

# Building Community

FALL 2004

## Local Dollars Helping Local People

The Mission of the Acton-Boxborough United Way is to identify and raise public awareness of community needs, link needs with quality services, and raise and allocate funds to support the charitable efforts of the community.



### Agency Spotlight

## How One Call for Help Benefited Thousands

In 1990, Barbara Smith took a call from a woman seeking help for a sister who was arriving from abroad and would need furniture and other household items. Barbara placed a small ad in her church newsletter, requesting donations of used furniture and other household items. The community response was overwhelming. So was the idea to use this abundance of goods to help others.

Today, 14 years later, the Household Goods Recycling Ministry (HGRM), under the leadership of Barbara and Ira Smith and a 15-member volunteer Board, provides the necessities of home to approximately 175 to 200 local families per month. From its humble start in the Smith's garage in Acton, HGRM was forced to find additional storage sites as donations increased. It could take up to four hours to shuttle a family around to various loca-

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A customer shops for household items at Household Good Recycling Ministry.

**Building Community**, the Acton-Boxborough United Way newsletter, is published three times a year and distributed to corporations, businesses and households in the Acton and Boxborough communities. Its purpose is to communicate the health and social service needs of the community and to describe the ways these needs are being addressed.



### Business & Community Recognition

## Leadership and Community Service by Example

In a back corner of Acton's Police station, you'll find the crowded office of Police Chief Frank Widmayer. He is a soft-spoken man with a dry sense of humor, but make no mistake—his commitment to strengthen the police force he oversees through training, support and development, and to serving the townspeople well and safely is unwavering.

Peering over the top of his PC, surrounded by boxes, files and paperwork, Chief Widmayer shares his thoughts on the community he has grown

up in and his strong connection with the Acton-Boxborough United Way.

### Addressing Domestic Violence

In the mid 1990s, Frank served on the United Way's Board of Directors and played a key role in the 1992 Community Assessment Study. Serving on that Committee was one of the highlights of his service on the Board, notes Chief Widmayer. That process

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## AGENCY SPOTLIGHT

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tions to outfit an apartment. Then in 2004, they leased an 8,000 square foot facility at 530 Main Street in Acton, consolidating storage sites into one location. Now it's "one stop shopping" for clients.

Goods go out almost as soon as they come in, according to Lisa Ann Donegan, responsible for HGRM PR. They accept any furnishings and accessories that are used within an apartment. While HGRM prefers to receive donations at their facility, volunteers are willing to pick up larger items. Donegan estimates that 40 to 50 apartments are fully or partially furnished each month with 60 to 70 beds, on average, moving in and out.

This was the first year that HGRM requested financial support from ABUW. It is impressive to know that 100% of the work of the agency is done by volunteers. "It's an amazing thing; not one person is being paid, yet we're servicing all these people," says Donegan. Additionally amazing is that HGRM does no advertising.

**Volunteers unload donated items.**



Donations and requests for goods are the result of word of mouth. There has been a 25% increase in activity since they moved to the new facility, estimates Donegan.

Have household items to donate? You can drop off goods at 530 Main Street on Thursday and Saturday mornings between 9 and 12 or by appointment at other times. The facility is open to clients on the 1st and 3rd Saturdays of the month or by appointment.

HGRM is always looking for volunteers. There are opportunities to work with clients, organize furniture in the warehouse, pick up and unload goods, and handle phone calls and set up appointments. For more information, please call the main number at 978-635-1763. ■

## COMMUNITY FORUM

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identified domestic violence as a critical concern faced by community members. In response, the ABUW awarded a Special Grant to an organization that was working to address the significant, and growing, number of domestic violence incidents in Acton. Since then, in his role as Police Chief and as the primary advocate for its formation, a partnership was created between the Acton PD and the Domestic Violence Victim Assistance Program (DVVAP). DVVAP provides training to police officers to enable effective response to domestic disturbance calls. DVVAP also trains a team of volunteer community advocates who follow-up with the victim to provide assistance in pursuing legal recourse, obtaining emergency shelter, or helping them move forward following the event.

The ABUW is a major source of funding for DVVAP's work, and Chief Widmayer comments that without that support, the partnership between his Department and the agency would be put at

risk. This is one of the many reasons why he continues to be one of the ABUW's many loyal and generous donors. Chief Widmayer explains his continuing allegiance to the ABUW is because it focuses on local issues, serves a large number of local people, addresses local issues of greatest concern, and is committed to identifying and addressing the human service needs of area residents.

### Focus on Other Issues

Some noteworthy issues the ABUW is currently working to address are the needs of non-English speaking residents, and the challenges faced by the significant number of multi-cultural families who have moved to the area in recent years. Chief Widmayer is also very interested in opening lines of communication, and getting more involved with and in support of the Hispanic community, among others.

Another top priority for both the Acton PD and the ABUW is the focus on the health and safety of the youth in our com-

munity. The local United Way supports youth services, including the social worker at ABRHS who works with at-risk students, Project Wellness at R.J. Grey Jr. High, mentoring programs through Big Brother, Big Sister, and pending support for the Community Alliance for Youth's efforts to publish a resource guide for parents. For his part, Chief Widmayer worked to win a federal grant entitled COPS in Schools, allowing the department to dedicate three officers to school-related services, especially at the Junior and Senior High Schools.

Chief Widmayer is a prime example of an individual who is dedicated to the well-being of the community he serves. His philosophy is to encourage everyone to do what you can for your community. He adds that donating to the ABUW is a great way to have a significant impact on a considerable number of local individuals and families in need and will ultimately improve the quality of life for all residents. ■

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## ABUW Attracts Student Board Members

**D**id you know that the all-volunteer ABUW Board of Directors includes ABRHS students? Three civic-minded juniors are serving a two-year term and were chosen from a large pool of applicants.

