

Merry Merry! Holiday Giving Program Brings Joy to Families

Christmas 2008 is one holiday Jeanette Hernandez will remember for the rest of her life.

Last year was a tough one for the Hernandez family, with husband and wife struggling to provide a nice holiday for their five young children, ages 5, 3, 2 and 1-year-old twins.

"We were trying to get our finances in order and had just moved in to our apartment," Jeanette recalled.

Holiday Surprise The family's caseworker came to them with the news that a Foundation Communities donor would sponsor them through the organization's *Holiday Giving Program*.

There was a knock at the door, and Jeanette's heart sang when she saw the gift basket filled with canned goods, a turkey, and toys, clothes and diapers for the children.

Poignant Memories Sadly, it would be the only holiday the family would spend with all five children. Less than six short months

later, Jeanette's youngest daughter, one of the twins, died unexpectedly in her sleep.

"We look at the pictures and remember that it was such a great Christmas. We just wanted it to be special, and it was more than we expected."

Caring for Others The giving spirit that meant so much to Jeanette and her family is the same spirit that moves people to take action.

Those people include Cacki Young, a longtime Foundation Communities (FC) supporter and donor who has hosted a huge party with a group of friends every year since 2000, asking each guest to bring a toy for deserving families.

Each year, the group, which has grown from 10 hosts to 35, has donated more than 400 toys for families in need. This year, the goal is 500 toys.

"The concept is simple and everyone is happy to help," says Cacki, a former social

worker who understands the challenges low-income families face. "We know how the toys are distributed and that they'll get to the people who need them. Now we need to raise awareness about issues low-income people face and what Foundation Communities does for the community."

For the Hernandez family, whose life is now slowly recovering from financial stresses and the shock of losing a child, the kindness of that FC supporter was like no other when they needed it most.

"It meant a lot to us whoever had the heart to donate. It just meant so much to a family in need." — *Jeanette Hernandez*



How You Can Help

- » Sponsor a family and make their holidays special. Contact: Chris Alberts (christopher.alberts@foundcom.org) for details.
- » Purchase a holiday gift basket. For a \$50 donation, we will provide a family or individual with a basket of holiday goodies. Contact: Chris Alberts.

Building Communities – One Person at a Time



Ken and Mercedes Ciani, Homebuilders since 2006

Building a house happens brick by brick – one step at a time – and so does building a community that thrives and that helps its own. When Foundation Communities (FC) launched its unique Home Builder fund-raising initiative, the response was better than expected. And in the past few years, the program has grown to be an easy, yet meaningful, way for supporters to help the Austin community.

Expanded Services Home Builder donors make a multi-year pledge commitment; we have Home Builders whose pledges range from \$20/month to \$400/month! Thanks to this planned, dependable income source, FC has been able to expand housing and support services for the families and individuals most in need. These funds have also helped us secure and leverage large grants by showing that we have a track record and are a trusted resource in the community.

.....*Thanks for your support!*

How You Can Help

- » Sign up to be a Home Builder!
- » Ask your company to match your gift.
- » Help spread the word! Attend an Open House this year – and bring a friend. Find dates, locations and RSVP info at www.foundcom.org

M Station: A “Dream Project” and a Community Effort

Our hard work and your committed support have paid off! Foundation Communities (FC) is excited to announce **M Station**, our “dream project”. This 150-unit affordable apartment community for working families is scheduled to break ground this spring.

A green-built model of eco-friendly, transit-oriented development and affordable housing, M Station will include a childcare center, a Community Learning Center with after-school programs and a computer lab open to the neighborhood. And, with easy access to the new MetroRail transit station, a great neighborhood school just a few blocks away, and the Children’s Museum Workshop and the Sustainable Food Center Kitchen and Gardens being built across the street, the central Austin location is truly a godsend for future residents.

“This project is the culmination of everything we’ve learned over the last 20 years about good design, management and services.”

“This is a groundbreaking project that will provide affordable housing for those who need it most, as well as education, childcare and learning opportunities for residents in surrounding neighborhoods,” says *Walter Moreau, FC executive director.*



Affordable for All M Station is a \$24 million project. Most of the funds for M Station have already been raised through grants and tax credits, and FC is now in the final stage of seeking private support – about \$2 million in donations for the learning center and other features. It’s a dream project that’s quickly becoming a reality for those in need of affordable housing.

Average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Austin is about \$950/month, but M Station apartments will rent for an average of \$697 – and that’s a boon for a city in desperate need of affordable housing.

Essential Support Austin Heights is a neighborhood close to the M Station project and their community support was critical to getting the project off the ground.

“We’re excited about the early childhood center and other services for the neighborhood,” says Gustavo Rodriguez, president of the Austin Heights Neighborhood Association and chairman of the neighborhood’s Steering Committee. “After seeing other Foundation Communities developments and programs, people were interested in seeing more and offering their support.”

