

DIALOG

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Fall 2007

DIAKON'S WILDERNESS CHALLENGE PROGRAM ATTRACTS INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION

Diakon's Wilderness Challenge Program will soon have an international audience. Youths participating in one of the program's courses were filmed this summer by a documentary company from Japan.

Based at the Diakon Wilderness Center near Boiling Springs, Pa., the challenge program serves teens referred by juvenile courts and county children and youth services from across Pennsylvania, employing success in meeting challenges in a demanding and unfamiliar setting to generate change in young lives.

Diakon was contacted in May by producers from Documentary Japan, Inc., which creates "National Geographic"-style documentaries. The company, the producers explained, is developing a documentary entitled "Long Trail of Life—People Who Challenge the Appalachian Trail," a 109-minute program to air on NHK, Japan's equivalent of the United States' Public Broadcasting System. The documentarians had learned of the Diakon program through the Internet and were immediately intrigued.

"There's no program like Diakon in Japan," says Documentary Japan's Shiroki Yoshihiro. "There's little chance [for youths] to go back to society [as soon] once you commit a crime." The challenge program added a new element to the planned documentary, originally focused specifically on Appalachian Trail through-hikers. The film, set to debut this fall, follows individuals who use the wilderness and, in particular, the Appalachian Trail to challenge themselves and face a variety

Justin belays a fellow Diakon Wilderness Center student during a rock-climbing session photographed by a Japanese film crew.



DIAKON WILDERNESS CENTER EVOLVES MEETING NEEDS OF YOUTH

■ Twenty-six years after it first opened in the mountains above Boiling Springs, Pa., the Diakon Wilderness Center continues to evolve to meet the needs of at-risk youths.

“We are aligning ourselves with our heritage, using the wilderness adventure components, helping staff build appropriate, supportive relationships with students, and putting programming in place that offers youths opportunities to learn and grow,” explains Corey Carothers. After having spent eight years supervising the center’s Weekend Alternative Program, Carothers is now leading transitions as center administrator.

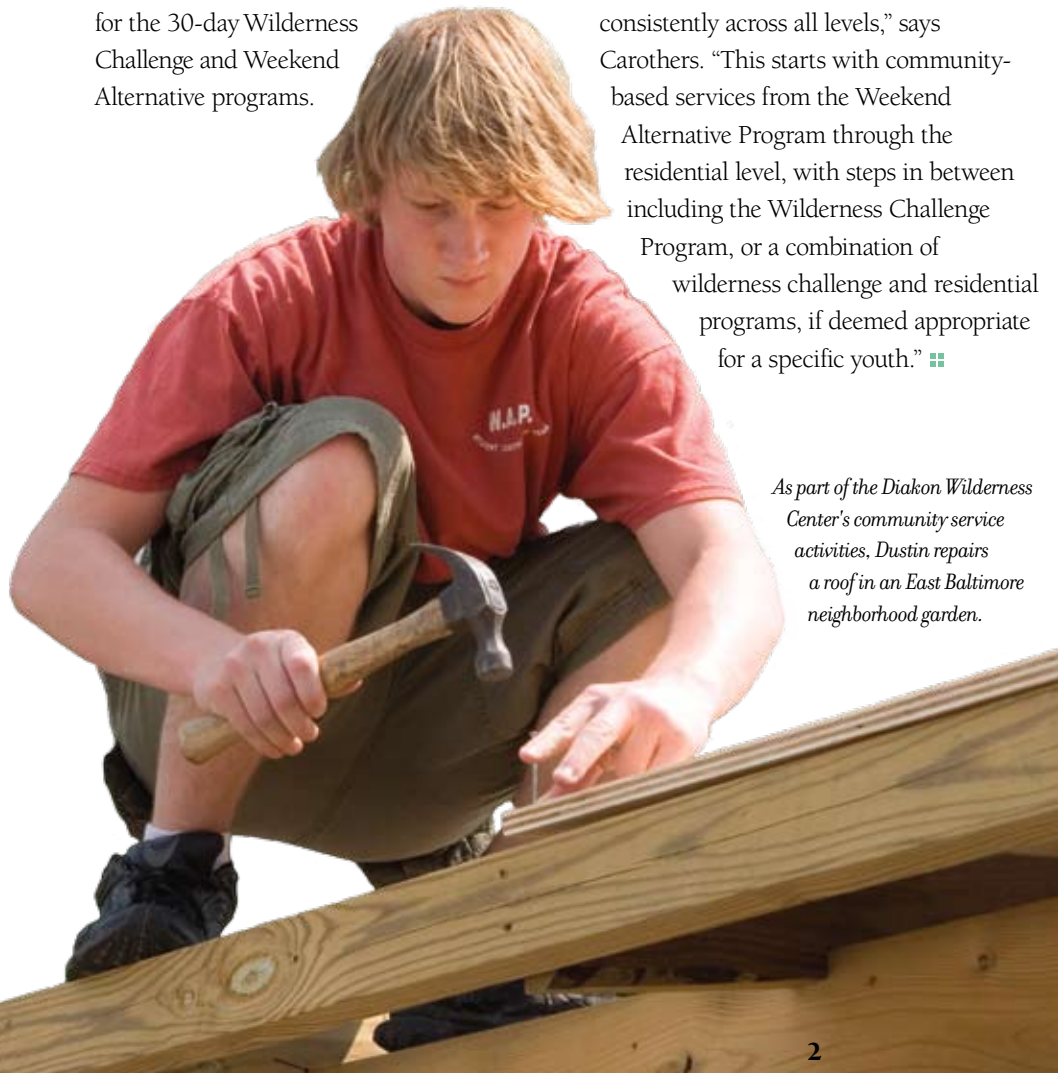
The primary change involves the recent introduction of the Foundations Residential Program, a 120-day service that focuses on family involvement and reintegration of youths into community life. The center continues to serve as base for the 30-day Wilderness Challenge and Weekend Alternative programs.

“In designing the Foundations Program, we worked collaboratively with county staff members . . . to align the program with the type of service they wanted,” Carothers says. “We are really trying to capture the population of kids who are entering their first out-of-home placement.” County juvenile probation and children and youth services refer youths to the wilderness programs.

The Foundations program provides intensive service for four months to address youths’ issues. This period is followed by reintegration of the youths into their communities through planning that begins on the day the teens enter the program. Reintegration involves the youth, his family, county staff, and appropriate community-based support services.

“We can now offer a full continuum of services that address youth issues consistently across all levels,” says Carothers. “This starts with community-based services from the Weekend Alternative Program through the residential level, with steps in between including the Wilderness Challenge Program, or a combination of wilderness challenge and residential programs, if deemed appropriate for a specific youth.” ■

As part of the Diakon Wilderness Center’s community service activities, Dustin repairs a roof in an East Baltimore neighborhood garden.



BRIDGE PROGRAM EXPANDS INTO LANCASTER COUNTY

■ “There are so many teens out there who are struggling with issues such as drug or alcohol abuse, and they need support to get through the conflicts in their lives,” says Ron Davis. Building a bridge to a better future for such at-risk youths is what the program Davis directs is all about.

And now that Chester County-based program—aptly named the Bridge Program—is building those bridges for teens from Lancaster County as well.

