

Building Community

SUMMER 2005

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.

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.

CONCERT FOR COMMUNITY A Fun(d)raising Event

On April 30th, hundreds of people attended the second annual Concert for Community, starring Dr. Elliot Steger, and benefiting the Acton-Boxborough United Way. Dr. Steger opened the show with “Jessica,” a piece he wrote in honor of the birth of his daughter 19 years ago.

The concert continued with “Herbie’s Blues,” a selection from his most recent album, *Joyful Blue*, and several other original compositions. Dr. Steger was joined onstage for much of the show by Lello Molinari on the acoustic bass and Jon Hazilla on drums. These two remarkable talents both teach at the Berklee College of Music in Boston. In addition to his original pieces, Dr. Steger did terrific

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Dr. Elliot Steger (R) with Board Member and Concert Organizer Ken Appel



Dr. Elliot Steger

Micki Williams Remembered

In its 24 years of serving Acton and Boxborough, the United Way has been fortunate to have had many amazing and talented individuals serve on the Board of Directors. Of the many incredible people who have served this organization well, Alice “Micki” Williams was certainly among those who poured heart and soul into fulfilling the mission of the Acton-Boxborough United Way.

It was during the first year of her term on the ABUW Board that Micki was diagnosed with the cancer that would take her life just a few short years later. Undeterred, Micki plunged headlong into her battle with the ovarian cancer that invaded her body and her life, yet never for a moment set aside her commitment to the many activities to which she was committed, including the ABUW.

One of the tasks Micki undertook while on the ABUW Board was to work with a committee of other Directors to reach out to area businesses, a

segment of the community with unlimited potential for growth in its support of the United Way’s work to improve the quality of life for area residents. She worked on appeal packets, went door to door to establishments in her neighborhood of East Acton, and engaged various business owners to participate in one or more AB United Way-sponsored efforts.

At the completion of her second year on the Board, Micki enthusiastically accepted the nomination of her peers to be the President of the Board of Directors. Micki had reached the height of her medical treatments and drug therapy, which would continue throughout her leadership of the Board. She never wavered or faltered in her commitment to the ABUW, and in addition to leading the Board, Micki single-handedly coordinated a fundraising project—selling outside luminaria kits during the Thanksgiving season. She procured donations of the com-

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CONCERT FOR COMMUNITY

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covers of Billy Joel's "Piano Man," Stevie Wonder's "Sunshine of My Life" and the classic "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." Dr. Steger's banter added a delightful touch to the evening. In one case, he introduced a never-before performed piece called "Sol Caliente" by explaining that it was written during one of last winter's many blizzards while reflecting on having lived in the somewhat more hospitable climate of San Diego.

As the opening act, the high school's own a cappella group, 13 Fish Named Jennifer, quickly reminded the audience why they have garnered such a loyal following. It is a rare talent to convincingly mimic bagpipes by "singing" the Scottish National Anthem through one nostril. Van Morrison's "Brown-eyed Girl" and "The Theme from Ghostbusters" were also beautifully interpreted by the group.

This year's concert was preceded by a reception for leadership donors, giving ABUW Board members and the donors the opportunity to meet the "person behind the name." One of those people on the ABUW side was Ken Appel, Special Events Chairperson, who worked so hard to make the concert a success. Dr. Steger was gracious enough to take time from warming up for the show to attend the reception.

It is through the generosity of the community—especially Middlesex Savings Bank, who underwrote the concert, and Bursaw Oil & Gas, who sponsored the concert—that many clients of the service organizations United Way sponsors were able to attend the concert. Sandra Campbell, Executive Director of ABUW, was pleased with the support given to the event. "The generosity of our community never ceases," she said, "and this event is another example of the spirit of support that makes Acton and Boxborough such wonderful places to live and work. The commitment of the volunteers, area businesses, concert attendees, our Board members, high school students, and, of course, Dr. Steger, will have a significant impact on improving the quality of life for those in need in our own neighborhoods, for which the entire ABUW organization is very grateful."



Agency Spotlight

Friends of the Acton Council on Aging

Staying connected to their peers is a big draw for many seniors who use the Smith-Cloonan Senior Center in South Acton. A wide variety of programs attract people, but it is the companionship that helps to keep them coming back. Linda Duvel, the president and founder of the Friends of the Acton Council on Aging (COA), hopes the organization "provides an opportunity for seniors to lead a vital, interesting, educated and serviced life. It is easy to fall into the trap of isolation if you have no place to go."

