in housing dates to the organization's founding. Among the earliest programs were residences for single working men and women in large cities. Development accelerated beginning in the 1960s with new federal housing programs undertaken in partnership with Volunteers of America.



*The Palmer House, in Wilkes-Barre, is a former school beautifully renovated as affordable apartments for the elderly.*

Since 1968, Volunteers of America has developed 138 affordable housing complexes in 28 states.

"With limited options, many residents in Volunteers of America housing would otherwise be living in unsafe environments or be homeless," explained **Bill Jones**, vice president and chief operating officer.

"After retirement, many of the parents and grandparents in our community find themselves worrying about their ability to afford a safe place to live out the rest of their lives," Jones continues. "With housing costs, medical bills and other expenses, many senior citizens find it difficult to maintain a stable and healthy quality of life."

In Harrisburg, **Laurel Towers** on North Third Street provides 86 affordable apartments for elderly individuals or couples living on a fixed income. **The Palmer House** in Wilkes-Barre, formerly a historic elementary school, has been renovated into 28 apartments.

While it is difficult for most of us to comprehend all the struggles that are associated with mental illness, we can understand the need for stable housing providing independence and medical help available nearby. Through affordable housing, Volunteers of America empowers people with chronic or severe mental illnesses to live in the community and to successfully manage their illness. Statewide, three apartment complexes are operated: New Song Village near Harrisburg, Third Street Apartments in Harrisburg and PlainsView Apartments in Wilkes-Barre.

"Affordable and permanent housing has a direct impact on a person's recovery," said **Kim Kennedy** director of the mental health program. It provides that catalyst by which

consumers can begin pursuing and attaining personal goals."

Housing options for many low-income families may appear limited, but with the help of Volunteers of America's affordable housing, it is possible for families to live in a safe environment suitable for raising children.

**The Family Apartments**, in Allentown, contains 12 apartments for low-income families priced below market rates.



*Laurel Towers provides affordable housing for the elderly in Harrisburg.*

"Everyone deserves a safe and decent place to live," concluded Garner. "We are committed to providing better housing options for the people in our community who need help."

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## Bank deposits contribution to renovation project

**Citizens Bank Foundation** has made a \$7,500 donation toward renovation of a Volunteers of America building that is home to two Volunteers of America programs.

“**The Citizens Bank Foundation** is pleased to support this vital project,” said **William R. MacKenzie**, president of the Capital Region for Citizens Bank.

Volunteers of America’s **Third Street Supported Living Program** and our **Thrift Store** are located at 1404-1406 North Third Street in

Harrisburg. Funding for the project has also come from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and Dauphin County’s Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation.

Additionally, Volunteers of America is appreciative of project support from **The Kline Foundation, Foundation for Enhancing Communities, Stabler Foundation and Whitaker Foundation**, as well as many others.



*William R. MacKenzie (right) president of the Capital Region for Citizens Bank, presents Alan R. Garner, president and CEO of Volunteers of America, with a “big check” from The Citizens Bank Foundation.*

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## Jack Williams Tire makes \$5,000 Christmas gift



**Jack Williams Tire & Auto Service Centers**, headquartered in Dallas, PA has presented a \$5,000 check to Volunteers of America. It is the second year Jack Williams has made a \$5,000 Christmas time donation for children. **Bill Jones**, vice president and chief operating officer for Volunteers of America accepted the check from **Tracey Williams**, vice president of the company. **Stephanie Williams**, advertising manager, and **Jason Williams**, executive vice president, also participated in the presentation.

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