A service to youths while in their homes, Diakon Youth Services’ Bridge Program offers weekday support and intervention to help adolescents referred by county juvenile probation offices accept accountability for their actions. The program helps youths build a foundation of self-discipline and respect for family, teachers, and the law.

The program is linked to Diakon Wilderness Center’s Weekend Alternative Program, which offers outdoor and adventure-based activities, counseling, and community service to youths during the weekend—the time when teens are most likely to fall into old habits.

As a result of the Bridge Program’s success in serving youths from Delaware and Chester counties, staff members worked to expand the service to Lancaster County. For Davis, the expansion was both a personal and professional goal.

“I moved my family to Lancaster County in 2004, and at the time I was aware the county viewed our Weekend Alternative Program with high regard,” he says. “I wanted to offer the weekday program here to support youths involved in the weekend program, as well as to use it as a stand-alone program.”

Licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, the Bridge Program serves male and female adolescents ages 12 to 18 who can be safely maintained in the community. For maximum effectiveness, Davis explains, parents or a responsible family member must be willing to support each youth’s involvement in the program.

Documentary Film continued



The documentary film crew.

of concerns—with the ultimate goal of healing. The producers believed Diakon's use of the wilderness to achieve dramatic life changes for young people fit well with the focus of their documentary.

“Our program is about challenge—helping youths to work through those challenges to be able to choose their own path,” says Jason Brode, director of the Wilderness Challenge Program, which uses high-impact, adventure-based activities to act as short-term intervention to help youths change behaviors or regain their focus in life.

The 30-day program requires participants to live outdoors and successfully complete demanding physical and emotional activities. Working with specially trained staff members, youths in each group share responsibilities, learn problem-solving and communication skills, and overcome fear as they create a foundation for a successful return to home, school, and community life.

The Japanese crew filmed and interviewed staff members as well as youths taking part in the challenge program. On the trail for three days during public service, hiking, and rock-climbing activities, the film-makers also interviewed youths and family members at the course's graduation ceremony.

At that ceremony, the young men—some groups are co-educational, but the one filmed was all-male—agreed that the program had a positive impact on their lives.

“I came into this with an open mind and ready to learn new things. I'm looking forward to going home and getting my life started—a fresh start,” says Jeff (permissions were secured from county officials for youths' participation in the documentary, in which they will be identified only by their first names).

Ben agrees. “I wasn't used to hiking when I came into this and I struggled and hurt my ankles in the beginning but I wanted to finish this course. We all really became a team, and the whole program taught me a lot of lessons. I didn't think I was going to make it, but now that I have, it was the greatest thing I ever did!” Besides, he jokes, “We're all leaving this course mountain men and will be famous in Japan!” ■

OUR MISSION

In response to God's love in Jesus Christ, Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries will demonstrate God's command to love the neighbor through acts of service.

Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries is a leading provider of senior living accommodations and social services, including adoption, counseling, and home care, in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware. With many hands and one heart, Diakon staff members each year touch the lives of more than 70,000 children, families, and older adults. Diakon's mission is to respond to God's call to serve the neighbor, and we are proud to continue a 138-year tradition of hospitality and care for people of all faiths.

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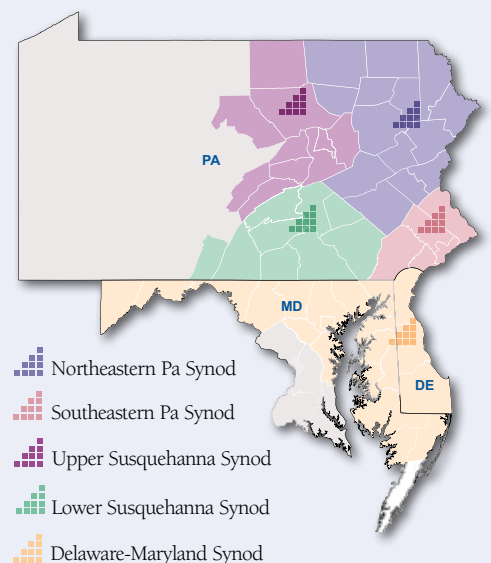
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DIAKON SERVICE TERRITORY



THE PRESIDENT'S DIALOG



The Rev. Daun E. McKee, Ph.D.

Dave Baker, our chief information officer, began his presentation to Diakon's board of directors with images of cylinder phonographs and crank telephones.

He progressed to photographs of room-sized computers with less memory than contained in today's cell phones/PDAs.

The years between those technological advances seem enormous in comparison to the speed with which technology changes today. In just the last 10 years, computers have become markedly smaller, satellite-based technology for everyday applications has become commonplace, and e-mail and other forms of electronic communication have revolutionized the way we live and work. Advances in technology are also changing the way we serve people.

Imagine this scenario:

Your older parents live several thousand miles from you. Valuing their independence, they are working hard to maintain their home in a senior living community. While nursing care and assisted living accommodations are available within their community, they continue to live independently—yet their needs are changing. Their health is becoming more frail.

You worry about them, but you now have a number of tools available to you. From your location across country, you can log into the security system in your parents' home, monitoring the level of activity. You can check as to whether your father has taken his medicine. You can make certain they have not fallen. And of course you can communicate in real time.

The technology to do this exists now. The issue to implement it widely remains cost.

But Diakon and organizations across the country are examining ways to make such technology more affordable, to integrate it more quickly into the services we offer. The need to do so is paramount.

According to government statistics, the United States is spending approximately 16 percent of its Gross Domestic Product on health care. Given the "age wave" we face as Baby Boomers begin retiring in 2010, the U.S. in 20 years will be spending 30 percent of GDP on health care—unless new approaches are found.

Leading "the national charge to develop and deploy technologies that can improve the aging experience in America" is the Center for Aging Services Technologies, or CAST. Diakon is playing an important role in CAST, making financial contributions to aid its research, participating in events, and helping to guide its mission, the latter through Dave Baker's long-time participation as a member of the 35-member CAST commission.

Established in 2003, CAST is a national coalition of more than 400 technology companies, aging services organizations, research universities, and government representatives, focused on:

- Creating a national vision of how technology can improve the quality of life for older adults, while simultaneously reducing health-care costs.
- Promoting research and development pilot projects.
- Removing barriers to commercialization of technology-related solutions.
- Advocating national discussions over widespread access to technology related to aging services as well as standards to ensure technologies are compatible with one another.

What CAST has accomplished so far is impressive. The organization has participated in the White House Conference on Aging and been invited to meet with White House staff, developed a "white paper" on the vision for aging-related technology services, and organized a variety of conferences and continuing task groups on such topics as electronic health records, technology standardization, and pilot projects on technology usage to serve older persons.

CAST's national chair is the general manager and global director for Intel Corporation's Health Research & Innovation Group and its sponsors include Intel, Honeywell, Johnson & Johnson, and numerous aging services organizations, including Diakon. Members include a range of other technology firms, additional aging services providers, and universities across the country.

"Baby boomers have expectations that technology will assist them in 'aging gracefully,' while remaining in their homes longer," says Baker, who paints a vision of how technology can assist older adults and their families:

“Imagine a cell phone that helps older shoppers pick foods based on their medical history. Tiny radio transmitters in food packages broadcast ingredients to the phone, which would offer advice to the shopper,” he says. “One out of three people over the age of 65 suffers some sort of fall each year. Imagine shoes with battery-powered vibrating soles that stimulate nerves to improve balance,” he adds.

