



Joseph turned to hope: Hope that finds a way when there is none



ANNUAL REPORT 2011-2012

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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.



Innovation Nation: On the Cover

The SSJ Neighborhood Network started a mural art program this year thanks to the support of the **The Erie Women's Fund, PNC Bank and Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority**. The front cover of our Annual Report is the mural located on the corner of 18th and Cherry. The mural project works with at-risk children teaching the difference between art and graffiti vandalism and resulted in 3 new murals in 2012. We will paint at least 4 more murals this year.

*Revitalizing a Neighborhood
Empowering its People*

Welcome 2013, Ready, Set, Go!

As we say adieu to 2012 we look forward to 2013 with the spirit of our Charism of Unity of Neighbor with Neighbor and Neighbor with God. As we reflect on the work accomplished in the last year we can think of no better “mentor” than that of Saint Joseph who God entrusted with ensuring the survival of hope. There are many themes we can connect to our namesake and the work being accomplished in Little Italy: Carpenter, Teacher, Protector, Provider, Mentor, and Believer in Hope just to mention a few.

As we reflect on our Technicolor Dream Coat of 2012 we have filled our patchwork swatches with the color of hope. The carpenter in us has created new revitalization efforts geared to preserve and rebuild. The teacher in us has provided educational and cultural opportunities for children living in poverty. The protector in us has instituted projects to ensure the safety and well being of our neighborhood. The provider in us has offered emergency services, a safe place for those in need, affordable housing and programs to welcome our New Americans. The mentor in us has offered opportunities for personal growth for children and adults. The believer in us has helped us join with our community to work towards peace.

Some highlights:

- 77 children received programming
- 2 new home owners (Genesis Project)
- 24 flag banners installed on West 18th Street
- 5 urban art park benches created
- 600 people provided advocacy and empowerment
- 14 Manufacturing Firms joined the Little Italy Business Forum
- 39 Landlords have joined the Little Italy Landlord Association
- 8 mothers educated through “Time Out for Moms”
- 1 Housing rehabilitation underway
- 15 people provided affordable housing
- 8 Facade improvements completed
- 3 new murals created
- 5000 hot meals served
- 2 Community Gardens with 26 raised beds
- 50 community gardeners!



Thank you for believing in our mission and helping our dreams of a better world come true. Throughout this publication flows artwork created by the children of the center. We hope you enjoy the blossoming talent! We are eternally grateful for your support and hope you enjoy seeing the many colors of change in Little Italy.

Sincerely,

Rose
Rose Graham
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Director

Carol
Carol Wilcox, SSJ
Program
Director

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Phyllis Hilbert, SSJ
Neighborhood Advocate
Manager

Wally
Wally Brown, SSJA
Housing Coordinator
Coordinator

Susan Moyer
Susan Moyer
Neighborhood
Manager

Gretchen Durney
Gretchen Durney
Program
Coordinator

CARPENTER.....

During the harsh months of winter in Erie, it is hard to envision going without the comforts of a home. One family who truly has lived without such amenities, and who with the help of SSJNN has recently come into home ownership – Tek and Kunti Shibakoti.

Through the Genesis Home Program, which prepares families for home ownership, both Tek and his nephew Bishnu have achieved the American dream of owning a home. The program, supervised by Wally Brown and Sr. Phyllis Hilbert, begins with a dedicated and disciplined family renting an apartment owned by SSJNN. With SSJNN's frequent mentoring and referrals of support to the GECAC Family Savings Program, Marquette Savings Bank, and HANDS, the family is assisted in setting and achieving financial savings goals. The Genesis Home Program rents to a family for one to two years. If the family decides to buy a home in Little Italy they are eligible for a \$1200 grant. Each month for one year, \$100 of the tenant's rent is placed in an escrow account which is available to those families choosing to become home owners in the area.

Tek's journey began in the refugee camps of Nepal. He said one of the main reasons for staying focused on this goal is because "I have been homeless since before this house – for the past 25 years." Looking back on his memories of the camp, Tek tells of rain coming in through the tarp acting as a roof while trying to sleep, and he now says he is thankful for the roof over his head in the U.S. "It's a dream, and my dream came true." While Tek says other refugee families he knows have viewed homes in areas such as Millcreek and Fairview, he says he picked this area "because actually we need to develop this Little Italy area...we all must make the neighborhood better." Speaking of other trying times in his life, such as caring for ill

parents, whom now reside with Tek, Kunti, and their two children, he added that he never gives up. "We shouldn't run away from the problem – we should find out how to get past the problem."

