

Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network

2017 ANNUAL REPORT



(814) 454-7814

Two Neighborhood Offices:

- 425 West 18th Street, Erie PA 16502
- 436 East 26th Street, Erie PA 16503

www.SSJNN.org

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FROM THE DIRECTOR:

A year of transformation—there is no better way to describe the past year at the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network.

Transformation for me as I came to know and love the Sisters of St. Joseph's history and mission.

Transformation for the staff as they graciously welcomed me into their daily lives and work.

Transformation in our ability to carry out work right across the heart of Erie, from our new and larger Eastside headquarters at 436 East 26th

Street. Transformation in the depth of our resources for Little Italy revitalization, through increased Neighborhood Assistance Program Tax Credit partner contributions.

Transformation for our dear neighbors and our neighborhoods as we carry out the vocation to which we have been called.

In this report you will see a snapshot of our activity, stories of transformations large and small. We celebrate them all, as some are seeds just beginning to grow. Along with the remarkable and dedicated SSJNN staff, I am excited to share them with you—our strength and our supporters, through whose generosity and shared faith these stories are made possible.

With your help the SSJNN staff are making a difference and we look forward to tackling the deep needs that remain.

Heather May Caspar
Heather Caspar
Executive Director

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OUR MISSION

The Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network, sponsored by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania, provides leadership, advocates for local residents, and partners with the broader community to develop opportunities for both personal growth and neighborhood revitalization.

BECOME INVOLVED

VOLUNTEER your time and talent, individually or as a group, with our youth programs, soup kitchen, gardens, office assistance, events, committees, clean-ups and much more.

DONATE hygiene and household products, non-perishable food items, snacks for children's programs, paper products for the soup kitchen, art supplies, used bicycles and parts.

CONTRIBUTE via our website at www.ssjnn.org or by using the envelope enclosed. Consider making long-term financial plans for SSJNN and the vital neighbors and neighborhoods it serves across Erie.

ATTEND the 12th Annual Guess That Tune Gala on Saturday, April 28th, 2018 at the Bayfront Convention Center!

PERSEVERANCE AND PRIDE



Miranda is a shining star in our SSJNN 'Jammers' Youth Basketball program in Little Italy.

Miranda joined the program three years ago, not knowing a single basketball skill and without much knowledge of the game's rules, concepts or basics.

But Miranda didn't let this stop her. Pushing through her insecurities about the unfamiliar game, she has persevered and blossomed into a stand-out player. The only female starter on the team, Miranda scores, dribbles and rebounds with confidence.

She takes pride in her improvements, demonstrating increased self-esteem and leadership in helping other teammates.

EMPOWERED YOUNG WOMEN



One of our small group programs for youth this year is called "Girl Talk" and it's just for preteen young ladies.

They agreed upon rules for the group - such as respect, confidentiality, kindness and listening - and write them on the chalk board before starting each session.

Many topics are covered in this trusting and empowering group and our confidence in this program has grown right along with that of the girls themselves.

NEWLY FORGED RELATIONSHIPS

650 neighbors came together in our neighborhoods for National Night Out, an annual community-building event that promotes police-community partnerships and neighborhood camaraderie.

This night features a friendly presence from local law enforcement, as well as a meal, music, games and more. Shaking the hand of an officer, climbing aboard a fire truck, donning a sticker shaped like the sheriff's badge, these moments and more make lasting memories. Perceptions are broken down when communication and camaraderie take place.

This is our 15th year of hosting the event and its popularity is not waning in the slightest.



BARBED WIRE TO BEAUTY

A site on West 19th Street that was a dumping grounds for illegal waste and held a deserted and derelict building is being transformed into a park for all to enjoy.

Recently tangled with vegetation-choking vines and barbed wire, and only travelled daily by stray animals, the lot underwent demolition, grading of topsoil and seeding of grass. A few pieces of history such as train axles and concrete will be repurposed here, and art by Evan Everhart will also be installed.

We encourage you to take a drive past and stay tuned for springtime plantings and much more. If you see the before photos of this place on our Facebook page, you truly won't believe your eyes.



TRANSFORMATION

EXPANDING HORIZONS



Deshawn is developing a taste for growth in our SSJNN Urban Farm Project of Little Italy.

He began working in our community gardens last summer and returned this year – with the added responsibility of working the

Little Italy Farmers Market booth for the SSJNN Urban Farm Project garden at 19th and Myrtle.