“Or imagine homes that allow residents to open doors and control shades, windows, and thermostats through simple-to-use touch-screens or voice-activated controls. Other systems turn off unattended appliances, call in food and prescription orders, or summon help when sensors detected a fall.”

That is the type of future we want to create in our senior living communities. We also want to bring those technologies to our in-home services, so that older adults who want to do so can remain in the homes they cherish.

As it has throughout their lives, technology will continue to change life for the baby-boomer generation. Moreover, members of that generation will not only want that change—they will demand it. We need answers today for what this generation faces because we are running out of time to prepare for what’s coming. In response, Diakon is committed to caring for our current residents, as well as those who come to us for service over the next few decades, through research and the use of new technologies.

We believe the situation represents not so much a technology issue as it does one of imagination. Technology is out there, just waiting to be used in new, enabling, and assistive ways. We just have to imagine new ways to do so, in an efficient and affordable manner.



The Rev. Daun E. McKee, Ph.D.
President/CEO

In keeping with our focus on technology, we invite you to learn more about CAST by visiting www.agingtech.org. To learn even more, please view CAST’s video about its vision for technology-related services for older persons, which you can view at: http://www.agingtech.org/imagine_video.aspx

In addition, direct links to CAST and the CAST video can be found on Diakon’s Web site at: www.diaikon.org/dialog

WRITING BRINGS GENERATIONS TOGETHER

■ Write a letter? Are you kidding? In an e-mail-based world, that’s a pretty common reaction. But thanks to an RSVP Senior Corps pen-pal project with students from The Lutheran Academy in the Lehigh Valley, Pa., the age-old tradition of handwriting a letter is making a comeback.

And Gladys Ackerman, a Luther Crest resident and volunteer with the RSVP Senior Corps program, is glad. Writing a letter, she says, is a lot better than e-mail, which can seem cold and impersonal with its abbreviated approach to conversation.

Karen Nielson, Lehigh County coordinator for RSVP, heard about the success of a pen-pal project in a nearby county and decided to give it a try. “I thought it was important to help kids communicate other than with computers,” she says. “I wanted them to know there is a certain way of writing a friendly letter.”

Teachers at The Lutheran Academy also liked the idea and quickly agreed to incorporate the program into their curriculum. Today kindergarten students, as well as those in second through fifth grades, share monthly letters with residents of Luther Crest, a Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community in Allentown, and two nearby senior apartments.

Ackerman and Nielson screen the letters, making sure no one shares last names, addresses, or photos. With these privacy safeguards in place, the intergenerational pen-pals have been sharing their thoughts on everything from sports and pets to holiday traditions.

There is a lot of joy and happy feelings passing between letter writers, says Ackerman. “It is great that these young people get to know what life was like for these seniors [when they were children]. I’m happy they are sharing that kind of thing,” she says. “They talk about families and activities. They are finding out about each other’s likes, dislikes, and feelings. That is the real way to get to know people.” ■

Marie Molloy writes to her pen pal.



BRANDYWINE PROGRAM RECEIVES STATE RECOGNITION



Diakon's Brandywine Program, based in Newport, Del., was recently recognized by Delaware Gov. Ruth Ann Minner and Lt. Gov. John C. Carney, Jr. As Delaware celebrated Mental Health Month, the program was recognized for providing crisis-management services to the Child Development – Community Policing Program initiative. The program (*see article, Aiding Children, on this page*) unites city police officers, mental health professionals, and the state to aid children and their loved ones who have been victims of or exposed to violence. ■■

Accepting the award on behalf of the Brandywine Program are, left to right, Kerri Paytong, administrative assistant; Candice Davis, therapist; Shelly Lazorchak, therapist; Rita Rousseau, executive director of Diakon's Community Outreach Services; and Ray Shamus, clinical director, crisis program. Also pictured, right, is Susan Czyrk, director, Division of Child Mental Health, State of Delaware Division of Child Mental Health.

BRANDYWINE STAFF WORK FROM POLICE HEADQUARTERS AIDING CHILDREN

■■ A shooting has occurred. The victim is rushed to the hospital and police cordon off the scene. Relatives comfort the victim's spouse.

And standing, watching the entire scene, is ... the couple's child.

A horrific scenario, to be sure—but one being addressed in Wilmington, Del., as the result of a state-funded component of Diakon's Brandywine Program.

Known as the Child Development – Community Policing Program, the effort is designed to heal the wounds that chronic exposure to violence inflicts on children and families.

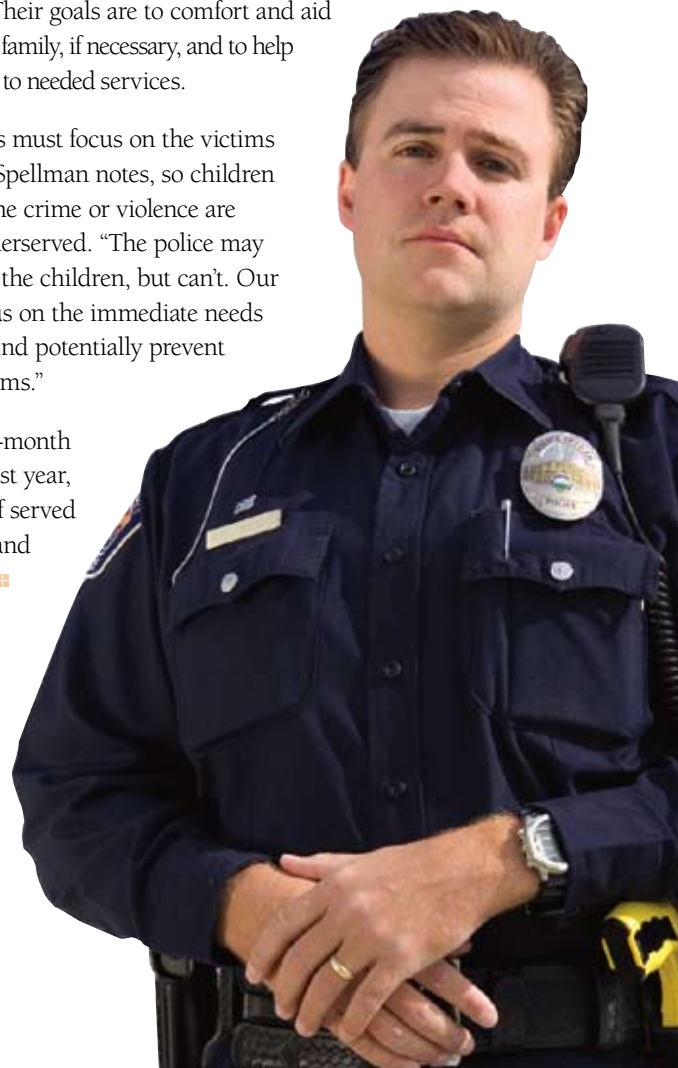
Modeled after a project developed at the Yale University School of Medicine's Child Study Center and implemented in New Haven, Conn., the Wilmington service represents a partnership between the city's police department and the Division of Child Mental Health Services within the State of Delaware's Department of Services for Children, Youth, and Their Families. The division contracts with the Brandywine Program to provide the service.

