

ANNUAL REPORT 2012-2013

Symbols of Hope



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Our Mission Statement

The SSJ 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.



On the Cover

The front cover of our Annual Report is the mural located on the corner of 18th and Chestnut created by Steve Mik of Evolving City Murals. The mural project works with at-risk children teaching the difference between art and graffiti vandalism. The mural art program is one of the efforts working to revitalize the neighborhood.

Revitalizing a Neighborhood
Empowering its People

The theme to this year's Annual Report is Symbols of Hope. We have had many symbols this year that prove that our mission and services are providing hope and forever improving a neighborhood that 14 years ago was in great distress. The goals being accomplished can not be done without funding, faith, commitment and passionate volunteers. Funding provides us with the building blocks to make a neighborhood thrive including planting materials for our gardens, home and neighborhood improvement supplies for revitalization, educational materials for our children's programs, food and non-perishable items for our soup kitchen and pantry and the people-power that generates and supplies the energy to make positive changes. Our faith leads us in the direction to open new doors every day and to be true in our every day interactions with the community we serve. It all began with the faith of the Sisters of Saint Joseph. Your commitment to our cause and our consumers determination to rise above in extremely adverse conditions gives all of us hope that one day, our services will no longer be necessary. Without our fabulous volunteers we would not be in operation today. In the last year they have donated 5,535 hours which equates to over \$63,000 worth of time and talent. These blessings have enabled us to bring to you the Symbols of Hope you are providing to our community through your donation of time, talent and treasure.

Some highlights:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 112 children received programming | 1 housing rehabilitation underway |
| 1 new home owner (Genesis Project) | 15 people provided affordable housing |
| 24 flag banners installed on West 18th Street | 4 facade improvements completed |
| 5 urban art park benches created | 2 new murals created |
| 900 people provided advocacy and empowerment | 5000 hot meals served |
| 2 new community gardens created (total of 4) | 1 vacant lot purchased |
| 8 mothers educated through "Time Out for Moms" | 7 home repairs completed |
| 24 people attended home maintenance classes | 12 people attended the small business development classes |

Thank you for believing in our mission and helping our dreams of a better world come true. We are eternally grateful for your support and hope you enjoy seeing the symbols of hope throughout the neighborhood and in the eyes of the people living, working and operating businesses in Historic Little Italy. This year we are proud to once again display art made by the children of the SSJNN among the pages and stories that follow. Enjoy!

Sincerely,

Those you have helped and the staff of the SSJNN

WATCH OUR GARDEN GROW

What a hopeful sight to watch the SSJNN Community Gardens Grow. In the spring the plants break through the earth adding beauty to our neighborhood. Thanks to dedicated neighbors and volunteers, gardens keep popping up in Little Italy! In 2013 two new community gardens emerged – The Namaste Garden on 17th and Sassafras and the Garden Lab on 19th and Myrtle.

The Namaste garden was created for and with our Bhutanese families. This communal project provides a place for families, especially their senior members, to plant and harvest their traditional vegetables. Judge Stephanie Domitrovich and Attorney Ron Sumaraski generously donated the land. Tires For Less, the adjacent business, provides the water for the garden.

The Garden Lab is the second unique contribution to our neighborhood revitalization mission. Annie Schmidt is the creator of this learning opportunity. The garden beautifies the corner of 19th and Myrtle and provides organic vegetables for the neighborhood. This property is on loan to the SSJNN from the Erie Redevelopment Authority and a generous neighbor, Doug McCann, supplies the water.



This year we added another component to our garden experience geared to teaching children work readiness skills. This innovative project directed by Gary McEnery invited youth of the neighborhood to apply for a summer job at the International Flavors Community and the Namaste Gardens. Twenty-two (22) youth participated in a comprehensive application process. Four applicants were chosen. When interviewed, they were asked *why they wanted this job*: “Help the neighborhood stay out of trouble”, “To make me feel good about myself”, “To help my family out”, “To get some money” were among the responses. SSJNN has in a small way addressed a major need among youth. We found that when structure, boundaries, and expectations are in place good things happen. This opportunity has helped prepare the boys for what the workplace expects by teaching them the soft skills necessary for employment.

