

# CC Works

Volume 12 Number 2

*A Catholic Charities Quarterly Committed To Active Witness*

## Sister Maureen's Message



We could not exist without our volunteers, our partners in implementing the mission of Catholic Charities. These friends are our board members, our lay collaborators,

and our youth who are interested in learning more about the social teaching of the church and putting that teaching into action in their community. This issue illustrates a number of examples of how blessed we are to have our volunteers.

Our newly arrived refugees were welcomed to our area by our faith group partners who have volunteered to "adopt" a refugee family. Their willingness to journey with our new neighbors is at the core of this new and very exciting program. Other stories highlight volunteers in our income tax assistance program, a young man from Delhi who is working with our agency to fight hunger, and students from St. Teresa's who joined us to better understand and respond to the root causes of poverty.

For all of us at Catholic Charities we join the message of our lead article in thanking John Steele for his years of service and commitment to Catholic Charities. John has been that partner who lived out the mission on a daily basis and has had a profound effect upon the community in Schenectady. John has been a mentor, a friend and a leader to many within the system of Catholic Charities and he will be missed.

I encourage you to read all the articles in this newsletter as they will give you insight to our services and may even call you to join us by volunteering at your local Catholic Charities agency.

Sister Maureen Joyce, RSM  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Catholic Charities, the Diocese of Albany

## Thank you, John Steele

Talk about staying power, it would be hard to beat the longevity and achievements of John Steele, Executive Director of Catholic Charities of Schenectady County!

John began his work with Catholic Charities back in 1968 while still in graduate school. He rose through the ranks to become the head of the agency, a position he has held for an incredible 34 years.

He began as a part-time social worker with Albany Catholic Charities, and considered

moving on to possible employment with the state, the county or, perhaps, to open a private practice. But when it came down to making a decision, "I really became interested in carrying out the mission of Catholic Charities," he said.

During his early career he did just about everything for the agency, family counseling, marriage counseling, working with unwed mothers, case management for low income families, and many other such assignments.

In very short order his organizational and leadership skills were demonstrated in operating a newly created drop-in center for teenagers on Quail Street in Albany – the Ozanam Center.

Under the leadership of the late Sister Serena Branson, John became an integral part of the growth and development of Catholic Charities during the 1970s. A nutrition program for the elderly that he began in 1978 by serving about 10 individuals currently provides home delivered meals on a daily basis to an average of 450 seniors.

Among the other programs developed under his leadership were a transportation service for the elderly, meal sites, and a model daycare for those who are too frail or suffer from dementia or Alzheimer's disease. He has also collaborated and partnered with a number of other agencies, both public and private, enabling Schenectady County Catholic Charities to address the emergency needs of people throughout the community.

Today Schenectady Catholic Charities serves, on average, about 5,000 individuals per year with a wide variety of programs, most of which were initiated, developed or enhanced under John's leadership. "We've built a strong base of services," he said.

John and his achievements have had a strong positive impact on his colleagues. John A. Nasso, executive director of neighboring Catholic Charities of Fulton and Montgomery Counties, said he has relied on John as a friend and mentor for 20 years, seeking his advice through phone calls, emails, breakfast meetings and side conversations at other gatherings. "John was always helpful and insightful. His understanding of programmatic issues, personnel issues, building a board of directors, maintaining good relations within the community and knowing how to sustain

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**John Steele with his wife, Bernadette**

## Fran McCaffery

Fran McCaffery is a native of Philadelphia. He and his wife Margaret have four children – Connor 10, Patrick 9, Marit 6 and Jack 2. Fran is currently the Head Coach of the Champion Siena College Saints Men's Basketball team. Under his leadership, they have distinguished themselves by twice becoming defending MAAC champions. No small feat. Congratulations!

Fran is in his third year on the Board of Trustees of Catholic Charities. He enjoys his association with other Board members and has come to understand the magnitude of what the Board does. He believes Sister Maureen Joyce, CEO of Catholic Charities, has assembled a phenomenal group of people who work to see that its mission is accomplished.

