



# Building a more compassionate community one person at a time

# THE BEACON

Fall/Winter 2020

A Semi-Annual Publication of Bethesda House Schenectady, Inc.

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## Welcome to the 2020 Fall/Winter edition of Bethesda House's *The Beacon*



**A**s I look at the growth of Bethesda House over the last 28 years I am in awe of the work that has been done to increase services, recruit and keep talented and qualified staff, and to see statistical data as it relates to the people we have housed, medically stabilized, and provided basic living services to.

It is no secret that community support, our outstanding volunteers, and amazing supporters are part of

the cornerstone of Bethesda House's foundation.

2020 is a year that will be remembered for it's uncertainty and the life changing events that have reshaped who we are as a society as well as in our own personal space.

I have been inspired by the dedication, selflessness, and resilience across our many programs and staff who provide the services. The work that we have done in helping clients understand the pandemic and how safety measures need to be adhered to is impressive.

Bethesda House has implemented new food programs which assist people in households that are quarantined, people who are food insecure, medically compromised, and/or referred to us to the Food is Medicine program.

We are looking forward to 2021! Our sights are focused on bringing hope to others and ***Changing Lives!***

Many Blessings for a Safe and Healthy Holiday Season,

*Kimarie A. Sheppard*

## DID YOU KNOW...

Bethesda House provided basic living needs, housing, crisis management, social work, and medical care needs to over

**5,926** unique individuals during 2019-2020



Over **21,000** food pantry meals were provided

Bethesda House's Soup Kitchen staff served over **27,000** meals



Case Managers provided over **4,000** emergency and permanent housing services



Between the Agency's permanent supportive housing programs and the two emergency shelters,

**97** people remained COVID-19 free for **159** days  
Within **245** days only one person tested COVID positive

During 2019 -2020 the Agency's Social Work staff had an average monthly case load of **50** singles with over

**4,800** contacts/interactions each month

# Celebrating Dedication to Serve

By Caroline Codd, Staff Writer

At Bethesda House, we believe everyone deserves to have a safe and happy life, and that each individual has the power to create that deserved life with the right support and effective services offered to reach their personal goals. That is why we welcome each and all who come through our doors, taking the initial steps to seek help. Their participation in their own personal change is an act of bravery, and staff work to validate their intentions without bias or judgment on who they may have been or what they may have done.

Working with the homeless and economically disadvantaged is a humbling experience as we witness the struggles and obstacles each individual faces. Staff provide support as they address the challenges ahead of them and celebrate the accomplishments achieved everyday, no matter how small. Last year, Bethesda House welcomed over 5,926 unique individuals through our doors. People come to us with stories as unique as themselves and in most cases, it is proof that we are more alike than we are different. We all want to feel safe and appreciated. We all want to feel like we belong somewhere. We all seek some meaning in our lives and no matter how downtrodden we become, we hang onto hope that tomorrow brings a better day.

At Bethesda House, we see these resilient qualities in our guests and intentionally build our team of staff and volunteers to support this resiliency. Each one of our staff members and volunteers believe in the hope of a better tomorrow for Schenectady County's chronically homeless and impoverished. This season, we celebrate two of our most committed members who exemplify these qualities, **Ellen MacNeal** and **Danny Payne**, who retired from Bethesda House to move on to the next phase in their lives.

*The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others - Gandhi*



Ellen has been with Bethesda House since we were a simple drop-in day shelter in 1992. A Capital Region native, Ellen has always been involved in her community but her work at Bethesda House proves it is never too late to make a lasting impact. At 70 years old, Ellen lost her beloved husband and came to learn about Bethesda House through an article in the paper. After a full career at GE and having traveled the world, Ellen was looking for a way to spend her time and dive into new activities. While Bethesda House grew and evolved into the fully serviced agency we are today, Ellen says the spirit of volunteering has stayed the same. "It was always about helping each other in whatever way we could," Ellen says of the early days, "we just jumped right in." Recently Ellen has been helping our food pantry initiative, finding joy in providing fresh vegetables and healthy meal options for individuals and families in need. Always ready to greet others with a smiling face and a hug, Ellen says her favorite part about volunteering for Bethesda House was meeting people. "It enriches your life when someone is in need and all they need is someone to listen." Ellen has certainly enriched countless lives of both Bethesda House guests and staff, and we will forever be grateful for her service and positivity.