He uses his sense of humor to dispel adversity and weather all that life throws his way. Deshawn loves chatting with neighbors and customers at market, and giving tours of the garden. He is even learning to love some of the vegetables he grows. We are proud of him and of the gardens he has worked in to help beautify the neighborhood.

HOPE AND HARVEST



Eight families in our Eastside neighborhood made our 22nd & Parade Streets “Seeds of Hope” garden thrive for its second year.

The families met in early spring to map out beds using square foot gardening

models, and, with the help of Master Gardener Cindy Sonnenberg, saw everything through the season from seeds to harvest.

Cindy assisted neighbors with training and planting, and kept contact with the families throughout the summer to answer questions about watering the garden beds, weeding and harvesting.



DELORES’ GARDEN BOX

We had the pleasure of meeting Delores four years ago when she planted her first raised bed in our International Flavors community garden.

You would never guess it now, but at the time she knew very little about gardening. But the bounty from that first box provided ample motive to keep her planting each season since.

Over the years she’s planted tomatoes, collard greens, carrots, lettuce, onions and corn. Delores says its been a blessing that she enjoys sharing with her family and friends, and she looks forward to starting her garden every year.



We look forward to seeing her every spring and are grateful to have Delores as our neighbor.

THE LITTLE ITALY FARMERS MARKET

There are many successes we could share from our weekly, Little Italy Farmers Market, but we can’t say it better than how a few of the regulars did in their own words:

The vendors:

“It’s a great market in the middle of the city run by people with huge hearts and a desire to help others.” “I’ll definitely be back next year.”

The customers:

“What’s not to love?” “It’s great to have healthy and fresh food so readily available!” “It’s grown right here where I live, with neighbors that have heart.” “It brings neighbors together for a good purpose.” “I appreciate this market because it’s right in the city and the generosity of the program to the elderly and the poor.”



ESSENTIAL NEEDS AND SERVICES



Basic needs were met for 1,550 walk-ins, such as assistance with food, toiletries, household products, connection to individual ministry or referral to a partnering social service agency.

Volunteer receptionists are on the front lines daily, assisting walk-ins at our front door. Many families, schools and church groups assist with the collection of items to meet basic needs of our neighbors, such as canned goods, toilet paper or diapers. Shown above with Sister Phyllis Hilbert and one such donation is Religious Education Director, Geri Hadlock, of St. Mark and Our Lady of Mercy Parishes.

POLISHED AND PROUD PROPERTIES



We know what’s on the inside matters too, but for the facade improvement projects each year, it’s the outer shell that’s making the difference.

Nine residential and four commercial properties received exterior improvements this year from the program. To achieve a greater impact this year, we set our eyes on properties along 18th Street as well as the Cherry Street corridor.

We hope you take a moment to notice these shining improvements next time you’re in the neighborhood.

CLEAN UP CREW

Our streets and alleyways are looking brighter bit by bit, but have no doubt, there is still an abundance of litter to address. So we tackle this issue in a big way.

On just one dumpster day in Little Italy more than 450 tires were collected in just a few hours by a handful of helpful individuals.

In one afternoon, 583 volunteers from our Eastside Multicultural Community, including 500 McKinley Elementary students who call that area home, 75 Mercyhurst University freshmen and 8 employees from Erie Insurance, collected over 13,774 items of litter in the neighborhood.



Providing Resources for Independence (PRI) has also been a very active group in both of our areas on the litter and beautification beats.

FULL PLATES

When hunger and food insecurity kept resurfacing as concerns from a 2000 neighborhood survey, SSJNN co-founders, Sr. Mary Herrmann and Sr. Carol Wilcox, turned to St. Paul’s Church at 16th and Walnut. They came away with 94 volunteers after their very first conversation with parishioners.

Since then, neighbors have come together every Monday for the free dinner. That’s more than 850 meals and counting. Many of the meals, as Sister Carol would frequently say, “are gourmet in quality for our neighbors.”

95 cooks and servers gave 1,176 hours this year toward this ministry. More than 4,500 hot meals filled the plates of neighbors this year.



A NEW PRESENCE FOR SSJNN



Moving into a new, much larger, office space in our Eastside neighborhood also served as a move toward helping revitalize the 400 block of East 26th Street. Increased accessibility and a new, flourishing garden have brought new life to the block.

Countless volunteers helped to make a home for our bikes, gardening tools, meeting space and more.