His role on the Board, has been determined by the question: What can I do for the Board? As a member, he tries to raise awareness regarding the work of Catholic Charities, shares his expertise and engages in publicity and fundraising. A recent event that greatly impressed him was his participation with L. Lloyd Stewart, Executive Director of Catholic Charities of Rensselaer County, in sponsoring basketball clinics for underprivileged kids. Their enthusiasm was contagious and they were overjoyed when each participant received a new basketball. As they were leaving, one youngster was asked if he was going to continue to practice. His response was: "I can, now that I have my own ball." It was a good day.

As for the future, Fran hopes that Catholic Charities will be able to continue their programs for those most in need of assistance. "Frequently, these are the first to be cut when we experience hard economic times, as we do now. We must continue to find creative ways to stretch our money so no one will be denied life's basic necessities."

By Sister Nola Brunner

## Refugees Arrive in the Capital Region

After months of preparation, Catholic Charities welcomed its first refugees in early March. The refugees, three single Iraq men, were greeted at the airport by Catholic Charities Housing staff and members of the First Unitarian Society of Schenectady, who are helping to get them established in the community.

They are the first of an expected 60 refugees that Catholic Charities will welcome in 2009 as a new resettlement site through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Most of this year's refugees are expected to come from Iraq.

Catholic Charities Staff are now awaiting the arrival of 10 families, most of whom fled the violence in Iraq and are now living temporarily in Jordan, Turkey, Egypt and Syria. One family will be coming directly from Baghdad.

Refugees by definition are persons who have been persecuted or have a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Each refugee is screened and approved for resettlement through the offices of the U.S. government. They are legally eligible to work here and to receive social service benefits such as Medicaid and Food Stamps.

Catholic Charities Housing case managers are responsible for finding the refugees housing, enrolling them in social services and English-language classes and helping them gain employment.

Several faith groups, in addition to the Schenectady Unitarians, have stepped up to assist with the resettlement process by agreeing to "adopt" a refugee family or a group of single refugees in some way. They include Niskayuna Reformed Church, the Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany, the Black Catholic Apostolate/St. Joan of Arc/Sacred Heart Parishes in Menands/North Albany, Eastern Parkway and Faith United Methodist Churches in Schenectady and St. Madeleine Sophie Parish in Guilderland.

*Continued on next page*



Mokaya Bosire, along with members of the First Unitarian Society of Schenectady, greets three Iraqi refugees at the Albany County airport

## CC of Delaware & Otsego Counties

Jacob Pucci, a student at Delhi Central School in Delaware County, and a parishioner of St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church Parish in Delhi, New York, is working with Catholic Charities of Delaware and Otsego Counties to fight rural hunger. When he first met with the local Executive Director of Catholic Charities, Kathie Greenblatt, Jacob wanted to learn about the particular challenges of addressing rural hunger. As his Eagle Scout Project, he is raising funds to purchase foods, and to prepare individual boxes of food for the hungry in Delaware County, where more than 13 percent of area residents live below the poverty guidelines.

Each box of nutritious, non perishable food will feed one person for three days, and will cost \$17 to fill. A unique feature of these food boxes is that none of the components will need to be cooked. A person who is homeless, or living in a motel room or tent, may not be able to access the means of cooking or refrigerating meals. Jacob's plan is to include a can opener and other resource materials in each box of food. Scouts from Delhi will help to assemble the boxes. If you wish to make a contribution to Jacob's project please send checks to Jacob Pucci Project – Catholic Charities, 176 Main Street, Oneonta, New York 13820.



**Mustaf, Walid and Salam enjoy their first meal in their new apartment in Schenectady**

These faith groups are collecting furniture and household goods for "their" family. Some also are raising funds to cover the refugees' initial expenses, readying apartments, and coordinating drivers and English-language tutors. Others are preparing to greet refugees when they arrive at the Albany airport and to host social gatherings, designed to help refugees can meet one another and their new American neighbors.