*The highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them."*



Whenever Danny Payne is in the building, you can hear his laugh down the hallway. "You need a sense of humor to do this job," he says after 18 years of working for Bethesda House. After helping to build our housing program from the ground up, it's safe to say he's earned this sense of humor. Danny came to the Capital Region from Brooklyn, looking for a fresh start. He didn't know a soul but by simply being interested in other people, he made genuine connections and friends along the way. His dedication to helping others and giving everyone a "fighting chance" has made our community stronger and safer from systems designed to prioritize numbers over people. Danny has had many roles at the Agency and since October 2012 was Director of Residential Services. Danny has always been a firm believer in the *Housing First* model, which he says is initially what attracted him to Bethesda House. One of his first goals in the residential program was to make the Lighthouse program more of a home environment, creating comfortable common areas and providing nutrient dense food items so residents could make easy, healthy meals. Danny has ensured this home environment still thrives at the Lighthouse. He



has modeled the Agency's other housing programs in the same fashion. When our residents' most basic needs of food and shelter are met, they feel stable enough to start making positive changes in their lives. And the residents knew that Danny's office door was always open to them.

Working so closely with the most vulnerable, impoverished people in our community for so many years is not for the faint of heart. "You have to be in it for the people," Danny says, "I don't treat them like clients, I treat them like people." Danny Payne has worked tirelessly to shine humanity on a population that is often stigmatized and overlooked, an integral part of Bethesda House's mission to provide a just, hospitable and inclusive community rooted in and affirming the inherent dignity of every person. We are endlessly grateful for his dedication, heart and sense of humor. **And** we're not the only ones. When cleaning out his desk, Danny found a stack of thank you cards from guests and residents he has helped over the years.

Danny is thankful for his co-workers for lifting him up and making work a fun place to be, even when the work itself is challenging. After 18 years of putting others' needs before his own, he's looking forward to spending more time with his family and taking care of himself, finding joy in the simple things. Danny, we wish you all the joy and laughter in this next chapter. Thank you for providing hope to so many for a better tomorrow.

At Bethesda House, we believe in the power of the company you keep. From our staff to our volunteers to our donors and our guests, we are certainly surrounded by people worth celebrating.

## SEFA

SEFA is the State Employees Federated Appeal (SEFA). SEFA is a charitable solicitation of New York State employees. State employees may give to any of the charitable organizations that have been approved for participation in SEFA and may at any time revoke or modify a contribution made through payroll deduction by providing a written request to the employee's payroll office.

***Bethesda House usually attends the SEFA fair held at the Empire State Concourse each year, however due to COVID-19 there was no in-person fair. Each year, our participation bolsters the number of State Employees who make charitable contributions to our agency. We are deeply grateful for the generosity of the State employees who continue to have their donations dedicated to us. Thank you!***

## NEWS

### Did You Know?

Bethesda House is a partner with the Alliance for Better Health's Healthy Together. Healthy Together, connects community members with social needs such as food and housing assistance, access to transportation, help with benefits, and more - to the growing network of organizations ready and willing to help. Healthy Together links health providers of all kinds (from regional hospitals to local food pantries and everyone in between), so that basic needs, not just medical ones, are met timely and with kindness.



# Thank You to Volunteers

In a time of great unrest and uncertainty, it has become more important than ever to remember we are part of a collective. What gets us through trying times is knowing we have people around us we can trust, rely on and lean on for support and reassurance. While many of us have experienced the effects of isolation this year, it's also been a time to recognize who and what matters to us most, to honor those who stand by us in the midst of difficulties.

At Bethesda House, we are honored and proud to be a part of a collective that continues to stand up for the less fortunate in our community year after year. For 28 years, we have seen the best in those who volunteer their time and resources to upholding our mission. Our volunteers make an effort to get to know our guests as individuals, to see them as whole human beings. Many of them come in day after day to uphold our daily operations and bring the joy of service through our doors. They are our backbone and we are humbled by their generosity.