If you drop by the Senior Center any morning, you may find dozens of seniors working out in the common room. Painting and bridge classes are also offered. Other social gatherings center on common interests, be it poker, knitting or a book group. You may also hear the laughter and conversation of people having lunch, playing pool or deciding on a book or video to borrow. On the other hand, there are support groups for widows and widowers, and for those enduring the anguish of having a partner with Alzheimer's Disease.

The COA provides much-needed services for what some might see as an underserved population. When asked what she sees as the most pressing needs facing seniors today, Jean Fleming, the COA Director, listed three concerns: real estate tax relief, housing options and understanding the upcoming Medicare changes. The COA has tried to address these concerns in several ways. Workshops and lectures dealing with these important issues are offered, as

is space for private meetings with tax experts, benefits specialists and town assessors. The COA also takes an active role in advocating for seniors with state legislators and they've invited legislators to speak at the COA specifically about tax relief.

The COA's programs and staffing are funded primarily by tax dollars. The Friends of COA provide additional financial support to enhance the offerings and provide a wider range of services. In addition to underwriting the cost of trips, the Friends provide funding for computers, a computer instructor and furnishings for the center. They also sponsor special events, like holiday parties and concerts. The AB United Way is pleased to be a long-time supporter of the Friends, providing grant funds annually to assist the Friends in their mission. With that help, all services are offered to seniors either free or at minimal cost.

According to Ms. Duvel, "the number of seniors in Acton equals the number of students in the public schools" and recent data show the number of seniors using the COA increasing by 5% to 10% a year. With these numbers in mind, Ms. Fleming is hopeful about the expansion of services, including a possible senior cable channel in Acton. The Friends would also like to offer transportation that goes beyond the constraints of the senior van. Considering the lack of public transportation in the area, a ride to the doctor can be a life-saver.

The United Way looks forward to continuing our support for local seniors through the dedicated Friends of the Acton COA.



Senior citizens enjoy their time together at Acton's Senior Center.



Agency Spotlight

Community Alliance for Youth: Red Flags and Resources

Our community has always endeavored to keep our youth free from the influence of illicit drugs and alcohol. One of the best examples of this effort is the “Red Flags and Resources” booklet, which was mailed to every household with children in fifth to eleventh grade in Acton, Boxborough and several neighboring communities. Funded in part by a grant from the Acton Boxborough United Way, the booklet was a collaborative effort of AB’s Community Alliance for Youth, the Groton-Dunstable Alliance for Youth, Concord-Carlisle Alliance for Teen Safety and Westford Against Substance Abuse. Utilizing results from Emerson Hospital’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), the booklet serves as a practical resource for parents, teachers, coaches, and students.

A broad range of topics, including substance abuse, eating disorders, stress and anxiety, bullying, and sexual behavior, is addressed in “Red Flags and Resources.” Each of the seventeen topics is explored in a two-page spread and includes information about each behavior’s dangers, warning signs, and suggested confrontation strategies. The seventeen topics are covered in three major sections: Substance Use and Abuse, Emotional Health, and Relationships and Personal Safety. Each section also provides local and Internet resources in order to provide easy access to help for those in need.

An example is the section on marijuana, which is a response to the 2000 and 2002 YRBS data indicating that over 23% of high school students had used marijuana at least once during the month prior to the survey. The section begins with a description of the drug and its effects on the mind and body. Some “Red Flags” are bloodshot eyes, frequent use of incense, mouthwash and room fresheners and open windows even in the winter. The most-endorsed approaches for both parents and users is to talk the problem over in a non-judgmental fashion and, for students, to learn how to refuse drugs in situations filled with peer pressure. Professional guidance is recommended for serious problems only, and some sources for this

guidance are then listed at the end of the section.

The booklet also discusses strategies for nurturing healthy families and raising resilient children. Its key message is that young people are not just problems waiting to happen, but important assets to their communities.

In addition to the Acton Boxborough United Way, “Red Flags and Resources” was also funded by Emerson Hospital and several other organizations. All funding was done outside of school district budgets.

MICKI WILLIAMS

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ponents for the kit, which were intended to acknowledge the gratitude many of us have for the good fortune we enjoy, and to remember those whose lives have been filled with hardship. Micki assembled these kits in her garage, with minimal volunteer help. The result was an additional \$1,400 for the United Way.