In addition, several members of the Islamic Center of the Capital District have volunteered to serve as Arabic interpreters for the refugees.

The interfaith, multicultural nature of the project was in clear evidence at a welcome potluck for the first refugees. There, the refugees mingled with interpreters from Iraq and Egypt, Schenectady Unitarians and members of Al Fatimah mosque in Colonie who had immigrated from Pakistan, Tunisia and other parts of the Muslim world.

Catholic Charities is currently seeking other faith groups interested in participating in this project. Also sought are mental health providers with experience in treating trauma, and mentors for refugees hoping to resume their professional careers in the U.S.

In addition Catholic Charities is engaged in the process of developing a network of landlords to work with in providing safe, affordable housing for refugees in the cities of Albany, Schenectady and Troy. Staff also are reaching out to employers asking them to match their workforce needs with the refugees' skills and experiences.

For more information about the program or to learn how you can get involved with refugee resettlement efforts as a faith group or service provider, contact Sister Marianne Comfort at 453-6650 or [marianne.comfort@rcda.org](mailto:marianne.comfort@rcda.org). If you are a landlord or employer, please contact Mokaya Bosire at 434-3531 or [DirectorESD@nycap.rr.com](mailto:DirectorESD@nycap.rr.com).

**By Sister Marianne Comfort**

**Catholic Charities of Saratoga, Warren & Washington Counties received a \$20,000 grant from Bank of America to work with families in the north country who are engaged in clinical or Domestic Violence services to attain self sufficiency**

**CCSWW also received a \$10,000 grant from the Phyllis E. Dake Foundation for the Saratoga Mentoring Program.**



**Jake and Kathy ready boxes to help address rural hunger in Delaware County**

## Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program

For those of limited income, making every penny count is a constant way of life. When it comes to income tax time, it's even more critical. Commercial tax preparers offer access to a quick refund, but at a high cost to those of limited means. As a means of helping people who are in need of assistance in preparing their tax returns, Catholic Charities participates in the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program was begun by the federal Internal Revenue Service (IRS) for those with incomes of less than \$42,000.

Training for those interested in volunteering to assist in the VITA Program is provided by CASH Coalition, United Way and AARP. Some high school and college students also assist with the VITA Program. Each volunteer must obtain certain skill levels to become certified in handling different levels of tax preparation.

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Albany has been an active participant of the VITA Program for the past nine years. The Catholic Charities team is ably led by dedicated volunteer Wally Donnelly from Holy Family Parish in Albany and assisted by tax consultant Bill Shapiro, along with Mary Olsen and Michele Kelly (from Catholic Charities)