We'd like to extend a very special thank you to our long-term volunteers who have gone above and beyond to make this House of Mercy a place of acceptance, safety and understanding. Sharran Coppola, Ellen MacNeal, Randy Roeser, Patricia Roeser, John Sapone, Karen Sapone, Susan Williams, Terry Stroble, Kathleen Dunkerley, Nancy Gibelius, Thomas Schardt, Ellen Schultz, Nancy Vaccaro, Jill O'Neil, Joan Petramale, Jean Machin, June Schermerhorn, Nancy Ahola, Geraldine Mahon, Lois Hayner, Carole Merrill-Mazurek and Budd Mazurek, and Joanne Coppola are some of our longest standing volunteers.

Bethesda House Board of Directors is a voluntary Board. Since the Agency's inception, the Board is comprised of diverse, talented members from the community who embrace the Agency's mission to serve the poor. Even after a Board members term is up there is continued involvement with Bethesda House, their historical knowledge and dedication is invaluable.

They have stood by us through changes, triumphs and growing pains, through good times and bad. Each one has a unique set of talents and gifts that combined with their kind hearts and open minds have made Bethesda House and Schenectady County a better place.

As we reflect on this past year, we remember those who continue to show up time and time again. Thank you to all who have helped aid our mission and who have been a part of our collective over the past 28 years. We wouldn't be the full-service agency we are today without you. We are proud to stand by you.



## Food Security during Insecure Times: A Call for Volunteers

Bethesda House is in need of volunteers! We are specifically looking for volunteers to help with our food security efforts as demands have increased.

Volunteers would work on putting together food packages for delivery, driving our vans to deliver food packages and volunteering in one of our food pantries. As a result of this year's economic hardships, more single and family households are relying on our food resources. We believe all people deserve access to healthy, whole food options and that preventative care through a balanced diet can offset the diseases commonly found in the homeless and impoverished community. Eating healthy is an empowering form of self-care and we want to make this an accessible, affordable option for all.

This is why we have worked hard to make food security a priority in the services we offer. In addition to the daily meal we serve, we provide access to two food pantries in Schenectady County, offer a nutritional education program to our guests and residents, and strongly believe in the ideology of food as medicine. In our resident houses, we stock kitchens with healthy meal and snack options, hang flyers promoting healthy eating and living, and our staff will check in on residents to make sure they are eating well.

At Bethesda House, we understand the financial, physical, and mental barriers to making healthy eating choices. We understand the complexity and privilege of living a balanced, healthy lifestyle and we want to extend this opportunity to everyone. Physical and mental health should not be for the select few who can afford it. We believe a healthy diet is part of a comprehensive healthcare plan and incorporate this into our mission of serving the most vulnerable in Schenectady County.

We would love to have you join us in this mission. If you are interested in joining our food security efforts, please email [adminasst@bethesdahouseschenectady.org](mailto:adminasst@bethesdahouseschenectady.org). We're excited to welcome you into our family of volunteers, the pillars of this House of Mercy.

# The Power of Pause

By Caroline Codd, Staff Writer

**Pause and remember - Every single event in your life, especially the difficult lessons, have made you smarter, stronger, and wiser than you were yesterday.**

The holidays are fast approaching and many of us are wondering what they are going to look like this year.

Last year's seasonal holidays may simultaneously feel like yesterday and then another lifetime ago. Whether you'll celebrate the same family traditions or are looking for a fresh start, we can all appreciate the ways in which our lives have changed. As we enter the season known for joy and eternal hope, we may struggle to find the spiritual elements that enrich us especially this time of the year.

The holiday season always seems to be an appropriate time to take a few minutes, pause, and reflect on the gifts you have been given, the people you love and cherish and the opportunities afforded in life.

Giving gratitude with consciousness and pure intentions has been known to reduce stress and brings greater joy to celebrations. The power we receive when we pause to reflect on who has inspired us, what life experiences created opportunities to better our lives or our understanding of what is important, and in what ways will we choose to express gratitude.

Inspiration, joy, and hope are always around us, circling like a calm breeze. Waiting to breathe fresh life into us as soon as we stop, pause, and take a breath.

