

Zonta Club of Montgomery County
President's Report
2008-2009

For the past few years, our club's local service project has been the National Center for Children and Families (NCCF) in Bethesda, MD. NCCF's mission closely parallels our own. The center is devoted to serving homeless families, victims of domestic violence, and abused and neglected adolescents. Our members have devoted many hours to help make NCCF a model for the country, devoting time to mentor students, to paint dormitories, to plant gardens, and to help ensure happy holidays for the children by stuffing Christmas stockings with donations from our members. Our Vice President also sits on the Board of Directors of the Betty Ann Krahnke Center – a domestic violence emergency shelter providing safety for women and children.

Our activities from June 2008 to May 2009 also focused on contributing financial support and sponsorship to the following NCCF projects:

- Greentree Shelter Program – a model emergency shelter that helps homeless families recover through employment, parenting skills, budgeting, quality child care, and access to service networks, as they return to community living. Donation: holiday stockings
- Fannie Mae's "Help the Homeless Walkathon", a signature fund- raising event that raises money for nearly 170 homeless agencies including NCCF's Greentree Shelter, the Betty Ann Krahnke Center for Domestic Violence, and the Family Stabilization Program. Donation: \$1,000
- NCCF's Annual Art & Soul Auction (\$1,520) – proceeds to benefit at-risk and vulnerable youth by helping to fund the Freddie Mac Foundation Youth Activities Center to be built at the Greentree Center. The groundbreaking ceremony is scheduled this summer. Donation: \$1,520

Outstanding Achievement – A Children's Book of Poems

The achievement we are most proud of in the past year is the publication of a children's book of poems titled "Have You Ever Seen a Phloosal Fly?" In the spring of 2006, Saideh Gensheimer, a long time club member, told us that her husband, an unpublished author of humorous children's poetry, was considering donating a manuscript to NCCF. The club reviewed a selection of Charles Gensheimer's (Chuck), and heard a dramatic reading of one poem which received a standing ovation. The club immediately saw the potential for us to raise substantial funds for NCCF by selling the book for them

Then in the late spring of 2006, Clare Cumberland of our club presented the manuscript to Dr. Dr. Sheryl Brissett Chapman, the Executive Director of NCCF in response to Chuck's request to our club for assistance in having his proposal considered by NCCF.

In October, 2006, Chuck added two new, additional poems to the manuscript, and, during NCCF's 6th Annual Art and Soul Charity Auction, we presented the expanded manuscript to Dr. Chapman. Our club enthusiastically supported the proposal and again offered to sell the book for the Center.

Over the next couple of years the book project advanced and retreated in fits and starts reflecting budgetary constraints and NCCF capabilities and priorities. One challenge was that art work was needed to support the text of the poems. All parties agreed that the art work should be done by NCCF children. Children who were both talented and interested were needed. After some time, six wonderful little fourth grade artists were found in the JC Nalle Community School, one of the recipients of the profits from the sale of this book. At the school, the NCCF offers extended instructional, mental health, social and family support to elementary school students

in Ward 7, Washington, DC. The child-artists' participation in creating the book under the direction of the NCCF's volunteer art director will install in them lifetime memories of positive achievement. Not only will these children remember that they created a thing of beauty and fun. Also, all NCCF children and their parents will see and remember this example of what NCCF children and JC Nalle children and others leading lives like theirs can accomplish.

During the book project's "down time", we helped keep the project alive by frequent personal contacts with NCCF management and staff, and, more recently, by participating with NCCF in a series of planning meetings relating to the book. Finally, the only remaining challenge was printing costs. Our Club had enough faith in the book's financial and non-financial benefits that we funded the entire \$2500.00 cost for the printing of 500 books of the poems. The books are bright, colorful and very popular. The poems themselves are enjoyable for both children and adults.

In the Forward of the book, Dr. Chapman wrote: "When I was a little girl growing up, I read books to escape the challenges of family and community life...Books opened up new worlds for me.. When I met Charles J. Gensheimer, the author of *Have You Even Seen a Phloosal Fly?*, I knew immediately that I had encountered a kindred spirit." She goes on to note that the six 4th grade children from the JC Nalle School in Washington D.C., D'Asia Bando, Cierra Crawford, Mikael Mason, Keirra Thomas, Courtney Miller, and Kevonya Womack, who illustrated the book, have benefited from their work with Chuck and their volunteer art teacher Mary Freedman. Each girl was inspired to express her own visual genius and each was empowered to share in the delight of these poems. Chuck and the children came to NCCF's 8th Annual Art & Soul Auction for a book signing.

Our club will be selling the book at our fall Conference. But you can the book now from NCCF(6301Greentree Road, Bethesda, MD 20817) for \$21.50 (includes shipping cost). Proceeds benefit NCCF's JC Nalle Community School and The CARA House. T

The CARA House, founded in 1997, is a community-based collaborative therapeutic parenting education center in Ward 7 of the District of Columbia that helps prevent family involvement in the overloaded public child welfare system and fosters family permanency as well as child safety and well-being. This program teaches adults the skills necessary to nurture healthy children, provides concrete, basic resource supports, and raises community standards for effective parenting and healthy families.

The last stanza of "Have You Ever Seen a Phloosal Fly?"

*"And now you know the how and why
That Phlossals flip, that Phloosals fly,
And you can see them, too, Just try –
In you Imagination's Eye!"*

Kathleen O'Malley
President, Zonta Club of Montgomery County

District 3 Fall Conference
October 2-4, 2009, Alexandria, Virginia