FRESH FROM THE MARKET



This year the SSJNN embarked on a project with two Erie County farmers to bring fresh produce to people living in poverty. In the spring of 2013 two farmers who are partners in a Community Supported Agriculture Program called Peace by Piece Farms, Judith Dauson and Cynthia Beck, were driving over 18th Street and noticed our community garden. They stopped and talked to Sister Phyllis about how impressed they were with the garden and told her about their dream of providing fresh produce to people living in poverty through a farmers market that would accept food stamps. Before long the planning began and in July of 2013 the market opened with a total of four vendors who set up shop on Monday evenings in conjunction with our soup kitchen. Vendors included Peace by Piece Farms, Rupp Farms, Honey House Bakery and Liz and George Farms. The market is the first community supported farmers market to accept food stamps in the City of Erie (St. Paul's installed an exterior phone line so we could use the EBT machine).

The program ran for 12 weeks and resulted in over 400 food stamp transactions totaling over \$1,500 in healthy produce purchased by low income individuals. As you know,

it is much more expensive to eat healthier. To defray cost, three companies - Country Fair, Fluid Engineering and American Hollow Boring - donated funds to match all food stamp, senior voucher and WIC voucher purchases!

In 2014 we hope to expand the market with a new concept, incorporating our community gardens with the farmers market. Families who grow in our gardens would have the opportunity to sell their produce at the market to assist in supporting their families. Gardeners will be paired with a market vendor as a mentor to teach them the ins and outs of the farmers market business including marketing, sales, and fiscal accountability.

The market was a great success and will open again in July of 2014. Even though it provides an opportunity for people receiving food stamps to shop, the market is open for everyone. If you or someone you know might want to be a vendor at the market, please call us at the number provided below. Vendors do not have to apply to accept food stamps as the market acts as the "store" which makes it much easier on those coming to sell their products. We hope to see you at the market in July on Monday evenings from 3:30 PM to 6:30 PM!

Interested vendors can call the SSJNN at 814-454-7814



WE WALK A JOURNEY



Recently an Erie Times News Reporter came to the SSJNN soup kitchen to gather some information from our neighbors. She conducted numerous interviews but I wanted to take a moment to share one that made a powerful impact upon me. She asked one of the children, Dallas (who started coming to programs at the SSJNN when she was 5 years old and is now a senior in high school) what her earliest memories of the SSJNN were. Dallas responded by telling a story about when she was a small child she had to have heart surgery and the first faces she remembers after surgery were Sister Carol Wilcox and Sister Mary Herrmann. “The Sisters came and were there when I woke up. They brought me a stuffed animal that I still have today.” At this moment Dallas’ little sister Bryeonna came over and Dallas said the Sisters help her little sister too. They have helped our whole family!

Dallas’ youngest sister Bryeonna, who is six years younger than Dallas, had trouble learning very early on. It was discovered that Bryeonna had a brain mass that was compromising her ability to read. The prognosis for Bryeonna was not good as the mass

continued to grow. At 5 years of age, she was enrolled in our tutoring program. Most of the educators working with Bryeonna thought she would not be able to read but her tutors, most recently Bobbie Wood, and Bryeonna were faithful to meeting weekly to work on reading and reading retention. Miraculously, the mass began to shrink and tutoring helped her develop the ability to read. They beat the odds! Thanks to Bobbie and Bryeonna’s hard work she is reading at nearly a fourth grade level!

Since this was around the holiday, I asked Dallas what she wanted for Christmas. She responded by looking at her little sister and saying, “I already have everything I need.” Dallas is very close to Bryeonna and attends our art shows, choir performances, etc. whenever possible. We give her the **BEST BIG SISTER AWARD!**

NEIGHBORHOOD FACE LIFT

Healthy businesses and healthy homes help create healthy neighborhoods. As we move forward in our efforts to create a healthy Historic Little Italy, the SSJNN is bringing together local businesses, government officials and other social service organizations at least twice a year to discuss shared concerns like neighborhood appearance, safety and crime, traffic and housing. The meetings keep our local businesses informed and encourage them to participate in our efforts.

One way business and property owners can participate in area improvements is through our Façade Grant Program. The program which started in 2012, offers façade grants through the Pennsylvania Elm Street Program as a way to improve the appearance of buildings. Grants pay 50% of façade improvements up to \$5,000; an equal match from the property owner is required. Improvements must be visible from the street and conform to the Secretary of the Interior's Renovation Guidelines for Historic Properties. The grant can cover the cost of new paint or siding, signs, awnings, windows and doors.

