



MercyLink

connecting the MercyFirst Community

Spring 2017

Message from the CEO: *Enriched by Our History*

The last few months have been quite emotional for us at MercyFirst. We spent much time focused on leaving Angel Guardian, a place we have called home since 1899. Built as an orphanage, the buildings, convent and grounds take up a whole city block in Dyker Heights, Brooklyn. Over these many years, Angel Guardian cared for thousands of children at this site. Throughout the 1950's and 60's, Angel Guardian oversaw all the adoptions in the Brooklyn Diocese that included children in foster care, as well as international adoptions. The international adoptions came out of the economic chaos that followed World War II and in some cases because of the shame placed by society on single women getting pregnant during those times. Eventually, most children were cared for by foster families in the community rather than in an orphanage. However, a nursery was briefly reopened to care for newborns in the 1980's in response to the crack epidemic that was a scourge in NYC during those difficult years. Since then, no children have lived here as it served as the main office for our Family Foster Care program.

One farewell event was hosted by the Sisters of Mercy for members of their community who worked at Angel Guardian over the years. We hosted a gathering for staff who used to work here, and one for adoptive parents and children, now adults, who were adopted through Angel Guardian. Lastly, we hosted a farewell event for current foster parents and our foster children as well.



The baby in this photo from the 1960s was the 1,000th baby adopted from Angel Guardian Home. Posing with the new parents is Sister Mary Paul Lafferty, RSM, then director of adoption services.

I was unprepared for how these various farewell events affected me. The stories that were told by parents were overwhelming. They talked about the day they came to Angel Guardian for the child they were going to adopt and take home. Others remembered how they walked up the front steps to meet Sr. Mary Paul who oversaw adoptions or when the baby was first placed in their arms. Mothers and fathers cried as they spoke. Their child, now an adult, wept as they listened. I choked up during each story I heard.

In planning our move to new offices, we do not want to forget our roots and the place that we and so many others called home for almost 120 years. It is expected that the buildings will be renovated for a new use, hopefully senior housing. This refurbishing will give Angel Guardian Campus a new start and a new purpose. However, no matter what happens to the

buildings, the stories will live on. The lives that were saved and changed will live on. MercyFirst will live on enriched by the history and spirit of Angel Guardian. We hope everyone who has been touched by Angel Guardian will stay with us as this journey continues!

- Jerry McCaffery, President/CEO

Save the Date

Monday, May 15, 2017

Spring Golf Outing
Tam O'Shanter Club & The Creek

Thursday, June 22, 2017

The Daniel & Virginia McCarthy
Scholarship Dinner
Brooklyn Botanic Garden

Recent Grants

FSC Foundation, \$3,000
Bridges to the Future

Human Service Council, \$10,000
Research Project

Celebration of the 117 year old history of Angel Guardian

This spring will mark a significant change in the history of MercyFirst. After 117 years the doors at Angel Guardian Campus will be closing. The Sisters of Mercy of the Mid-Atlantic Region have made a major decision to sell the Angel Guardian Campus. The age and condition of the buildings have become too much to maintain thus forcing them to make a very difficult decision. The building and the grounds are filled with stories and memories of the thousands of children who resided here over these many years, as well as all the sisters and staff who cared for them during that time.

How do you say goodbye to an icon of the agency? Well, we gathered together a committee of staff and began planning and hosting a series of celebrations that would allow all of our constituents to come together to reminisce and to tell the stories.

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October 22, 2016, seventy Sisters of Mercy who had spent time working at Angel Guardian gathered in the Sheila Pelan Board Room for a prayer experience entitled "These Hallowed Halls Remembering and Giving Thanks". Through song and stories we remembered the giants of Angel Guardian's history, Sisters Mary Madeline, S. Margaret Mary, S. Mary Majella, S. Mary Francene, and Sheila Pelan all former directors who weathered the ups and downs of leading a not for profit agency through turbulent times.

Sister Mary Corita told the story of the night long ago when a neighbor called and told her that she heard a baby crying. Sr. Corita went out to the gate and discovered a nine month old baby boy crying and took him in. S. Sharon Kelly told the story of her adoption and then her mother and father had six children after her. When she became a Sister of Mercy many years later she rededicated herself on the same Blessed Mother altar where her Mother and Father had dedicated her when she was placed with them. Despite the wind and the rain that day the building was filled with sunshine, love and much gratitude and pride in the Mission that was accomplished.



Foster/Adoptive parents, Mr. and Mrs. Snee hold photos from the 1970's of them and their daughter at Angel Guardian.

and their children knelt at the Blessed Mother altar and thanked God for the blessings they had received. Many a tear was shed but above all there was laughter and joy.