"If police are aware of children exposed to violence or if there are children in the victim's family, that's where we can help," says Fern Spellman, Brandywine Program director. "That immediate response is important. We also might come back the next day with a police officer. The staff also do canvassing, through which they go out to homes in the area of the crime and offer services."

Master's degree-level program staff are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to respond to crimes or violence involving children. Three specially trained clinicians and a case manager are stationed at Wilmington police headquarters and go to the scene as immediately as possible. Their goals are to comfort and aid the child and family, if necessary, and to help connect them to needed services.

Police officers must focus on the victims or suspects, Spellman notes, so children exposed to the crime or violence are typically underserved. "The police may want to help the children, but can't. Our staff can focus on the immediate needs of the child and potentially prevent future problems."

In just a two-month period late last year, program staff served 94 children and adolescents. ■■



CARPENTRY PROVIDES PASTIME FOR RESIDENTS



Woodrow Kinsey relaxes on a bench that he sanded.

FREY VILLAGE RESIDENT TURNING RELICS INTO ARTWORK

■ When many other Frey Village residents are settling in for the evening, Woodrow Kinsey is still going strong.

The Frey apartment resident can often be found in a basement hallway in which Frey staff members have set up a woodshop for him. Armed with a few hand tools and sandpaper, “Woody” stays hard at work, adding to his reputation as a consummate refinisher.

For nearly three decades, the former Elizabethtown resident has found satisfaction unearthing the hidden beauty in old wooden objects. From plant stands, chairs, and mantles to the benches and gazebo that decorate the Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community, there doesn’t appear to be any job too tough for Kinsey to tackle.

“This is something that helps me and maybe helps [the people I do it for],” he says.

Gary Shanaman, maintenance technician at the Middletown, Pa., senior living community, is always on the lookout for wooden objects that could benefit from Kinsey’s expertise. “He does a good job, and he’s fast,” Shanaman says. “One piece he

refinished for the Fall Festival was put up for sale and brought in around \$150. He did a beautiful job.”

When asked if he has a trade secret, Kinsey responds, “The first thing to remember is not to rush. Take your time.”

Kinsey’s wife reveals that he spends hours sanding, staining, and re-sanding until each piece is finished to his satisfaction. Each flick of his wrist, as he creates his trademark “smooth-as-glass” finishes, represents a labor of love. “I’d rather be sanding,” he says, than anything else. ■

SELF-TAUGHT CARPENTER FONDLY REMEMBERED

■ You’re never too old to learn new skills. Carl Boettger proved that. The former Twining Village resident, who passed away last year at the age of 98, had never worked with wood before he moved to the senior living community in his 70s.

For 20 years, Boettger built shelves, repaired tables, and caned and painted furniture for residents of Twining Village, a Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community in Holland, Pa. Recently, Boettger was remembered with a plaque that now hangs over the workbench he used in the village shop.

Originally, Boettger wanted to find ways to spend time while his wife enjoyed her pastime of knitting. He asked Frank Kelly, former owner of the village, where he could paint some shelves he had brought from his previous home. Kelly found a space for him and gave him some tools to get started. The village’s woodworking and repair shop was now in operation and Boettger and a group of volunteers were soon hard at work on a variety of projects.

Resident Len Lazarick also had no woodworking experience, but one day walked into the carpentry shop and asked how he could become involved. He and Boettger were soon close friends, as one

man mentored the other. “Carl was a brilliant man,” says Lazarick. “He taught himself to cane, and was able to do caning at the woodshop and repair residents’ chairs.” Caning is the art of repairing chairs made of woven material. Ironically, it has some similarities to knitting.

“We miss him very much,” says Lazarick. “He had a way of being in charge without you realizing it. He was always gentle with his criticisms and generous with his compliments. He was a real friend.”

Lazarick believes his continuing work in the shop keeps him close to Boettger. “Carl’s chair remains unoccupied, and we like it like that. It’s a way for us to honor him.” Although scattered across the country, Boettger’s family recently raised \$500 for Twining Village’s Residents Association fund, of which Boettger served two terms as president, and donated the plaque for the shop. The association presented the family with Boettger’s diploma recognizing him as an expert in caning. The diploma had been hanging over his workbench.

Boettger’s niece, Jean Evans, organized the donation for Twining. “Carl loved that woodshop,” she says. “He had never picked up a hammer or saw until he moved to Twining, then he just fell in love with it. We were so proud of his accomplishments. He was a special man and fondly remembered by all.” ■



Jean Evans displays the plaque that now hangs in the shop at Twining Village in Carl Boettger’s memory. Behind, left to right, are Werner Esckstadt and Jack Gershenson.

COUPLE WEDS AT BUFFALO VALLEY LUTHERAN VILLAGE



A wedding took place at the nursing care center at Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village, a Diakon Senior Living Community in Lewisburg, Pa., this past March. In order for his father, Marvin Wagner (seated center) to participate in his wedding, Scott Wagner, Sr., and his new bride JoAnn Wagner (center, back), held the ceremony at the village nursing care center. Also present were mother of the groom, Mary Jane Wagner (left) and the bride's parents, Janis and Bill Reeser (right). Diakon expresses condolences to the family on the recent loss of Marvin Wagner.

SECRETARY VISITS SENIOR CENTER



Pennsylvania Secretary of Aging Nora Dowd Eisenhower, left, discusses state programs for older adults with Goldie A. Karns. Eisenhower recently visited the Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries-sponsored Mechanicsburg Area Senior Center to discuss the state's "Prescription for Pennsylvania."

ADOPTION NIGHT



Adoption Night at Williams Grove Speedway, Mechanicsburg, Pa., on July 6 was an evening of fast cars and warm hearts during which 60 Pennsylvania children waiting for loving homes were pictured on the wings of 40 sprint cars. Prior to the race, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, along with six public and private adoption agencies, cooperated to host an adoption fair on the speedway grounds. Sponsors donated more than \$20,000 in contributions, goods, and services so that children and prospective families could enjoy the event.

TROLLEY RIDE

Residents of Pocono Lutheran Village, a Diakon Senior Living Community in East Stroudsburg, Pa., participated in the town's Memorial Day Parade aboard a trolley displaying the Diakon name.



EVENTS BENEFIT DIAKON SERVICES



Guests look on as chefs prepare food at the third annual Dining with Diakon event. On April 10, more than 300 guests attended the event that featured 10 guest chefs who submitted recipes that were prepared by Cura chefs. More than \$90,000 was raised for Diakon programs serving children, families, and older adults in central Pennsylvania.



Ten Cura Hospitality chefs introduce the "Be Our Guest" theme at the Diakon 19th Annual Benefactor's Dinner. Held on May 10 at the Holiday Inn, Fogelsville, Pa., the event raised \$180,000 for services provided by Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries in the Berks-Lehigh Valley regions.

DIAKON KIDZSTUFF



Children enjoy the many programs and activities provided by the Diakon KidzStuff child care center opened last year in East Baltimore. Housed at the newly renovated Diakon Place building, the center offers before- and after-school care, day care, and a summer program. The expansion provided by the relocation of Diakon KidzStuff, which is licensed by the state of Maryland, to Diakon Place has allowed the center to provide infant care.