We would have been content with our move into such a prime location being the only good news, but making it a true win-win for both of our neighborhoods, our new site’s former tennant, Angelo’s Roofing, moved into a vacant building at 1504 Cherry and is now happily at home in Little Italy.

CLUED IN ABOUT CAREERS



We may not have a single photo to share of program director Colleen Burbules in action within McKinley Elementary and Wilson Middle Schools, but that doesn’t take away the fact that 875 unduplicated students were touched

through her teaching of career awareness curriculum at both locations, including 272 sessions at McKinley and arranging 33 professionals to participate in a speaker series at Wilson.

Colleen was finally caught on camera as she was rightfully honored as a Youth Worker of the Year through Unified Erie.



FRIENDSHIPS AND TRUST

On the City’s Eastside, the SSJ Neighborhood Network is helping to infuse friendship and trust between neighbors, one block at a time.

This summer brought more than 500 neighbors together through small and individualized block parties, focusing on neighbors living right across the street from one another within the same block. New and old neighbors alike shared a meal and came to know each other in a new and personal way – one that builds trust and inspires feelings of safety and shared responsibility for the care and keeping of the neighborhood.

This approach resulted in more individuals attending and volunteering at events, as well as point-persons being established within groups of immediate neighbors.



OWN SET OF WHEELS

Do you worry about your mode of transportation?

For many of our neighbors the answer is “yes.” But due to the bike programs operated from the Eastside neighborhood, 104 youth and neighbors in need of transportation now have their very own bikes and can put that worry behind them.

Volunteers worked two nights a week year-round, with 107 sessions held last year. And while the Pedal Mettle earn-a-bike program for youth continues, the weekly bike lab has picked up steam and has youth and adults alike scheduling appointments and learning crucial bike repairs.



CULTIVATED CULTURE AND UNITY



Twelve families of Bhutanese origin come together to cultivate the Namaste Garden at 1712 Sassafras Street in Little Italy.

Unique varieties of hot peppers, beans, greens and more serve as food for the neighbors here, but also

help to educate other cultures about these neighbors’ resourceful techniques in seed saving, making their own spices and using herbs and plants medicinally.

This year, the Namaste and three other gardens in Little Italy played host to more than 100 third-graders from Grover Cleveland Elementary School, who came to tour and learn about the purpose and produce of each location.

FLOURISHING FLOWER GARDENS



If you’ve noticed some of the flourishing streetscape in Little Italy, then you’ve noticed the work of several young adults and their mentor, Sue.

Starting with an educational trip to Potratz in the spring, the crew chose appropriate flowers for our planter benches and followed through with the watering and weeding throughout the season.

Even hearty perennials need a little TLC each year, so they also took the curb-side gardens under their wings and made 18th Street just a little brighter.

FRAMEWORK FOR RENEWAL

The Eastside Action Committee, founded in the summer of 2014, is an 18 member group of concerned neighbors, businesses, and other leaders in the community. The group, under the leadership of SSJNN, is rejuvenating the Eastside neighborhood to become economically viable, safe, healthy and welcoming.

To achieve this goal they are following the framework of the successful Pennsylvania “Elm Street” model, which our Little Italy neighborhood also follows. Discussions include neighborhood design, image and identity, neighborhood vitality, and safe, clean and green spaces. The committee members are seldom seen with their feet up, regularly helping to support block parties, National Night Out, garner donations and more.



WEST 17TH STREET GEM

Shining siding, windows and shutters upped the ante on West 17th Street this year with a rehab of a beautiful old home in the 400 block.

Finishing touches are taking place on the inside of this two-unit, and there is a waiting list of people hopeful to move in.

Affordable housing in the area continues to be a need and we are happy that this house will soon be home to two new families entering our Genesis home ownership program.



GREAT GARDENS AND GREAT WORKERS



Fourteen teens in Little Italy were hired for our work readiness program. Partnered with an adult “coach,” they dug, planted and weeded every Saturday from April to September. Several coaches were also residents of Little Italy.

For many it was their first job, and the teens’ excitement was priceless - from getting their working papers to getting their first paycheck. Ten of the fourteen were the only wage earners in their families. Five of the fourteen went on to pursue other jobs.

We are so hopeful for this program’s ability to break the cycle of poverty, provide opportunity, and teach work ethic and soft skills. We are proud of all our teens learned, and thankful for the volunteer garden coaches who kept spirits high, got soaked on rainy days, and stayed the course with these young adults.