On November 18th the present MercyFirst staff came together as usual to celebrate Thanksgiving as we do every year. Our last Thanksgiving celebration at Angel Guardian Campus however was special because the Pot-Luck lunch was replaced with a sumptuous luncheon which included everyone's favorite dishes. There was prayer, much and much laughter and stories but most of all there was thanks. Thanks to the present staff for all the hard work they do and all the great things that they accomplish every day in the name of Mercy.



Jerry McCaffery, MercyFirst CEO, with the two former Angel Guardian Home Executive Directors, Sr. Francine Horan (left), Mrs. Sheila Pelan (right) at the Staff Reunion.



Many Sisters of Mercy have worked at Angel Guardian Home over the years and were in attendance at the farewell event.

November 5th over 131 adoptees and adoptive parents revisited Angel Guardian Home and shared their very poignant memories and stories and tour the grounds and took pictures in the chapel and with the Angel in the Garden. One gentleman shared this reflection with S. Maureen King. He recalled, "I never felt sad about being adopted until I held my own son and thought, who had held me!" S. Maureen assured him that the Sisters had held him and loved him. A woman who had been adopted told the story of finding her birth family but not before her birth mother had died. When she met her birth brothers and sisters they were overjoyed and welcomed her with great love. They said to her, "You look just like mom." She was looking forward to spending Thanksgiving with them. Mothers and Fathers



Meet Oreo, adopted from Angel Guardian 11/5/16...While taking a tour of the grounds visitors found a kitten in the grass. Jackie, who was herself adopted from Angel Guardian, decided to adopt this kitten and give him a new home!

Over 120 former staff gathered together to say farewell to Angel Guardian on December 2nd. The Agency was decorated in all its Christmas finery including the Tree with the pictures of present and former staff and clients which in itself told a story. There was a formal program planned but it became unnecessary as the warmth and love and friendships that had grown through the years took over. It truly was an expression of the great sense of community that bonded staff here all through the years. There was food and libations but the most important ingredient that made that night so special was the comradery and great love of the staff for each other and for the mission that they accomplished working here.

Last but not least, we had a very special Christmas Party with the children and families on December 17th. Santa was the special visitor at this event which was sponsored by the Jack and Jill Group who treat us every year. The day was complete with great food and treats prepared by our own Jennifer Blafford who provided the food for most of our celebrations as well as three individually wrapped gifts for each child. Christmas Carols filled the reception area as the children received their presents from Santa.

This time next year we will be in our new location but no one who worked at the Angel Guardian Campus will ever forget the Farewell Tour and the building we loved so well.

“Beautiful Me”

Through the Hance Family Foundation MercyFirst has provided the “Beautiful Me” program to girls in our residential programs. “Beautiful Me” is a self-esteem program designed to educate females by promoting appreciation for their genuine qualities, accurate self-awareness, and the satisfaction of helping others. In 2016 we completed workshop sessions for three separate groups of girls and have trained five facilitators to run workshops under the guidance of the Beautiful Me consultants. The Hance Family Foundation was started by the family following the tragic loss of their three girls in a wrong-way crash on the Taconic parkway in 2009.

“Partnering with the Hance Family Foundation has been a wonderful experience for MercyFirst. Through the workshops, our girls have been able to learn both how to recognize what is beautiful about them and also how amazing it feels to have their peers identify what they see as beautiful about each person in the group. Staff have also been able to participate in the workshop and found the experience to be powerful. We hope to continue to expand our partnership with the Hance Family Foundation to the group homes in the coming year,” Erica Mattar, MercyFirst Director of Campus Programs.



Catherine's Corner

Wishing you a happy and peace-filled 2017.

Ancient Gaelic Blessing

*Deep peace of the running wave to you
Deep peace of the flowing air to you
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you
Deep peace of the shining stars to you
Deep peace of the gentle night to you
Moon and stars pour their healing light on you
Deep peace of the God of Peace to you*

Peace and Blessings!

Sister Maureen King RSM
VP of Mission Integration

Annual Polar Bear Plunge!

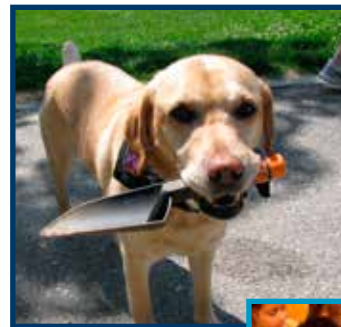
The Polar bear Plunge has grown again this year raising over \$24,000! MercyFirst Board Chair, Scott Gildea, and Yves Maco (husband of Board Member Rhonda Maco) again took the plunge in Coney Island. This year Scott recruited 2 more partners, MercyFirst Staff member Kerri Sneden and her sister Taylor Garner.