LOCAL ARTIST PUTS TALENT WHERE HIS MOUTH IS



Wendy Knouse, Ohesson Manor's manager of marketing and sales, unveils a painting by local artist Mike Platzer, right, in celebration of the community's 30th anniversary.

■ ■ ■ "It's just beautiful," praised one resident, as the painting was unveiled. How the painting came to be is equally inspiring.

In celebration of its 30th anniversary this year, Ohesson Manor, a Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community in Lewistown, Pa., commissioned local artist Mike Platzer to create a painting of its gazebo using oils on canvas.

The artist did the painting in a unique way—using his mouth.

A 1975 diving accident left Platzer a quadriplegic. His senses were awakened to painting thanks to an artist friend who taught him the basics.

Platzer's enthusiasm for painting supersedes any obstacles he has encountered, and a heartfelt affection for his subjects is evident in all his paintings. Accomplished in both oil and watercolor, Platzer renders a wide range of themes from landscapes and lighthouses to woodpeckers and character studies. And each of his oils embodies a spiritual element that underscores the triumphs of the artist.

"This piece took me more than 22 hours over the course of five days to complete," he says.

"Mike has displayed his work at our art shows, and his gift is amazing," says Wendy Knouse, Ohesson's manager of marketing and sales. "We asked him to complete this work so we could have a memento from our 30th anniversary."

Ohesson Manor residents had the opportunity to watch Platzer begin the piece when he completed the under painting in a resident common area. "It's amazing how he can do the details using his mouth," notes one.

The painting is very personal to Ohesson Executive Director Cork Leiter, because his father helped to build the gazebo. "It's always been nice for my family and me to see something that my father helped to build," he says. "It's especially touching to have this painting to display a bit of his work." ■ ■

Bridge Program continued

"As the youths go through the three-month program," he says, "they discard the negatives in their lives and develop positive habits that build confidence, self-esteem, and respect for teachers and the law."

The program includes weekly home visits, including meetings with parents or other family members, individual counseling sessions, efforts focused on accountability including random drug testing and alcohol screenings, community service projects, and 24-hour crisis intervention.

"It's important that we remain flexible to offer the counties what they need to provide a better service for youths and families," Davis says. "Through this program, we make every effort so that youths can remain in the least restrictive environment and make better decisions." ■ ■

GIRLS ON THE RUN® RACES TO HAVE A POSITIVE INFLUENCE

Throughout the Upper Susquehanna and Northeastern Pennsylvania synods, thanks to Diakon's efforts, girls are racing to become involved in Girls on the Run®—a program that encourages pre-teens to develop self-esteem and healthy lifestyles through exercise and community outreach. Knocking down the walls of what the program originator—four-time Iron-Man tri-athlete, Molly Barker—calls a “girl box,” a place where girls of only a certain size or beauty are considered popular, the program teaches skills that can be used for a lifetime.

Program teaches community connection and involvement

■ ■ ■ Upper Susquehanna Synod

To second-year Girls on the Run participant Autumn Greenway, the horse rescue mascot, Pebbles the pony, is a four-legged reminder that her actions can positively influence the community.

Members of Girls on the Run with Pebbles, mascot of Appalachian Horse Help Rescue, Inc.



“I absolutely love horses, and being around Pebbles reminds me that I can make a difference in the world,” she says. Last winter, Greenway, along with the other Girls on the Run—or GOTR—participants at Central Elementary School in South Williamsport, Pa., raised about \$600 for Pebbles and her agency, a Linden-based, non-profit organization dedicated to rescuing abused equines. Enlisting the support of their entire school, the girls held a silent auction and donated the proceeds during a check presentation in April.

“The girls visited the barn and saw what we do,” says Pamela Koch, barn manager and president of Appalachian Horse Help Rescue, Inc. “The donations will be used for feed and to care for the horses. This has been a wonderful opportunity for us.”

According to Kathy Wither, a GOTR coach, linking the girls to the community heightens their awareness of their surroundings. “It teaches the girls to look beyond themselves and to become aware of the world around them. It’s about people, community, and involvement,” she says.

Adorned in a pink boa, purse, and a decorative bow around her tail, Pebbles posed for pictures with GOTR members and with the lucky class that won a “Pictures with Pebbles” package auctioned off during the fund-raising event. Following her photo shoot, Pebbles attended the check presentation at a special school-wide assembly.

In its fifth year under Diakon Family Life Services – Upper Susquehanna coordination, the GOTR program has been serving girls in Lycoming County through summer camps and after-school programs. In 2006 alone, 309 girls participated. Within the synod, Girls on Track, a similar program for sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade girls, recently raised money to buy two game-consoles for the pediatric unit at Susquehanna Health

System, Williamsport. On behalf of Girls on Track, the Nintendo Corp. also donated games to the hospital. “The community service piece of the program is a powerful experience for these girls and connects them to the community,” says Pat Peltier-Russell, Diakon Family Life Services’ school-based counselor. ■

Young participants call program ‘life-changing’

■ ■ ■ Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod

Nine-year-old Gabriela “Gabby” Cuadro describes the Girls on the Run pilot program offered at her school—Jefferson Elementary School in Allentown—as “life-changing.”


“I have become a better person in a lot of ways,” she says. “I tell my friends that if they join the program, it will change their lives. It teaches you the right ways to eat, how to keep good relationships, how to exercise, how to deal with bullies. . . . It is just a really good program.”

Promoting health on many levels, Diakon Family Life Services – Northeastern Pennsylvania launched the program this spring, following success with the program by Diakon Family Life Services – Upper Susquehanna.

Diakon Family Life Services staff members Kathi Eichman and Catherine Arne arranged for a 10-week pilot program for 12 girls. During the sessions, the girls exercised, learned life skills through creative activities, and built self-confidence. The season ended with a 5K race, celebrating participants’ accomplishments.

“It has been a great opportunity for our girls,” says Susan Siegrist, Jefferson Elementary School counselor. “I have seen bonds form between fifth- and third-graders, confidence has bloomed, and girls who initially needed coaxing are now enthusiastic participants.”

DIAKON/FDR EXPAND SWAN'S ROLE ENDING THE WAIT FOR WAITING CHILDREN

 With a continuing focus on transitioning children from foster care to permanent homes, Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries and Family Design Resources are well under way in their second five-year role as prime contractor for Pennsylvania's Statewide Adoption & Permanency Network, known as SWAN.

SWAN's primary goal is to end the wait for waiting children.

Serving as primary contractor to manage SWAN was a natural move for Diakon, whose tradition of helping children dates to its origin in 1868, says Linda Ciampi, senior vice president, Diakon Family & Community Ministries.

"It was a way to reintroduce what Diakon historically has been all about in a much bigger way," she says. "It has lifted up Diakon's commitment to vulnerable children and youths state-wide and nationally."

Established in 1992, SWAN is a partnership of the state Department of Welfare, public and private adoption agencies, advocates, judges, the legal community, and foster and adoptive parents; in addition, the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange, part of the welfare department, is now managed under the prime contract.

Together, these groups and individuals serve children in foster care for whom adoption is the goal, as well as foster children for whom permanency will come through placement with a legal custodian or relative.