Extremely focused and hard-working, Tek explained some of his other goals, such as obtaining his GED (which he is presently studying toward), getting a better job, and having his U.S. citizenship by 2016. "But not only a citizen," he quickly adds, "a responsible citizen." He is also quick to tell with a smile, "I have no words for the support of Kunti – I really want to meet her in my next life. I can do these things and have these goals because of the moral support of her...she manages so many things at home... the bills, cooking, children."

Tek said some of his relatives and friends also want to move into the area – and he tells them of Wally "my brother", and Sister Phyllis – "They are really, really good people... Their helping hands are always open to us... And they are helping all in the area."



TEACHER.....



A Conversation between Sister Carol Wilcox and Amya, one of her long time students, Part One:

Amya interviewing Sister Carol and her responses:

What made you come here and work here? “Well, the Sisters wanted to be a presence in this area...and Sr. Mary and I volunteered to start this up. That was in 2000, and we went all around the neighborhood getting to know everyone. 2000! The same year that you were born, Amya! (a hearty laugh) That’s when we started Neighborhood Network.”

Did you guys have to pay for this? “Yes. Yes, of course. It was a house, so we remodeled, and painted and fixed rooms – all of those things you do to a house.”

Do you like spending most of your time with kids? “Yes, I love spending time with kids. I have for many years.”

What is it like when you see someone smile at you because you did something good for them? “Well, what is it like when you make someone smile? (Amya: “It makes me feel good inside.”) Yes, that’s right. It’s wonderful. It makes you feel good inside, yes.”

What has it been like to be a Sister? Did you always want to be one? “It has been a journey. I knew in 6th grade. I thought about it in 6th grade and in high school. The sisters were my teachers in Bradford. I was going to go to college, but I didn’t – I enrolled with the Sisters of Saint Joseph. ... I remember walking home with my girl friend in 6th grade and she bet me ten dollars that I wouldn’t become a sister. (Amya: What happened with the ten dollars?) (laughing) Well, nothing – I don’t know – that was a long time ago!”

Were you a good kid? “Yes. (laughing) I was a very good kid. I used to read all the time, for example I read all the Nancy Drew books, every single one of them. Also, we played outside all the time...and we did not have any TV – not any – until I was in 6th grade, and then we got one but it was black and white. And we had never heard of a computer, Nook, Kindle, iPod – we never even knew these words (Amya wide-eyed) because these things didn’t exist.”

Was college a great journey? “It was a long journey. See, we taught school first, then we went to class, and then we came home and had dinner, so it made for a long day. But that was way back in the days, as they say.”

What’s going on in your life now? “Well, lots of things, like the Time Out for Moms group, mentoring, the soup kitchen that you help at, and some other things here. But the program I had to give up here was the children’s program – because children need a lot of energy, and I don’t have the same energy of a young person.”

PROTECTOR....

Part two of a conversation between Sister Carol and Amya, Sister Carol interviewing Amya:

What makes you happy?

“Well, seeing a smile on my family’s face – seeing that they aren’t mad or angry or sad or anything – that makes me smile.

What is easiest and hardest for you in school?

“Easiest? Easiest is probably reading. Because our teacher explains it really well. And she tells us about things like refugees and immigrants, and you can read about anything that’s interesting to you. Hardest right now is math and social studies...but it depends on the year.”



What do you want to become?

“I think I’d like to become either a singer, actor, model, or teacher...maybe for kids my age or older. I thought about being a teacher because I’ve been teaching Lala (younger sister) for a long time. Like she didn’t know her colors, numbers, or shapes when she was in preschool – but now she does.”

What is someone or some thing that inspires you?

“Well, Barack Obama being elected – watching that and seeing how far he’s come – that inspires me. ... Also, Rosa Parks. (Sister: Why Rosa? Do you know what she did?) She stood up for herself, like when she had to sit in the back of the bus. I think that she was really brave – that she had courage. (Sister: Yes, she was a strong, courageous woman – and that is inspiring.)”

What is it that you like about Neighborhood Network?

“I don’t miss a day. ...I went to Trinity, but there are so many kids there, and Trinity is just different than here. Well you guys do a lot of nice things here to help me, or at Christmastime. And you guys listen, and you let us be ourselves here. Plus you guys got me that tutor for math, and Rosie, my mentor. That is pretty cool.”

What is your hope for the future?

“I hope that I don’t lose any more people in my life.” (Amya talks about her uncle who died suddenly in the fall, and others.)

What’s going on in your life now?

“Well I’m just trying to get through school this year...so I can get to middle school and so I can graduate from high school. (Sister: Yes, to graduate! That’s your goal. ...But remember that each and every day is a gift – so don’t just try to get through the day, Amya – each day is a present.)”

MENTOR...

TABBY'S WAY.....

Anyone who has interacted with sixth-grader Tabby at SSJNN is familiar with her positive attitude and unwavering good manners. With poise and vocabulary beyond her years she describes how her own experiences have taught her about kindness and standing up for others.