**Thank you to
Scott, Yves,
Kerri and
Taylor for
taking the
plunge for
MercyFirst!**

Remembering Sassy

On New Years Eve, MercyFirst lost Sassy, a beloved member of our Therapy Dog family. Sassy had been serving as a therapy dog at MercyFirst for the past 6 years and has truly been the heart and soul of the dog program. Sassy was beloved by the kids and staff at MercyFirst and her presence on the Syosset campus will be deeply missed.



*If you want to help support our dog program,
Project C.A.R.E., contact Kerri Sneden,
ksneden@mercyfirst.org or 516.921.0808 x 1114.*

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR HOLIDAY DONORS



An amazing holiday breakfast was hosted by Freedom Fellowship of Christ and gifts were given by the Village School PTA. (below)



Progressive Insurance hosted a holiday toy drive for our teens. (right)



Seaford High School delivered tons of holiday toys. (above)



Donation from Elisa Viesta & Co., Marine Corp and Charities for Charities (below)



James Biello Associates filled gift boxes for 40 youth at MercyFirst. (right)



Southwoods Middle School, Syosset, NY, hosted a holiday food drive to help MercyFirst families. (above)

INDIVIDUALS

Mr. Jim Abbott
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 Ms. Liz Wren
 Sister Georgette Zalewska



Our Friends at Kimco sponsored 40 teens this holiday season. (above)

GEICO and Law Offices of Printz & Goldstein collected gifts for over 150 kids through their Annual Holiday Toy Drive. (below)



The Triumphant Church of God hosted a Toy Drive for our Brooklyn location. (above)



Staff at Northwell Health Ambulatory Services organized another wonderful donation this season. They sponsored 9 MercyFirst families; getting gifts for everyone in the family! (left)



Andrea Clifford and Robin Miller hosted "The Circle" party with over 50 local families who sponsored a group of residents. (left)

Our friends at Hicksville CYO provided us with toys for our kids. (below)



Our friends at Merrill Lynch sponsored a toy drive for youth of all ages! (above)



The Castiglio family made a tremendous donation for our youth in memory of Jason Pugliese.



ORGANIZATIONS

AP Willits Elementary School
 Apostles of the Sacred Heart
 Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
 BP Mechanical Corp.
 Breezey Bikers
 Casella Construction Corporation
 Catholic Youth Organization
 Columbiettes/Leisure Club
 Divorced or Separated Catholics of Long Island, Inc.
 Elisa Viesta & Co.
 Flatlands Lions Club
 Freedom Fellowship of Christ
 Friends of the Long Island Railroad
 GEICO Insurance
 Indigo Murphy's Bar and Grill
 James G. Bilello & Associates
 Kimco Corporation
 Knights of Columbus & Columbiettes
 Law Office of Printz & Goldstein

Local 342
 Marine Corps League Brooklyn
 Merrill Lynch Private Client Group
 Molloy College
 Northwell Health Ambulatory Services
 NYC Fire Department
 P.S. 104/Fort Hamilton School
 P.S. 176
 P.S. 195/The Manhattan Beach School
 P.S.204
 Progressive Insurance
 Quinn & Co., of NY
 ROK Health and Fitness
 Seaford High School
 South Woods Middle School
 St. Bernard's Roman Catholic Church
 St. Luke's Roman Catholic Church
 St. Mark's Catholic Academy
 St. Simon & Jude RC Church
 The Circle
 Theodore Roosevelt Elementary School
 Tony Tots Express
 Travel Quest, Inc.

UFW Local 342
 US Customs and Border Protection
 Van Westerhout Cittadini - Molesi Club
 Victoria Loconsolo Foundation Inc.
 Village Elementary School
 Vox International Corporation
 Wheatly School
 Xaverian High School Confirmation Program
 Zurich American Insurance Group

To find out how you can donate to MercyFirst contact, Kerri Sneden at 516.921.0808 x 114 or email ksneden@mercyfirst.org





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Brooklyn Campus
6301 Twelfth Avenue
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MercyFirst Welcomes New Board Members



Susan Lee is a self employed Development Consultant working with small nonprofits to strategize on fundraising methods. Lee also serves as a board member for the Nomi Network and volunteers at Covenant House, Catch a Lift Fund and is a Charity Marathon Runner. Lee lives in Brooklyn with her husband Benji.



Ken Male is the Senior Vice President and General Manager of TechTarget in Newton, MA. Male also serves as a board member for the Magil Theatre Company and Foundation for Children. Male resides in New York City with his wife Erica and their daughter.



Elizabeth Venuti is an Associate Professor of Accounting at Hofstra University. Venuti is also involved with St. Dominic Parish in Oyster Bay, St. Francis Hospital Foundation, Grenville Baker Boys and Girls Club, Island Harvest and the Nassau Country Club. Venuti lives in Mill Neck on Long Island with her husband Michael and their children. Ms. Venuti previously volunteered as a Mentor at MercyFirst.