Diakon/FDR became SWAN's prime contractor in July 2000. In seeking the state contract, the two organizations joined forces because of the vastness of

the SWAN program and the value of what each had to offer—Diakon's knowledge of foster care and adoption, FDR's expertise in permanency and relationships with public and private agencies. It has been a successful partnership.

The first five years

As prime contractor from July 2000 to July 2005, Diakon/FDR managed the program with a focus on standardization of adoption services, best practices, and accountability—doing more, in fact, than required by the contract, says Lorrie Deck, SWAN program director for the state's Office of Children, Youth, and Families.

"They expanded the capacity of the network to better serve children in foster care with the goal of adoption, by putting best practices in place," she says.

The result was an increase in the number of children adopted from foster care. "I think it happened, in part," Deck says, "because their approach involved key stakeholders from the public and private sectors. Diakon/FDR also brought credibility to the program. They held themselves accountable."

Advancing the development of the network

Diakon/FDR's ability to collaborate, communicate, and develop relationships with other adoption professionals was crucial to this initial success. In addition to hosting an annual conference, two state-wide meetings per year, and quarterly meetings, the organizations have offered training and educational programs to county and private children and youth agencies, while meeting with legal officials to further their understanding of adoption. "While we were promoting best practices, we were also being challenged to

start new services," says Brenda Lawrence, program administrator for the SWAN prime contract and co-director and president of FDR. "We brought the private providers together voluntarily, saying, 'Let's solve issues together.' This enhanced the network's response. They see themselves as being focused on solutions rather than being competitive."

Diakon/FDR also introduced a data-management system that included an electronic invoicing system and referral information system. "This is a very critical component of our success," says Ciampi. "We went from everything being done on paper to moving toward an electronically based operation for billing, referrals, and tracking of benchmarks. It has meant phenomenal growth."

In addition, SWAN's Web site features innovative technology and real-time access to information critical to the adoption process.

SWAN'S SIX BELIEFS

- Every child in foster care deserves to achieve permanency in a timely manner.
- Every child with a goal of adoption deserves a permanent family.
- County agencies must be supported to prioritize and provide permanency services.
- Delays in achieving permanency must not be due to race, culture, age, geography, level of ability, or case priority level.
- Permanent families must be developed for every waiting child.
- Resource families that step forward to provide the continuum of care to children in the child welfare system must be supported to remain intact.

Advancing the understanding of permanency

Knowing the absence of post-adoption support can affect adoptive placements, Diakon/FDR worked closely with Deck's office to develop and initiate post-permanency services for all adoptive families, whether or not they adopted a child from the child-welfare system.

To make the services easily accessible to families in need, the SWAN Helpline was expanded to be the first point of contact for families requesting post-adoption services. In addition, the helpline provides information on such issues as decision-making in adoption and foster care. "The state also asked us to be responsible for the Pennsylvania State Foster Parent Association," Lawrence adds. "We provide guidance and technical assistance. It is a great connection because the association wants to support anybody coming forward to be a foster or adoptive parent. We all have the same children and families in mind."

Earlier, Diakon/FDR launched the Legal Services Initiative, which provides paralegal staff knowledgeable about the adoption process to county Children and Youth agencies.

"We place the paralegals in counties requesting services, provide joint supervision, and support their work in the county to ensure all the legal steps happen efficiently and permanency is secure," Lawrence says, adding that the system was implemented in 11 counties during the first five-year contract, with 17 paralegals now serving in 14 counties.

Advancing permanency through best practices

Diakon/FDR, in partnership with the network, also created a pilot project that reflected one of the most advanced efforts nationally toward standardization within statewide adoption practices. For one year, project committees reviewed and assessed data on current adoption practices.

The project resulted in the creation of the Benchmark Handbook, which provides benchmarks and procedural guidelines on specific work practices, such as completing child profiles and child-specific recruitment, to private foster and adoption agencies subcontracting with Diakon/FDR.

"Over the last five years, Diakon/FDR has been a strong leader in developing best-practice standards in permanency and post-permanency work across the state of Pennsylvania," representatives of COBYS Family Services wrote in a letter supporting Diakon/FDR's bid for a second five-year contract. "They have shown insightful initiative and commitment to best practice standards regarding services for the entire adoption continuum—from orientation to post-permanency services."

Looking to the future

The commitment to innovative service for waiting children is carrying Diakon/FDR through the second five-year contract, with a focus on building capacity within the program affiliates.

"We would like to see direct units of service expanded, especially child preparation and child profile. We would like to see those services utilized to better serve children in foster care—even those who do not have a goal of adoption—so we can help them find the best permanency resource available," explains Deck, adding that the state also would like to see more families involved in post-permanency services to help them sustain their adoptive placements. ■■■■



DIAKON ADOPTION & FOSTER CARE

RECEIVES BLUE RIBBON AWARD



Diakon Adoption & Foster Care recently received a Blue Ribbon for Children Award. As part of Child Abuse Prevention Month, Berks County Children and Youth Services held its third annual ceremony to recognize individuals and organizations that are dedicated to preventing child abuse and work with local children who are abused and neglected. The Topton office of the Diakon program was nominated for efforts in preventing child abuse and improving the lives of children in Berks County. The Blue Ribbon Campaign began in 1989 when a Norfolk, Va., woman tied a blue ribbon on the antenna of her car after the death of her 3-year-old grandson. Now the campaign is honored nationwide every April. ■■

Sen. Michael O'Pake, center, congratulates Case Manager Rebecca Small, left, and Director of Permanency Services Kathy Roach, right, as he awards them the Blue Ribbon for Children Award.



YOUR GENEROSITY IS APPRECIATED

Most of the Diakon programs and services depicted in *Dialog* provide benevolent care in a variety of ways. Diakon depends on generous donations from corporations, synods, congregations, and individuals to enable it to serve so many people, especially those with limited financial resources.

You, too, can make a difference in the lives of people in need. Simply use the blue envelope in this issue of *Dialog* or log onto our Web site's convenient and secure donation form to make your gift.

For further information on how you can support one or more of our ministries, please call our Office of Advancement at 1-877-DIAKON-7, option 2, extension 21219. Thank you!

DIAKON CREATES NEW CPE PROGRAM



The Rev. Rhoda Toperzer, Diakon's CPE supervisor, center, meets with Diakon staff involved in CPE training, from left, the Rev. Katherine Brearley, Diakon Hospice Saint John; the Rev. Mike Sigler, Ohesson Manor; Jason Brode, Diakon Wilderness Center; the Rev. James Link, Cumberland Crossings; and the Rev. Peggy Sue Pfeffer, Diakon Hospice Saint John.

Although Clinical Pastoral Education—or CPE—is typically recognized as taking place in hospitals, a growing trend finds the training in other settings as well.

Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries has created just such an innovative program, one that involves Clinical Pastoral Education in senior living communities, hospice settings, and even programs for at-risk youths.

Begun in 1925, CPE is a form of theological education, often associated with chaplaincy programs, that occurs not only in classrooms, but also in the clinical settings in which ministry is practiced. The training represents a rigorous process at the master's degree-level of credit and involves a minimum of 300 hours of clinical service plus 100 hours of education.