Sandy Wilder, a neighborhood resident and member of the Steering Committee, says that while community meetings attracted huge turnouts with concerned residents, FC representatives listened and made sure residents were comfortable with the project before moving forward. “Everyone had a chance to express their feedback, and once they did their own research and asked questions, the vote was positive in favor of the project,” Sandy says. “FC has a 20-year track record. They’re not going to be practicing on our neighborhood.”

Working Together In the end, five neighborhood associations in the area, including Austin Heights, gave their support for the project.

Rodriguez says neighbors have a vested interest in the project’s success – and that they’re all in this together. “We’re all contributors, and people really feel a part of the project,” he says. “We saw that Foundation Communities would work with us and that they cared about the residents, while also creating programs to help individuals create a better life.”

JOHN STEVENSON: GIVING BACK AS A VOLUNTEER

John Stevenson has always supported the communities he’s lived in, and Austin is no exception. John and his wife Lois started volunteering at Foundation Communities’ Community Tax Center– helping low-income families and individuals file their income tax returns. “We were just really impressed with all the things that Foundation Communities was doing and wanted to help,” John says. “The affordable housing, all the classes and services – it’s just fantastic.” It was also gratifying for the Stevensons to see the effect their efforts had on the people they were helping. “These people were living on almost nothing,” he says. “They were just so happy when we’d tell them they were getting a big refund.”

An eye to the future Since his wife passed away a few years ago, John has become the “patron saint” of Foundation Communities, and his passionate commitment has been far-reaching. First, he established the *Lois A. Stevenson Emergency Fund*, a pool of funds used to help families facing a short-term crisis or opportunity. For example, our supportive housing program can now provide a homeless family with money for food while they’re waiting for food stamps to start. Or, the funds might help a promising student start school while waiting for scholarship funds to arrive.

Expanded services He also funded a pilot program to provide a visiting nurse for FC residents so that we could expand mental health and substance abuse support services. “We were talking about the need for these residents, and I thought maybe I could help, so we got it going,” recalls John. Thanks to John’s monthly gift, we have been able to keep the visiting nurse program for our most critical residents. And the program’s success and our track record in managing it recently helped us secure a major federal grant to expand those services. (See related article in this newsletter.) “The need is always greater than our funding,” says Walter Moreau, FC executive director. “This is an area where individual support will continue to be critical to help residents succeed in the future.”

Inspiring others Stevenson says volunteering is as easy as asking what you can do to help. He says helping in the Tax Center is an ongoing need – and a great place to get started. “You get to know a lot of people, and there are all kinds of things you can do to help,” he says. “There’s also a need to help with financial management training – a lot of folks don’t know how to shop, or handle their money, and Foundation Communities is always looking for people to help.” At the end of the day, it takes a community to build a community and take care of its own, and Stevenson is happy to contribute. “It just makes you feel good to help other people.” Thanks, John, for your ongoing commitment and generous support!



A Place to Call Home Luncheon

Foundation Communities' Annual fundraising event was October 27 at Skyline Terrace.

Guests were treated to a guitar performance by Sierra Ridge children and speeches by Adriana Gonzalez (St. Elmo Elementary Principal), Dr. Cynthia Karnstadt (Garden Terrace resident), Danny Hamilton (Luncheon Chair) and Walter Moreau (FC Exec Director). The event was a huge success, raising more than \$230,000 to support FC programs in 2010! Thanks to everyone who attended and pledged their support.



Luncheon Committee from left to right: Ashley McIlvain Moran, Day Fariss, Danny Hamilton (Luncheon Chair/Board Member), Gina Richardson (Board Chair)

Upcoming Open House Dates:

- » January 19 at Skyline Terrace
- » February 24 at Sierra Ridge
- » March 30 at Spring Terrace

How You Can Help

- » Volunteer in the tax center, like John and his wife did. It's one of our critical need areas this time of year
- » Contribute to the *Lois A. Stevenson Emergency Fund* to help Austin families in crisis situations. Contact Jackie Blair for info on training: Jackie.Blair@Foundcom.org
- » Tell your friends about us! Bring them to an Open House or ask them to volunteer with you! Dates and location at www.foundcom.org.

Federal Mental Health Grant Offers Residents Hope, Vital Services

Supportive housing works to end the cycle of homelessness for over 345 residents each year. The key is the combination of housing PLUS critical services, such as medication assistance, and services to address substance abuse and mental health challenges. With the right services, residents can maintain a stable home. Recent federal funding will expand the services we can offer.