Julia Rey is a native of Colombia, where she spent the summer working at the orphanage her grandmother runs. She brings those caring concerns home by helping immigrants successfully integrate into American society. Julia is also active in several student organizations including the Speech and Debate Team.



Jocelyn Richard is interested in raising awareness among young people to the needs of the less fortunate in her community. The ABUW is a perfect venue to apply these interests. She stays active with team sports, playing soccer, basketball and lacrosse.

A recipient of the Presidential Community Service Award, Kristin LaConte is co-president of AB Community Outreach, and involved in many other organizations including SADD. She strives to help mitigate hunger and substance abuse with her burgeoning leadership skills.

We are delighted to have their youthful perspective.



### Business & Community Recognition

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## ABUW Goes Direct to Fund Social Worker

**T**he Acton-Boxborough United Way will again fund the part-time position of social worker Christina Granahan for the 2004–2005 school year at Acton-Boxborough Regional High School. As in previous years, Mrs. Granahan will work between 13 and 16 hours each week with high-risk students typically related to substance abuse.

Last year the ABUW supported the position through a grant to Concord Family and Youth Services. By funding the program directly this year, ABUW expects to eliminate administrative costs. The position has no allocation in the school budget and state and federal funds, which were used in previous years, have dried up. Additionally, resources in the community for high-risk students are very hard to find. The ratio of students to counselors at ABRHS is alarmingly high, at 240 to 1.

The continuing need for a high-risk behavior counselor was underscored two years ago by CAFY, the Community Alliance for Youth. This group of concerned parents and community members was formulated to address problems identified in a high-risk youth behavior survey, which is funded every few years by Emerson Hospital. The survey concluded that high-risk behaviors among students between 6th and 12th grades are a growing problem.

Mrs. Granahan meets with individuals and groups of students to discuss how substance abuse affects their academic, social and family lives, and to help them make

informed decisions for the future. Last year she met with 31 different students in 63 sessions, and conducted four group sessions with different students. Moreover, three graduates contacted her for follow-up appointments. Students are referred

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for discipline and justice issues and academic, social and attendance issues, as well as drug and alcohol abuse issues.

“Mrs. Granahan has a terrific ability to connect with adolescents,” said Susan Serino, AB Chairman of Counseling and Psychological Services. “Several of the students she has worked with have had difficulties trusting adults and are often resistant to opening up. Yet, students frequently comment that they feel comfortable talking with her and seek her out on their own.”

Mrs. Granahan will also consult with counselors, psychologists, teachers, parents, and outside service providers.

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## Community Outreach Seeks to Address Pressing Issues

The ABUW’s Community Outreach Committee held a Community Forum on Friday, September 24th to continue the dialog from the June forum between social service agencies and leaders in the community. Outreach focuses on how to more effectively address the most pressing health and human service needs of our area. Issues include affordable housing, elder care issues, needs of at risk youth, the struggles of those with English as a second language, and local transportation. The next Forum is scheduled for Friday, January 21. Please contact our office for more information.



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### Local Dollars Helping Local People



#### News & Updates

## Volunteering, Oktoberfest, Concert Info. and more!

#### Friends of the ABUW

You're invited to join our informal volunteer corps, the Friends of the ABUW. If you are interested in helping with short-term projects or initiatives, such as flyer distribution, mailings, ad hoc committees, support and planning for our spring concert with Dr. Elliot Steger, or other efforts, please contact Sandy Campbell at [abuw@fiam.net](mailto:abuw@fiam.net) or (978) 263-1777. There's no major commitment involved. Take on as little or as much as you like.

#### Caring Community Gets Us Involved

If you are looking for meaningful ways to volunteer in the community, please check out this up-to-date volunteer opportunities website, A Caring Community. Visit [www.abuw.org](http://www.abuw.org) and click on the picture icon for "A



Caring Community". The self-directed site lists more than 75 community organizations that need your help. There's an opportunity to involve just about anyone—families, Scout troops, students, religion classes and others. Volunteer opportunities include animal care, interacting with the elderly, care of young children, working with a food pantry or meal program, getting involved in conservation efforts, and so much more. It's a great way to meet others, help those in need, and make a dif-

ference in someone's life, including your own.

#### Oktoberfest!—West Acton

Stop by our table with your kids on Saturday, Oct 2 from 10:00 AM–4:00 PM. Pick up information on the ABUW, and say hello. We'd love to see you.

#### Spring Concert

Mark your calendars now! The second ABUW Spring Concert, featuring Elliot Steger is scheduled for Saturday, April 30, 2005! All proceeds from this event will go directly to support local programs supported by the ABUW.

#### Workplace Giving

If you give to the United Way through your workplace, please remember to designate the Acton-Boxborough United Way

(ABUW) specifically. This will ensure that your generous giving will come back directly to your community. If you are unsure of how to do this, please contact Sandy at our office at 263-1777.

#### Correction

The high-quality pictures printed in the Summer 04 newsletter, Restoration Project article, were provided courtesy of CJ Gunther/Zuma Press, Burlington, MA (*below*). We appreciate their community-minded spirit.



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If you wish to make a contribution, you can make an online donation ([www.abuw.org](http://www.abuw.org)), or send a check to: ABUW, 570 Massachusetts Avenue, Acton, MA 01720.  
If you would like more information, contact our Executive Director, Sandy Campbell at 978-263-1777 or stop by our office in West Acton.