At Bethesda House, we have experienced different reactions to the pandemic. We have seen fear, uncertainty, disbelief and anger. Over 85% of the people we provide services to are mentally ill and many self-medicate. Staff continually meet with residents, our emergency shelter guests, and our day guests in an effort to help them to understand what is happening in the community, why public places were closed, and

in some cases still are, and why there are limitations all around us. Agency staff managed their own uneasiness and made a conscious effort to be present for our clients.

As we enter the holiday season, we wonder how can we find inspiration and move through these next few months with a clear mind and heart? If you are wondering how the season of giving is going to look during this time, it's important to remember that we all have gifts to give ~ whether it's a listening ear, a compassionate heart, a curious mind, or the precious gift of your time.

During the last 28 years, Bethesda House has been blessed with long-term and new supporters who embrace our mission, the need for social justice, and to lend a hand to the medically fragile and poor in our community.

We at Bethesda House wish you a wonderful, peaceful, and joyful holiday season.

**You are our inspiration.**

## BETHESDA HOUSE HOLIDAY WISH APPEAL

It's time for Bethesda House's Wish Appeal! Each year we compile a list of gifts for friends and supporters in the community who wish to donate. Bethesda House gratefully acknowledges the generous gifts we receive that help us support the needs of so many. The items on our Wish List reflect our day-to-day needs. Donations are accepted Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00 - 4:00 or by calling Bethesda House (518-374-7873) to make arrangements.

### Day to Day

#### Food

- Non-perishable items

#### Kitchen

- Spices, coffee and tea

#### Clothing

- Gently used items for men/women

#### Practical Shoes

#### Fall/Winter Clothing

#### New Underwear and Socks

#### Hygiene Products

- Regular and hotel size shampoo, deodorant, toothpaste, soap, razors, toothbrushes and feminine hygiene products

#### Linens

- Sheets, towels, washcloths
- Blankets

#### Seasonal

- Home Depot/Lowes Gift Card

### Adopt Our Food Pantry

A \$50 donation gives us \$200 in food products from the Regional Food Bank.

A \$100 donation gives us \$500 in food products from the Regional Food Bank.

### Adopt An Apartment

Visit [bethesdahouseschenectady.org](http://bethesdahouseschenectady.org) for details.

### Gifts that Keep on Giving

Deferred gifts to Bethesda House can have a lasting effect on our future strength & sustainability. Please give serious consideration to:

- A bequest to Bethesda House
- A donation of a life insurance policy
- A gift of appreciated asset (stock, property)



**Bethesda House of Schenectady, Inc.**  
Friends of Bethesda House/Profile Update/Gift

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Fax \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is my contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*(Please make checks payable to Bethesda House)*

Credit Card: MC    Visa    AMEX    Discover

No: \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Sec. Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a GE Employee/Retiree? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

*(Bethesda House is a GE Match Recipient)*

Would you like to learn more about volunteer opportunities at Bethesda House? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

**You can also make donations at**  
[www.bethesdahouseschenectady.org](http://www.bethesdahouseschenectady.org)

# WEATHERING THE STORM

By Caroline Codd, Staff Writer

There's no question this year has turned our world upside down. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us just how fragile our sense of security can be, something we at Bethesda House witness every day. Bethesda House has provided emergency services to the homeless and economically disadvantaged for 28 years, however with the arrival of COVID-19, we are seeing the need grow. Many in our community are one paycheck or hospital bill away from becoming homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless. There are those who are using food security programs and rent assistance programs for the first time, and access to supports such as transportation, meal delivery, day programs have either been drastically reduced or eliminated all together during this pandemic. In Schenectady County, the number of vulnerable people has increased and the critical choices that need to be made have never been a concern before now. In our community, especially, we have seen first-hand how one tragedy such as a fire, natural disaster, or sudden illness can drain families and individuals of their livelihood, making them highly susceptible to the cycle of poverty and homelessness. Since March 2020, these real-life issues have been exacerbated by the current pandemic and economic crisis. We must remain vigilant and focused in order to help the most vulnerable in our community and understand that the delivery of these services have to be adapted to the times.