Federal funding, essential services

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), part of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, has awarded Foundation Communities a five-year, \$2 million grant to provide on-premise mental health and substance abuse support services to residents. The program, *Health Options for Moving toward Empowerment (HOME)*, includes funding for a part-time psychiatrist, full-time psychiatric nurse, two full-time clinical case managers, and access to inpatient treatment programs at area substance abuse programs. "While the focus of Foundation Communities is housing, this is an issue that needed to be addressed to ensure housing stability," explains Julian Huerta, director of programs.

with his life. Profoundly depressed for years, Mike seldom left his room, even for food, and had given up on counseling, therapy, medication, and relationships, refusing even to walk out his front door. He held little hope for the future, until the initial HOME pilot program. He met with a psychiatrist and psychiatric nurse and agreed to try anti-depressant medication for the first time in almost a decade. He is now meeting with home health and mental health professionals several times a week, is on medication, and has a much brighter outlook.

Future Success and your support

Foundation Communities was one of 40 organizations that were funded. The selection is a testament to the organization's experience gained over the last 20 years of providing essential community services, and developing solid relationships with local mental health organizations and professionals.

Without our supporters here in Austin and well-established track record, we would never have been a competitive applicant for this much-needed grant money. "We really had to prove ourselves with the application process," says Huerta. "We knew about our

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"Some residents must wait up to three months to get appointments and that's too late. When you're housing the homeless, they must be able to access these services quickly." – Director Julian Huerta
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Critical need, no funding Texas is one of the worst-funded states when it comes to mental health issues; the result of cuts to Medicaid programs that used to provide services for low-income people. As a result, when residents without private insurance must go on a waiting list for services, there's so little capacity for help that lives can go from stable to total disarray in no time at all, and that affects these residents' ability to maintain consistent housing.

Measured impact The success of an early pilot program at our Garden Terrace property, a partnership with the St. David's Community Health Foundation, was key to securing the federal grant and proving that integrated, on-premise services could help residents like Mike C., 46, move forward

residents' needs and how the mental health system works here, could show the success of the pilot program, and were able to put together a plan within the context of affordable housing to get the grant." The expansion of this program through the SAMHSA grant is a huge step forward. However, there is still a funding gap as the need for visiting nurses grows, and even expanded case manager resources are stretched yet further. "The ongoing support of individuals in the Austin community continues to be the backbone of our success," says Walter Moreau, FC executive director. "It's that critical commitment that will enable us to continue to take steps forward in the future."

New Community Financial Center: Expanded Services for Low-Income Families

There's nothing more empowering than taking control of your finances, and no one knows that better than Pamela Filip.

Pamela was looking for low-cost help to file her 2008 taxes and found out about Foundation Communities' *Community Tax Center* through the City of Austin Housing Authority.

Not only did Pamela get her taxes done, but she also discovered other options to put her on a path to a more secure future such as financial coaching and budgeting.

The new building is scheduled to open in January. Initial building renovations are being funded by the Schwab Foundation, which also underwrites the Financial Coaching program. More renovations are planned for 2010. Community support is key to raising the additional \$150,000 FC will need to complete necessary renovations to the center.

"We would love to do more renovations now, but we need to start operating at the new location in January, and that gives us time to secure additional funding," says Walter Moreau, FC Executive Director.

"The financial coaching really helped to take a weight off my shoulders. I was drowning in debt and didn't know how to get a handle on my finances." - *Pamela Filip*

Peace of Mind

With help, Pamela obtained a copy of her credit report, contacted creditors and set up reasonable payment plans that worked with her budget.

Demand for Services— and a New Home

It's that kind of demand for services that's driving the creation of the Community Financial Center.

Financial Help for All

The Financial Center will be a "one-stop-shop" for all FC financial programs, including free income tax preparation, financial education and homebuyer courses, financial coaching, matched savings accounts, money for educational needs, and self-employed people and small business support.



Did You Know?

Foundation Communities Community Tax Center files more than \$27 million in tax returns for Austin's low-income residents each year.

This free service saves each family about \$200 – money they would have spent for paid tax preparation.

How You Can Help

- » Volunteer to prepare taxes – we'll train you! Contact: Jackie Blair (Jackie.Blair@Foundcom.org) for details and training dates.
- » Donate to the Community Financial Center renovation fund.

Join Us for Lunch

Each month, we hold a free Open House lunch. This is NOT a fundraiser but a way to tour one of our communities, hear about the challenges facing low-income families and individuals in Austin and to find out more about the solutions we offer that work. Please join our Executive

Director, Walter Moreau along with Board members and residents. We begin at 11:45 with program and lunch at noon.

To RSVP and get directions/details, please contact Sadia Tirmizi at 512-447-2026 ext. 4017 or via email at sadia.tirmizi@foundcom.org

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- » February 24 at Sierra Ridge
- » March 30 at Spring Terrace

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Foundation Communities

3036 South First Street
Austin, TX 78704

Writers: Amy Lemen
Design: Creative Suitcase
Editors: Keary Kinch and Christopher Alberts

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