“Because of Diakon’s size as a social ministry organization, we need to be one of the leaders in providing education to do the jobs in this ministry,” says the Rev. Daun E. McKee, Ph.D., Diakon president/CEO. “It is one way through which we can give back to the church.”

Traditionally, CPE is undertaken by seminarians. Part of Diakon’s approach is to reach out to others as well. “In addition to chaplains or congregational clergy, we are accepting people into the program who are not aspiring to be clergy, but who may be religious leaders in their congregations or other setting, including their work,” says the Rev. Rhoda Toperzer, Diakon’s CPE supervisor.

“CPE helps participants build and enhance professional skills and, very importantly, integrate into their work who they are as people, which allows them to serve and live their faith more fully,” she says.

“Chaplains are there to serve where there are needs—and needs are everywhere,” Toperzer adds. “A chaplain may sit with someone with cognitive difficulties, spending meaningful time with someone who

will not remember her later, and then also listen to the grief-stricken and weary spouse, son, or daughter, worried about ‘abandoning’ their loved one simply in response to their own needs to eat and sleep, work or to be a parent. In addition to this type of setting, a chaplain can also help a youth who never knew his mother’s care because her drug habit got in the way.”

“Rhoda has a passion for this kind of education in the church,” says the Rev. John Richter, Diakon’s vice president for church relations. “To be the first CPE supervisor at Diakon, she has both the challenges and the freedoms to set things up.”

A United Church of Christ pastor, Toperzer is a self-described “big visioner” who spent a year developing a program she sees as deeply expanding the richness and overall integration of pastoral care within Diakon.

The inaugural CPE class took place in October 2006 with five students—four Diakon chaplains and a Diakon program director. Based at Frey Village, a Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community in Middletown, Pa., the course ran through February. Diakon’s first summer intensive program, with three seminarians, ended in August.

CPE is nationally accredited by the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education. The Reading Hospital and Medical Center ACPE program established a satellite arrangement for Diakon to offer CPE until Diakon’s program attains its own accreditation. “We successfully took our first step toward that goal when we were granted accreditation to be listed in the national ACPE directory. These efforts mean more service to our clients and residents, and also mean Diakon is taking a leadership role in serving professional clergy and other religious leaders,” says Toperzer.

“A chaplain needs to be very, very skillful at helping people draw on their faith, as well as be aware of and respect different religious traditions,” she adds. “If a chaplain is well-skilled, he or she is going to meet you where you are, listen to your soul, and help you find strength to cope through the burden, grieve deeply, and find peace, joy, and hope.”



The Rev. Rhoda Toperzer, Diakon's CPE supervisor, center, speaks with seminarians participating in the program, from left, Jerry Lutz, Albert Tchato, and Matthew Finney.

SOUTHGATE SOLD OUT BRIDGEGATE COMING SOON

■ With its new community of Southgate homes completed, Luther Crest, a Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community in Allentown, Pa., is embarking on Bridgegate.

“Bridgegate is a complex of apartments designed to enhance an active senior lifestyle,” says Jeanne Oski, Luther Crest’s executive director. “Bridgegate will offer five distinct apartment styles, all of which are conveniently connected to the hub of activities within the campus community center.”

Bridgegate will consist of three buildings connecting the existing Luther Crest apartment complexes. Each three-story Bridgegate building will house 14 apartments designed for modern senior living, with models featuring such amenities as breakfast bars, dens, open floor plans, patios, and extra-large walk-in closets.

“We’re very excited by the success of Southgate, and look forward to serving even more people through Bridgegate,” says Oski. Now sold out, Southgate at Luther Crest consists of 22 homes, each with enclosed garage, two full baths, a fully equipped kitchen, and services including outdoor and interior maintenance.

“We’re equally excited that construction is under way on our new Wellness Center,” adds Oski. Slated for completion by early next year, the center will include a heated, indoor pool and an enhanced cardio-fitness theater, as well as such features as a billiards room, library, and computer lab. “The Wellness Center promises to add a new dimension of active senior living for all of our residents.” In addition to Southgate, Bridgegate, and the Wellness Center, existing Luther Crest apartment buildings continue to undergo renovations, with work including new designs, lighting, appliances, bathrooms, and doors. Common areas also have been extensively upgraded.

Additional plans for Luther Crest consist of expansion and renovation of its health-care center and assisted living community, as well as the addition of a memory-enhancement care center. The overall project is part of Diakon’s efforts to develop continuum-of-care senior living communities at its retirement-campus sites. ■

For more information on the Luther Crest project or to schedule a personalized visit, readers should call 1-800-606-3424.



Artist renderings of Bridgegate at Luther Crest (above) and the new Wellness Center.

A Positive Influence continued



Gabby Cuadro, left, and Carolina Sepulveda participate in Girls on the Run.

Parents have been equally pleased. “[My daughter] has been excited about going to GOTR and enjoyed all the activities,” says the father of a participant. “I think she seems more confident and willing to try new things.” Eichman hopes that through community support, more GOTR sites within the service territory of Diakon Family Life Services – Northeastern Pennsylvania will become available. Cuadro says she is eager to participate in future programs. “Girls on the Run just gives me a happy feeling,” she says. ■

How You Can Help...

Diakon Family Life Services depends on generous donations to support its wide range of programs in the Northeastern Pennsylvania, Lower Susquehanna, and Upper Susquehanna regions. To learn how your gift can make a difference in the lives of your neighbors, please use the blue envelope in this issue of *Dialog* or log onto our Web site’s convenient and secure donation form, found at www.diakon.org/supportopportunities.asp. For further information on how you can support one or more of our ministries, please call our Office of Advancement at 1-877-DIAKON-7, option 2, extension 21219. Thank you!



SWAN DIRECTOR RECEIVES PENNSYLVANIA GOVERNOR’S AWARD



Left to right, Cathy Utz, acting director, Bureau of Policy and Program Development of the Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF); nominated award winners Angelo Santore, program specialist with the OCYF, Independent Living program; and Lorrie Deck, director of the Pennsylvania Statewide Adoption & Permanency Network (SWAN).

■ Lorrie Deck, director of the Diakon-administered Statewide Adoption & Permanency Network, or SWAN, recently received the Pennsylvania Governor’s Award for Excellence, acknowledging her initiative in partnering with the state Office of Children, Youth and Families’ Independent Living program.

SWAN and the independent living program joined forces in 2004 to better address permanency planning for adolescents. Pennsylvania is the first state in which these two programs, sometimes considered dissimilar, have come together with a common goal. SWAN seeks to find adoptive families for children in foster care, while the independent living program helps children successfully age out of foster care. The overriding goal is to assure that every youth, whether adopted or not, gains the permanent connections and support necessary for success in life.

Honored with Deck was Angelo Santore, program specialist with the Office of Children, Youth and Families. Initiated this year, the Governor’s Awards for Excellence recognizes exemplary accomplishments of commonwealth employees. ■

SPECIAL CAMP HELPS CHILDREN LIVE WITH GRIEF

■ Seventh-grader Avery Magill didn't know what to expect when he arrived at Camp Evergreen, but a special volunteer made the experience a good one.

"John is the best buddy in the world. I couldn't have had a better volunteer," says Magill. "All of the volunteers and Christina put together a nice camp. It is a very good thing they took time out of their schedules to do this for us. This camp is a very good thing."