The Façade Program has been very successful over the past two years with 14 businesses and property owners funded, generating a total of \$140,923 in building improvements. SSJNN has awarded \$52,438 in grants to owners and owners have contributed \$88,485 towards the improvements. Business owners know that improving the appearance of their buildings helps retain and attract new customers and that a better looking neighborhood helps customers feel safe and welcome.

We are grateful for the nearly 300 businesses in Little Italy which serve the daily needs of residents and provide employment. Manufacturers, trucking companies, car repair shops, daycare centers, hairdressers, barbershops, restaurants, bakeries, a pharmacy and grocery store can all be found in the neighborhood. Businesses contribute money and services to the Neighborhood Network that we leverage to attract additional funding toward neighborhood improvements. This in turn encourages our businesses to stay and participate in the revitalization of Little Italy. Check out the improvements made so far! Take a drive around the area and see Ruiz's Barber Shop (18th and Cherry), Captain Ron's (18th and Chestnut), Bill Powers' rental unit (300 block of West 18th) and International Bakery (500 block of West 18th Street), just to mention a few.



FABULOUS VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT....



Standards-based, Curriculum-driven, PDE, PSSA, PASA, IEP, No Child Left Behind.

We know the lingo and praise the teachers, but we'd like to tell you a bit about one of our programs: one-on-one tutoring. It doesn't have an acronym, but it certainly has shining results.

In the art supply room, in the downstairs conference room, at the kitchen table, in a vacant office – wherever there is room enough – SSJNN is home to tutors and youth Monday through Thursday. Also reaching out from the SSJ Community Living Center are five Sisters who instruct right at their site. The sessions are once a week and at least an hour long, but the take-away goes far beyond that.

To the credit of our volunteer teachers, 10 children have been tutored and have risen in their reading grade levels this past year. One of these children has been tutored for six years and has made incredible strides. Another youth is 12 years old, and since late 2012 has risen from a first grade to a third grade reading level; he is working diligently each week toward more success.

Since the program's beginning with 4 children in 2000, 74 unduplicated children have received individualized instruction and have been helped with reading and comprehension at their appropriate grade level.

One of our volunteers, Bobbie Wood, has been involved in tutoring, mentoring, and occasionally serving at the soup kitchen for the past five years. Starting out with tutoring and then being asked to mentor, she continues to work closely with her students. Through tutoring, she believes the youth are aware of the value of education now and in their future. They also regularly discuss appropriate choices that will lead to their happiness, as well as good times and struggles of daily life. "The girls are also aware that I am active in my church and ask questions about God." Wood said both programs allow her to remain active with children in an effective one-on-one basis, which provides time to listen and respond to them individually and show an interest in their lives. Mentoring is also memorable, she added, because of its many first opportunities, "visits to museums, plays, restaurants, school activities, the Peninsula, and so many other learning experiences. Both girls are also regular visitors to our home and are aware that we consider them to be a part of our family."

Wood said she was aware of the SSJNN and their work in the community before she started volunteering and looked forward to being able to volunteer. But perhaps the spark was also in part from the past, "as a child I was educated by the SSJs and am grateful to the Sisters for their influence in my life." She said she finds volunteering to be an uplifting experience and referred to the facility as a "safe haven" for all "where children find a warm and loving environment with caring adults who develop their abilities, character, and self esteem."

She is indeed one of those caring adults. We are blessed and grateful for her presence and her efforts to impact our youth.