About two years ago Tabby and her brother started coming to SSJNN because they saw the community garden and wanted to get involved. But since then she has become a part of several after school programs “because I like to know a lot of people and this helps me with that,” she said. “And I like to see how a lot of personalities can come into one place and not be judged.”

Judgment, is something that has been all too familiar to her at school. “Last year I was bullied a lot by this one group of girls. It wasn’t until this year that I got to liking school.” Now Tabby says that she and her friends stand up for themselves and others at school. “It really hurts me to see others being picked on because I know what they’re going through and I didn’t like it one bit.” Now, she said, “We don’t keep it a secret anymore. We stand up for ourselves. We tell adults about things and tell bullies to stop it.”

Tabby said middle school is “so much different than what you see on TV or read in books.” As for the shyness that she said bullies brought on her because of how she looked, she has replaced it with kindness in her words and actions. “When you’re kind to someone it can boost their self-esteem – which is something people want – no, something people need to have.”

In school and in the neighborhood, this young lady is exemplary to others with her kindness and respect. “We’re all human beings and all here together – to help each other out – not work against each other.”



PROVIDER.....



Volunteer Spotlight

As you walk through the year with us hopefully you have noticed the beautiful artwork throughout this annual report. These wonderful pieces of work would not be possible without our dedicated artist in residence, Mary Ann Huster. Every Wednesday Mary Ann provides art lessons for 15 to 20 children. This program has become a favorite of the children in the neighborhood as they learn to express themselves in positive and productive ways.

Here at the SSJNN we see life lessons of children in poverty through their artwork. An example of this was no more prevalent than when we asked the children to create a work of art for the cover of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of NW PA's Christmas card this year. We gave the children several themes, one being the nativity scene, phrased the Birth of Jesus. Six of the children chose this theme and five of the children drew a nativity scene without Joseph. A telling reflection of their own lives. Our art classes not only provide an outpouring of artistic talent taught by a super creative teacher, but also an experience of lessons in life. Our children learn about culture and we gain an understanding about the needs of the children in our community based on their exports of life through art.

We and the children are very thankful that she has chosen to donate her time and talent to the SSJNN.

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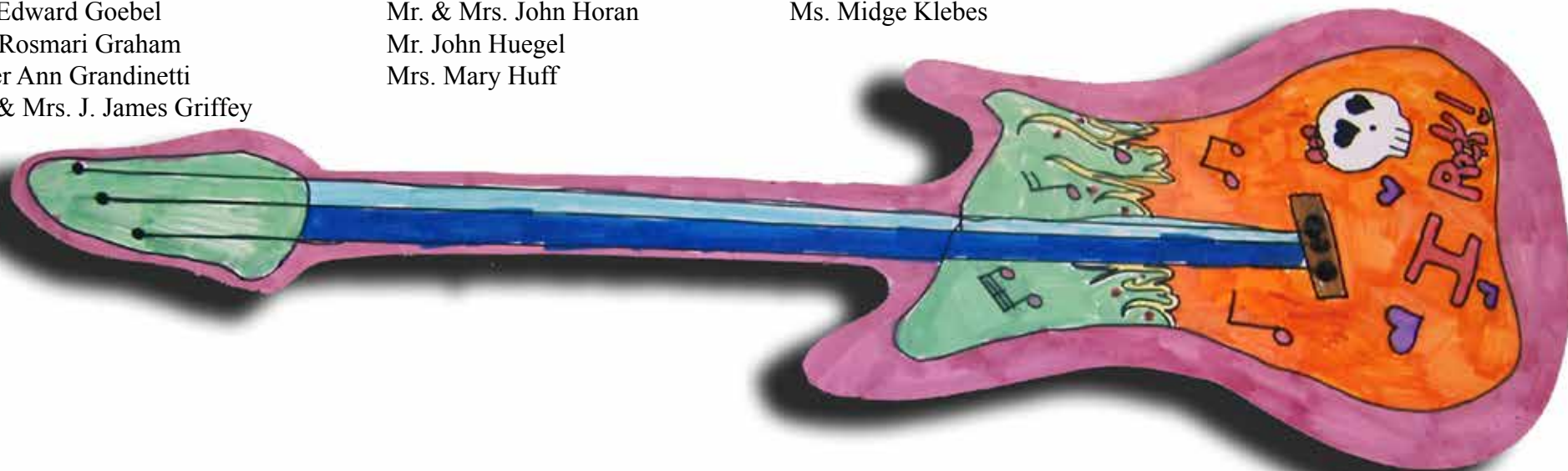