Proactivity is embedded into Bethesda House's mission. Our goal is always to stop the cycle of homelessness before it begins. From day one, we took a proactive approach to safeguarding our staff, residents and guests against the COVID-19 virus. In the midst of the initial panic, Bethesda House staff acted calmly and swiftly.

Bethesda House operates an Overnight Emergency Shelter and has thirty-five permanent supportive housing beds and three transitional veterans beds. Due to the need for additional emergency shelter beds in Schenectady, the Agency partnered with the State Street Presbyterian Church and opened an eighteen-bed emergency shelter. Due to the need to keep people safe and shelter in place, the Agency modified services to ensure that all guests and residents remained safe.

We never shut down because the services Bethesda House provides is as essential as medical services needed at this time. The Social Work and Case Management staff met with guests to address housing, medical, and social determinants of health. We navigated through the early months of this pandemic implementing policies and procedures as recommended by the CDC. With temperature checks and strict mask adherence, we have been able to keep our doors open to those who need our

services now more than ever. Due to the safety protocols we put in place and the diligence of our staff, Bethesda House remained COVID-free until early August. From mid-August to current, we again are COVID free. We are extremely proud that our efforts have kept people safe.

We are deeply grateful for all our community partners and Board Members who provided support and donated critical items to help us serve the homeless and poor.

As we prepare for colder months ahead, we are faced with challenges old and new. Winter has always posed a threat for the homeless community as they seek shelter from dangerous weather conditions and increased health crises - both mental and physical.

This year feels a little different. This year, the challenges of housing the homeless population is compounded by not only a second-wave of the virus, but a significant rise in homelessness amongst those 65 and older - the demographic most vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19. Even before the pandemic, homeless cases amongst the latter half of the baby boomer generation, which has made up the majority of the homeless population over the last 30 years, were expected to triple.<sup>1</sup> As health problems increase and employment opportunities decrease for this population, they are finding themselves at heightened risk for chronic homelessness and now, COVID-19. With our strong relationships and long-term partnerships throughout Schenectady County, Bethesda House is committed to protecting these individuals with adequate shelter and care.

After 28 years of serving Schenectady's homeless population, Bethesda House has specialized in its most challenging cases. We have become a safety net for those who fall through the cracks. We've looked at the impossible and said, "There's a way to help, if not us then who?" So even as we approach new challenges and stand on the edge of uncertainty, we know for sure there is always a wider net to be cast. There is always a way to catch those before they fall off the edge or open a door where there was once a brick wall. **There is always a way.**

This winter, we are committed to taking every step necessary to protect our community. Your support is an integral part of this community and is appreciated.

We are accepting winter clothing donations, PPE, hygiene and sanitization products donations all of which will be particularly valuable to us this coming season. Your unwavering support and generosity has helped us weather many a storm. We have every confidence we can and will come out on the other side of this one together.

<sup>1</sup>Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/30/magazine/homeless-seniors-elderly.html>



**Friends up to \$100**

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Bethesda House is grateful to the individuals, congregations, businesses, and private foundations who donated from \$1 to \$10,000. Your generosity allows us to continue helping others by providing for basic needs in an environment that encourages and supports positive change.

We thank you and look forward to another successful year. Every donor is important to us. Our goal is to list each person or organization as the donor wishes. If your name does not appear as you would like it to, please contact the agency's Administration Assistant at either [adminasst@bethesdahouseschenectady.org](mailto:adminasst@bethesdahouseschenectady.org) or (518) 374-7873, ext. 116 so we may correct our records.

A very special **Thank you** to donors contributing through United Way, we are grateful that you chose to direct your donor dollars to Bethesda House of Schenectady, Inc. **Thank you** to donors who participate in the GE Match.