Sponsored by the Diakon Children's Bereavement Program, Camp Evergreen is a weekend camp for children who have lost a loved one. "Christina" is Christina Fedorko, program coordinator and a certified grief recovery specialist.

Magill's "buddy"—John Allison, a Diakon major gifts and development officer and former executive director of Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village, Lewisburg, Pa.—was just one of the nearly two-dozen volunteers who helped to oversee camp activities and mentor a record number of participants—36, who varied in age from 6 to 17. The June program was held at Camp Kresge near White Haven, Pa.

"We also had a record number of volunteers this year," says Fedorko. "We simply could not do it without them. Through their efforts, they have an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of children and do something very special."

The volunteers and campers fish, boat, hike, cry, and laugh together.

"Volunteers help in so many ways," says Fedorko. "After sessions, if participants didn't feel comfortable discussing their feelings in front of the group, they often talk to volunteers. The volunteers and campers develop special bonds because they spend the entire weekend together," involved in such activities as journaling, painting memory rocks, nature walks, crafting, swimming, archery, and the symbolic planting of an Evergreen tree in memory of a loved one.

Volunteers, who receive training to participate in the camp, come from many walks of life. Cathy Carrell, Fedorko's sister, volunteers for many reasons. "Christina puts her heart and soul into the camp," says Carrell. "We see how the children benefit, and we love being volunteers and supporting Christina."



Camp participant Sharon Nossavage, left, fishes with camp volunteer Barbara Kern, director of Diakon Hospice Saint John in Allentown, Pa.



Camper Avery Magill bonds with his new friend, John Allison, Diakon major gifts and development officer and camp volunteer.

"I could never do this alone," notes Fedorko. "A lot of behind-the-scenes work goes into the camp, and my family—Elizabeth Fedorko, Richard, Cathy, Victoria, and Kristyn Carrell—help in so many ways. I can't thank them enough for all they do."

Camp volunteer Barb Kern, director of Diakon Hospice Saint John's Allentown office, also was joined by her family. Her husband, Brian, and children, Matthew and Lexi, assisted with camp activities.

"Volunteers share their own experiences, but they take away more than they give just by seeing what the kids get out of the camp," says Bill Klaips, who has volunteered for four years and is often accompanied by his sons, Casey and Corey.

"When kids arrive, they are so sad and shy. When they are leaving, they are happy and have lots of new friends. It's wonderful to be part of that." ■

MARYLAND ADOPTION OFFICE SECURES FUNDING FOR SUPPORT GROUPS



Potential adoptive families admire portraits of children in need of homes at Baltimore's Adoption Heart Gallery. Diakon Adoption Services in Maryland teamed with the Baltimore City Department of Social Services and the Baltimore County Department of Social Services to present quality photographs that capture the spirit and personality of each child.

Adoptive families have a new resource for support and information, as the result of a package of grants awarded to Diakon Adoption Services in Maryland.

Presented by the state Department of Human Resources, the grants fund adoption support groups in 10 Maryland counties and the City of Baltimore. Funding began in April 2007 and runs for two years.

Diakon partnered with congregations—10 Lutheran and one Baptist—in each of the 11 jurisdictions to serve as support-group sites. The meetings are open to any adoptive family, not only those who have adopted through Diakon. Those who want to learn more about adoption or who are involved in foster care also may attend. Free child-care is provided.

The groups focus on topics of interest to adoptive families, says Ramona Hoyle, director of Diakon Adoption Services in Maryland, including attachment issues, positive discipline techniques, child development, educational resources for the child with special needs, and loyalty and the birth family. Some topics feature guest speakers.

The grants include a requirement for community outreach, with one event in each area in November to celebrate National Adoption Month, and a second awareness event to be held during any other month. In May, adoption staff took part in Family Day, a community fair at Ravenwood Lutheran Village, a Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community in Hagerstown.

“We were already serving parts of Maryland,” Hoyle says, “and these grants extend Diakon’s services into counties where we previously had no presence, expanding our ministry.”

COUPLE RECEIVES DIAKON PRESIDENT’S AWARD FOR PARTNERSHIP EFFORTS IN BALTIMORE



The Rev. John Richter, left, presents the 2007 Diakon President's Award to Cleo, center, and Elroy "Big Chris" Christopher.

Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries recently recognized Elroy “Big Chris” and Cleo Christopher with its 2007 President’s Award, presented at the Delaware-Maryland Synod’s annual Celebrate Ministry event. The Christophers have been fighting for their East Baltimore neighborhood for more than 10 years. When they were confronted by fear, crime,

drugs, and other challenges, they decided to take action on behalf of their neighbors. Along with another community leader, Big Chris moved onto the corner outside a bar where significant drug activity was taking place. The two continued to live on the street corner for a year until the bar was closed and drug activity ceased.

Beyond this courageous activity, Big Chris and Cleo raised funds to have porch lighting put on all the houses in their neighborhood, as well as tree planters. They created the Covenant Community Association, which sponsors events including a summer youth camp for community residents. They also led the community in the conversion of several empty lots into a community garden for the entire neighborhood to enjoy.

Diakon has worked with Big Chris and Cleo since 2005 in sponsoring community events such as a back-to-school celebration, fall festival, and Christmas festival, along with community meetings to discuss the creation of plans to further improve the area. In addition, Diakon and Covenant Community Association have worked together to identify vacant housing that Diakon has purchased to renovate and sell to moderate-income homeowners.

RESIDENTS ‘KNIT A BIT’ TO SHOW SUPPORT FOR SOLDIERS

■ The chitchat and laughter coming from the group sounds similar to that at many afternoon get-togethers among residents of Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village, although there is one addition this day—the clink of knitting needles.

This new sound is made with special purpose: The group is knitting items for American soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Inspired by the Mifflinburg Area Military Moms Association—or MAMMA—and working with the Union County Chapter of the American Red Cross, the group of about 20 women meets regularly to knit. Many knit at other times, too, driven by the goal to help MAMMA finish 500 items by November so they can reach the troops by Christmas.

The residents of the Diakon Senior Living Community in Lewisburg, Pa., are making scarves, hats, gloves, socks, and wristlets to help protect soldiers against winter weather. The Red Cross supplies kits complete with yarn and instructions.

“It gives us great pleasure to help,” says Ruth Drozin, a senior living resident who organized the knitters. “They are so far away; it’s nice to know we can do something. Getting something handmade from home is very important to them.”

George and Rosemary Bannon have special appreciation for what their fellow residents are doing—their grandson is a medic serving in Iraq.



“It’s a very nice effort,” Rosemary Bannon says, to which her husband adds: “It gives us a close feeling because we know he welcomes any contact from home.”

Groups of older adults are among the most dedicated knitters, explains Annie Smith, Red Cross disaster services coordinator, who launched the effort patterned on the World War II “Knit Your Bit” campaign. The residents’ “help is like an amazing gift we’ve been given,” says Smith, whose son is also a soldier. “They’ve made it their mission.”

For the Buffalo Valley residents, as well as the staff members who have joined them, their mission also is a way to express thanks. “The troops are giving a lot for us,” Drozin says. “This is a little something we can do for them.” ■



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