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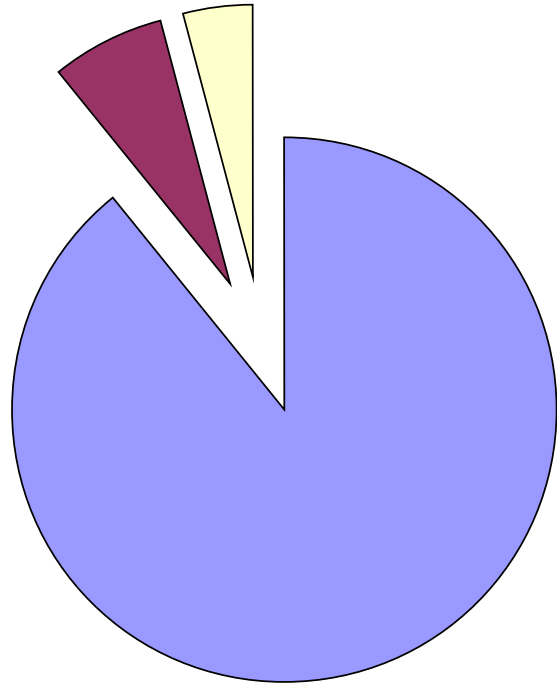
REVITALIZE....

Remember the days when you would walk down the streets in your neighborhood and along the way you would see countless neighbors that you considered your extended family? On our block, not too far from what we constitute as Little Italy, people in the neighborhood felt as if we were living on a 6 block island in the middle of the City of Erie. As a child you could not get away with even the slightest misbehavior without it being reported back to your parents by your neighborhood family. The moral of the story is our parents did have eyes in the back of their heads, they were the 100 pairs of eyes in a neighborhood that cared about their people, lawn, home, environment and most importantly their children. It is not so different today in the Little Italy neighborhood. The SSJNN is working to restore that feeling of what constitutes a vibrant neighborhood.

Although we will never restore Little Italy to an identical reproduction of what it was, we are making progress at creating a place once again that has the feel of that old time neighborhood. Creating a neighborhood involves many aspects including safety, housing, good neighbors, education, image and industry. We will continue our work on all of these aspects and hopefully inspire others to take pride in the City of Erie to create thriving neighborhoods. We hope that you have liked the changes over the last year. There is no better way to show some of those changes than in pictures. Little Italy is a transformation in process. This transformation over the past year is directly related to financial assistance from our Neighborhood Partnership Program donors: Eriez Magnetics, Northwest Savings Bank and Saint Vincent Health System and our Neighborhood Assistance Program donors: Marquette Savings Bank, Berry Plastics, Reddog Industries and Saint Vincent Health System.

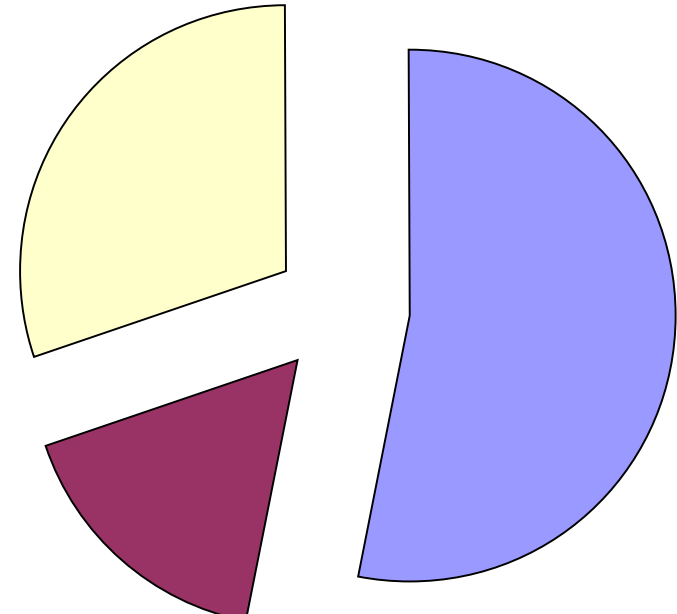


Expenses by Percentage



- 89% Programs and Services
- 7% Fundraising
- 4% Administration

Revenue by Percentage



- 53% Donations
- 30% Fundraising
- 17% Rental Income

** Revenue Sources: Grants are included in Fundraising, NPP and NAP tax credit donations are included in Donations.
Total operating budget for 2012 = \$585,321, a 40% increase from 2011 due to NAP and NPP tax credit programs.



Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network

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Visit us at our website:

www.ssjnn.org

OR

Please Like Us on Facebook

SSJ Neighborhood Network

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. **diapers**, toilet paper, tissues), 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

Please let us know if you have a change of address, if you would like to receive our newsletter; if you are receiving more than one newsletter; or if you would like to be taken off the mailing list.

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