**Thank you** to donors who participate in Amazon Smiles, Clynk and other Hannaford fundraising initiatives.

**Your gifts of spirit and generosity are deeply appreciated.**

**In-Kind Donors:**

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Immanuel Lutheran  
Ladies of Charity Schenectady Vicarate  
Niskayuna Boy Scout Troop 34 –  
Scouting for Food  
Lane Press of Albany

Our Redeemer Lutheran  
Panera  
Price Chopper  
Rivers Casino & Resort  
Sharran A. Coppola  
St. George Episcopal Church  
St. Stephen's Episcopal Church  
St. George's of Clifton Park  
St. Kateri Tekakwitha  
St. Joseph's Catholic Church Scotia-Glenville  
Temple Gates of Heaven  
The Ladies Philoptochos Society of St.  
George Greek Orthodox Church  
Union College  
Unitarian Universalist Society  
Burnt Hills – Ballston Lake Women's Club  
Manhattan Bagel  
United States Postal Service

**Honorarium/Memorial Name:**

Elaine Ognibene	Mary Christoffel	Rick & Kathy Fink
Marianne Sheppard	Eli Krieger	Donald Kerr
Michael and Beverly Roscoe	Mr. Jack Anthony Bacchia	Anne Nolte
William and Janice Phillips	Charlene A. Perun	
Robert J. Christoffel	Ms. Clarie Racicot	

### **Bethesda House**

Is an interfaith ministry to the homeless, disabled and economically disadvantaged citizens of Schenectady County, building a just, hospitable and inclusive community one person at a time by affirming the dignity and addressing the needs of each guest entering this House of Mercy.

### **Board of Directors**

Cathy Terwilliger  
President

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Vice President

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### **Bethesda House Administration**

Kimarie A. Sheppard  
Executive Director

Leina Minakawa  
Director of Social Work

Louise O'Leary  
Director of Program and Case Management Services

Crystal Thatcher  
Director of Residential Services



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Photography by Jessica Gravelin

# FUNDRAISING

*Fundraisers are the catalysts of change*

Fundraising events have been drastically modified!

Our May Bowl for Bethesda and August Live Band events were cancelled due to COVID-19. We would like to thank several businesses who donated to our Annual **May Bowling Event**, who will be recognized, again, at our 2021 Spring Fundraiser. Thank you to: Capitaland Motors, Inc., Jones Funeral Home, Annette Guido, Repeat Business Systems, Bennett Contracting, Inc., and Frank and Sons Body Works, Inc.

This year our 10th Annual Fall Fundraiser was virtual. We began with From Our Home To Yours on October 29th featuring the band, North Side Sound and closed with An Evening with Bethesda House on November 19th featuring Joe Sinatra Kriss. We bridged the events with opportunities to purchase raffle tickets for 50/50 and a chance to win one or more of the 18 amazing baskets shown on our website.

Oh times have changed! We missed seeing everyone, hearing laughter and having great conversation. As the world around us steps into a new way of embracing life and love, it's important to breathe and think about the "good" in our lives.

### **A very special thank you to:**

Andy Farina – Bass, Paul Graves – Guitar, Kasey Hogan – Guitar, and Todd Friedman – Drums of **North Side Sound** whose musical stylings opened the 2-week fundraiser. Dancing and singing were not off limits!



**Joe Sinatra Kriss** for a special night of wonderful songs and flashbacks to **Old Blue Eyes** and the **Rat Pack** performances. Joe flew us to the moon!

**Thank you to our Event Sponsors:** COINS, Alex & Christina Dell, Kevin McCormick, Kathleen Rooney, Ellen Schultz, Stracher Roth Gilmore Architects, and Stewarts Foundation

**Thank you to our Honorary Committee Members:** Rachael Chabot, Tom Christoffel, Mr. & Mrs. Andrew Clark, Margaret Coker, Sharran Coppola, Steven and Abby Curro, Gail Desnioff, Michael Diffley, Gary & Kathleen Dunkerley, Annette Guido, Alex & Betty Hallenstein, Joan & Dick Healy, Leonard Herman, Richard & Mary Jo Homenick, Lynn Kaminsky, Ellen MacNeal, Leina Minakawa, Louise O'Leary, Randall & Patricia Roeser, John & Karen Sapone, Michael & Linda Sciocchetti, Kimarie Sheppard, John Sheppard, Terry & Anne Stroble, Cathy & Dave Terwilliger, Paula Waselauskas, Richard & Eunice Werner, Andrew & Anne Wood.

***We could not have had such a successful virtual fundraiser without Ed Biittig, videographer or the staff and Board Members for the basket donations!***

***From Our Home to Yours – THANK YOU!***