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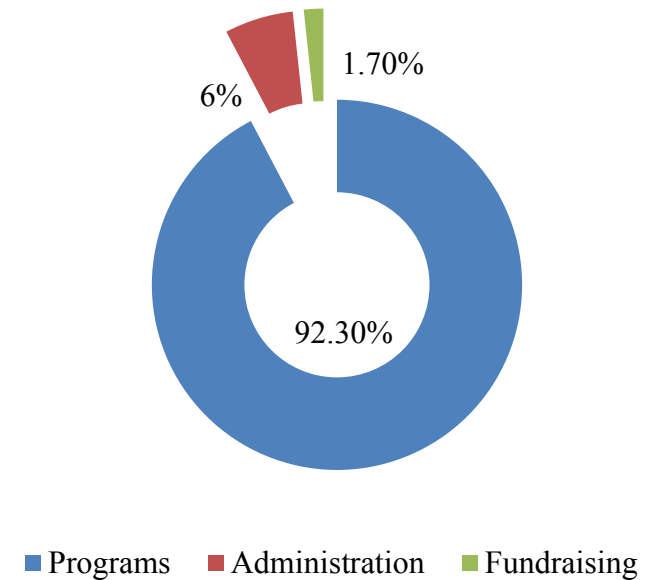
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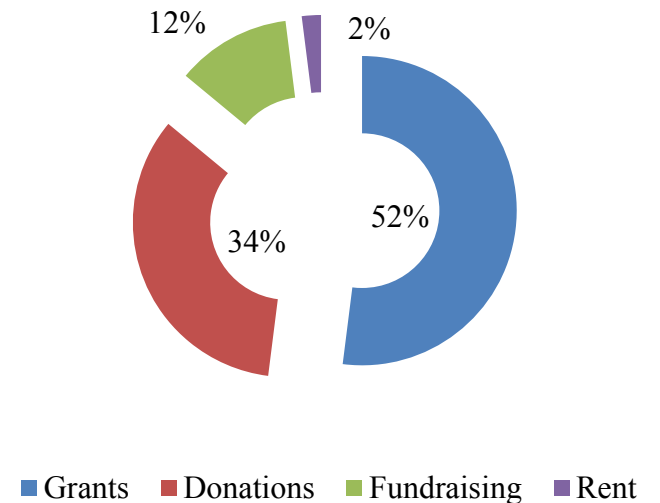
FINANCES

<u>ASSETS</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2012</u>
<u>Current Assests</u>		
Cash and cash equivalents	409,467	400,913
Grants receivable	2,309	4,000
Other receivable		1,791
Property and equipment, net	303,273	178,617
Total Assets	715,049	585,321
<u>LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</u>		
<u>Current Liabilities</u>		
Accounts Payable	8,526	9,190
Accrued payroll	7,031	4,476
Security deposit	3,870	3,600
Deferred revenue	124,538	130,098
<u>Total Liabilities</u>	<u>143,965</u>	<u>147,364</u>
<u>Net Assets</u>		
Temporarily restricted	17,498	23,409
Unrestricted:		
Designated	50,000	35,000
Undesignated	503,586	379,548
<u>Total Net Assets</u>	<u>571,084</u>	<u>585,321</u>
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	715,049	585,321

Expenses by Category



Revenue by Category



A GLIMPSE INTO THE NEXT YEAR....

As we say goodbye to the last fiscal year we look forward to wonderful goals for the next year. Below is a snapshot into some of the things, in addition to our existing services, we have on our to do list for 2014. Thank you for being a part of our journey. We are blessed to have your support as we continue our efforts to change our neighborhoods.



Install new sidewalks along 18th street from Cherry to Sassafras;

Plant grass, trees and curb gardens along West 18th Street from Cherry to Sassafras;

Complete at least 5 new facade improvements;

Develop partnership with the City of Erie for increased Community Policing initiatives ;

Expand mural art program;

Continue to expand Genesis (next purchase will be the single family home next to the SSJNN building);

Expand the Farmers Market and Community Garden programs to include a work readiness and social enterprise component;

Purchase and install a greenhouse to offer environmental education throughout the year;

Open an East Side location of the SSJ Neighborhood Network serving the area of East 26th to East 16th from Parade to Elm Streets;

Start an Earn a Bike program where children earn a bike after working 15 hours on learning bike repair and safety.

BECAUSE OF YOU.....



60 people grew what they ate & 30 children cooked what they grew



50 children created Art



16 children participated in choir



15 children improved their grades



Over 5,000 meals were served



15 people received housing services



50 children received backpacks and school supplies



21 children went to camp

These are just a few of the things you made possible through your generosity. There are many more and the people you have helped are forever grateful.



Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network
425 W 18th St Erie PA 16502

(814)454-7814
fax (814)454-7915

Visit us at our website:

www.ssjnn.org

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Please Like Us on Facebook
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How You Can Help...

Contributions - For your convenience, an envelope is enclosed or donations are accepted online at www.ssjnn.org

Volunteer - Tutor, Mentor, Soup Kitchen, Assist with office duties, Fundraising, Marketing, Participate with our other programs

Donate - Hygiene products, paper products, (i.e. laundry soap, dish soap, deodorant, paper towels, toilet paper, tissues, hand soap), non-perishable food items, paper products for the soup kitchen

Remember - Please consider making room in your long term financial plans for the future support of SSJNN

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