INVALUABLE VOLUNTEERS



We can’t say it enough - our efforts are made possible due to the hundreds of volunteers who stand before, behind and beside us to achieve great deeds for our neighborhoods.

Soup kitchen cooks, servers, tutors, mentors, garden coaches, receptionists, clean-up crews, bike repair specialists, community activists, block party planners - these are just a few of the jobs that volunteers take on as they join in our daily work.

Giving a whopping total of 8,019 hours last year, 328 volunteers put the “Network” in SSJ Neighborhood Network.

THANK YOU, VOLUNTEERS!



STANDOUT WORKERS

Max was one of our teen garden workers this year, working at the 19th & Myrtle Urban Farm and the Little Italy Farmers Market.

If there was any doubt that these youth are turning into great workers, we can turn to their booth at market—a source of financial sustainability for the gardens and the work readiness program—which tripled its profits over last year.

Max now holds down two other jobs and is currently saving for a car.

Once timid and hesitant to speak up because of his Ukrainian accent, we are proud of how Max has grown into a leader, and how he helps to maintain beautiful and bountiful spots in the Little Italy neighborhood.



SAFE SPACE TO EXPLORE CREATIVITY

Each and every Wednesday after school you can find budding artists engrossed in projects at SSJNN under the direction of their steadfast volunteer teacher Mary Ann Huster.

It’s art. It’s popular, so it’s youth excitedly running up our stairs. It’s a safe space where kindness is exemplified. It’s snack time. But it’s also attention being paid, praise being given, and creative gifts being boosted.

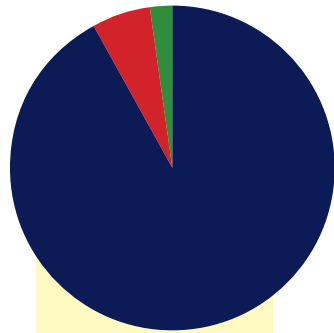
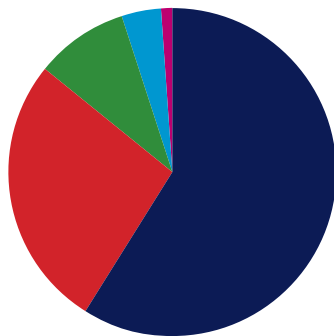
Who knows what other great works our youth will achieve if they have opportunities such as this offered to them for exploration and creative expression?



FINANCIAL REVIEW

SUPPORT AND REVENUE

SUPPORT		
Contributions & donations	426,437	59%.....Contributions/donations
Grants	197,269	27%.....Grants Income
REVENUE		
Fundraising	65,839	9%.....Fundraising Income
Rental Income	31,676	4%.....Rental Income
Interest Income	676	.1%.....Interest Income
TOTAL SUPPORT & REVENUE		721,971
EXPENSES		
Program Services	638,533	92%.....Program Expense
Management and general	39,165	6%.....Management Expense
Fundraising	15,127	2%.....Fundraising Expense
TOTAL EXPENSES		692,825



COMMUNITY COMMITMENT



Five corporate pillars supported our work to the tune of \$1,560,000 in tax credit donations for projects and programming: Highmark Health, Marquette Savings Bank, Northwest Bank, Erie Insurance and PNC Bank.

Part of a 6-year plan, our 2017 projects included blight removal, property renovation, facade grants, an artful and green bus shelter contest, surveillance cameras, urban farming, Pedal Mettle earn-a-bike program, the Little Italy Farmers’ Market, career awareness and instruction to elementary and middle school students, and LED porch lights given to neighbors in high risk areas. We are very grateful to these investors and the Neighborhood Assistance Tax Credit Program made available by the PA Dept. of Community and Economic Development, and look forward to carrying out more projects over the next 5 years.

THANK YOU DONORS!

Your support makes transformation happen:

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A TRIBUTE TO SISTER CAROL WILCOX, SSJ January 1, 1943 - July 19, 2017

With the heaviest of hearts this summer, we said farewell to one of our founders and our dear friend, Sister Carol Wilcox. Her way of living our mission and the teachable moments she showed us and so many neighbors will never be forgotten. Her spirit lives on here at the SSJ Neighborhood Network in countless ways.



"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end, they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." Lamentations 3:22-23

IN LOVING MEMORY