Micki was also an invaluable member of the Nominating Committee, and helped to recruit many new talented individuals to work with our organization.

A long time activist and volunteer in the Acton area, Micki was deeply involved in town politics—she served on the School Committee, was active in the League of Women Voters, and in the Acton Democratic Party, including representation to the State Democratic Convention. While she was on the ABUW Board, Micki also was busy serving on the East Acton Planning Committee, which helped to create a new plan for East Acton village, and led social justice activities at her church, the First Parish in Concord.

Alice “Micki” Williams passed away in May, succumbing to the cancer that she fought so hard to overcome. While Micki was officially a part of our organization for just three years, the mark she left on the ABUW, and on her community, will be felt well into the future.

Rest in peace, Micki, and thank you for your commitment to making our world a better place.

Agencies Receive New Funding Awards

Thanks to the generosity of our community, the Acton-Boxborough United Way recently voted to award \$160,000 in grants to local health and human service organizations serving area residents. Because of you, our supporters, these 25 agencies are able to make a tremendous difference for those in need. The grants were allocated with various awards among the organizations listed below:

Children & Youth

Acton-Boxborough Regional High School,
Counseling Dept – Social Worker
Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Central Mass/
MetroWest
Community Partnership for Children
Community School
Patriots Trail Council, Girl Scouts USA
Project Wellness

Developmental Disabilities

Friday Night Fun Club
MinuteMan ARC for Human Services

Domestic Violence Services

Domestic Violence Victim Assistance
Program (D.V.V.A.P.)
South Middlesex Legal Services

The Elderly

Cooperative Elder Services
Friends of the Acton Council on Aging
Friends of the Boxborough Council on Aging
Minuteman Senior Services

Family Counseling

Acton Housing Authority
Concord Family & Youth Services
Eastern MA Literacy Council

Health Care – Education & Treatment

Pediatric Intervention Team at Emerson
Hospital

Hunger & Housing

Community Supper
Friend In Need, A
Household Goods Recycling Ministry
Stow Food Pantry

Information & Referral

Mass 211

Mental Health Services

Eliot Community Human Services
Restoration Project



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US POSTAGE
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Acton-Boxborough United Way

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Local Dollars Helping Local People



News & Updates

ABUW Keeping Busy

25th Anniversary of ABUW

In 2006, the Acton-Boxborough United Way will be celebrating its 25th year of active service in our community. In the coming months, we will be planning many special events to mark this exciting occasion. You will be hearing about these events as our plans are finalized, and we hope you will join in the celebration.

211 Initiative

In late June, the Council of Massachusetts United Ways (COMUW) voted to ratify the next phase of the plan to move towards implementation of the 211 information and referral service. This service, as mentioned in previous Newsletters, will enable residents of the Commonwealth to dial "211" and get referral information on agencies and organizations in their area that can assist them with a health or human service issue they are facing. The Mass211 Task Force is currently working to identify a third party vendor to manage and operate the 211 system, and once contractual agreements are in place, an implementation date will be estab-

lished for "211" to become live and available to Massachusetts residents. The Acton-Boxborough United Way is pleased to support this initiative, which will fill a long unmet need in our communities.

The Immigrant Experience in Acton and Boxborough

Several ABUW Board members and staff attended a panel presentation held this past spring sponsored by Acton's No Place for Hate Committee, entitled "Who's In Your Neighborhood?" This event featured a variety of area residents, all immigrants to the community and representing various cultures, who shared their stories on why they came here and about the positive as well as the challenging experiences they have encountered. The ABUW's Community Outreach Committee plans to hold a follow up discussion forum later this year to address the challenges immigrants face, and how our social service agencies and others may work together to address those issues. Please look for more information in early fall.



Volunteers spread the word about ABUW on Fifer's Day.

Fifers Day in Boxborough

The ABUW was pleased to participate in Boxborough's annual Fifers Day event this past June, where we had a booth, balloons, and informational material available. It's always great to be present at enjoyable community events like this one. Look for us at this year's West Acton OktoberFest, which will be held on Saturday, October 1.

If you wish to make a contribution, you can make an online donation (www.abuw.org), or send a check to:

ABUW
P.O. Box 2258
Acton, MA 01720-6258

If you would like more information, contact our Executive Director, Sandy Campbell at 978-263-1777 or send an email to abuw@abuw.org.