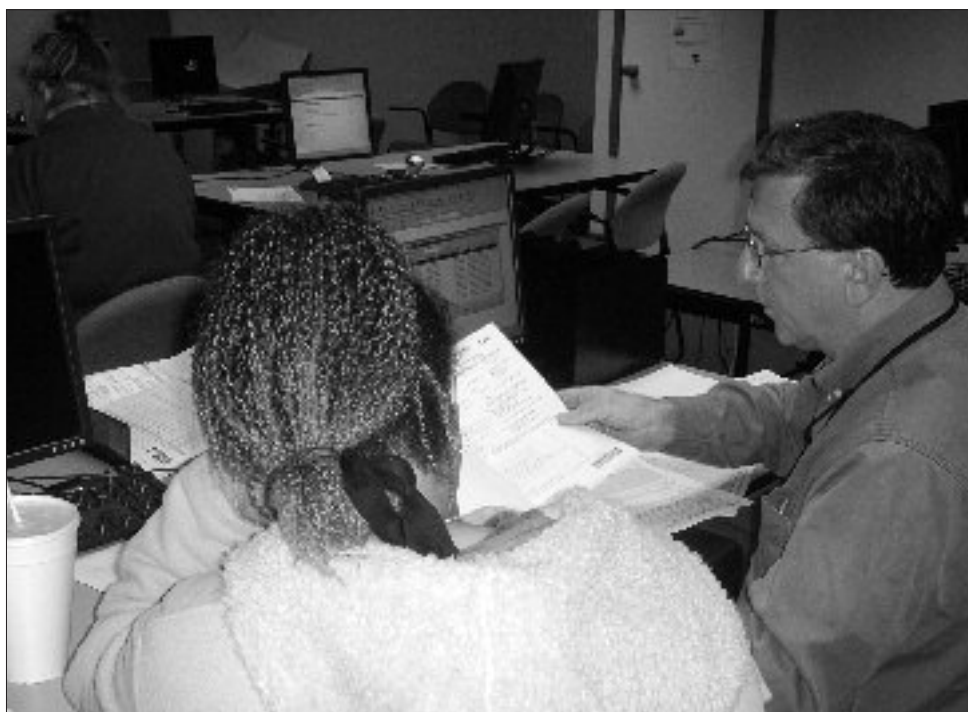
and 17 trained volunteers. A total of 293 tax returns were prepared this year in addition to 20 back-tax returns. Savings of over \$43,000 were realized for clients who avoided having to pay for commercial tax preparation. Refunds for those who were qualified totaled \$327,964. Appointments were held at 40 North Main Avenue, Albany and were scheduled beginning in February through mid-April on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. [Next year, it is anticipated that extra hours will be added on Wednesdays from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.]

Mary Olsen from Catholic Charities noted that there is a diverse group seeking assistance from the VITA Program. Clients are senior citizens, married couples, college students and single mothers or fathers. Mary also noted that "it is important for our clients to maximize their income tax return and avoid paying part of their income tax refund to a commercial tax preparer."

In order to be fully prepared for next year's tax season, Bill Shapiro offered some concrete information for those who are eligible for this service. Now is the time to begin organizing and collecting documents to make tax preparation more effective next year. Essential docu-

ments include: a complete copy of the previous year's tax return; a statement of earnings provided by employers; all bank statements, even if it only shows a minimal amount of interest earned; homeowner records, insurance payments, STAR rebate statement; records on investments, especially statements of purchase prices; documents pertaining to self-employment expenses, e.g., special clothing expenses, clothes cleaning bills; receipts for day care expenses; records of mileage incurred for volunteer work; receipts and records for "side business expenses" such as supplies, postage, mileage, and tolls. Bill recommends keeping a notebook to record mileage and other expenses as they occur which will make it much more streamlined to claim deductions at tax time.

Bill advised that "if an individual has any problems or difficult situations, please don't wait until April 14th and think that the problem will go away." If clients are referred to the VITA Program early in the year, "we can help to resolve any outstanding tax questions," stated Bill. Case workers can suggest that their clients start planning for next year's income tax season now and contact Catholic Charities and the VITA Program for assistance.



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## Thank you, John

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**John Steele and Bishop Howard Hubbard**

quality services are some of his great talents." Mr. Nasso went on to say, "His knowledge of human services, especially from an administrative and leadership position will not be easily replaced. And, of course, we will not be able to replace his experience and good nature."

Gary Siegel, executive director of Catholic Charities Disabilities Services, said, "I look to John as a person who truly cares for people and puts that care into meaningful action. He is not only true to his mission; he lives it. In his career with Catholic Charities he has helped improve the lives of countless numbers of people and their families as well as serve as an example of leadership, style and grace for me, other directors and staff in general." Gary added, "He may be leaving Catholic Charities in his official capacity, but he will never leave the hearts of those whose lives he has touched."

He leaves behind more than a wonderful legacy. His development of a field instructor program that has trained undergraduate and graduate students for the last 25 years, has prepared untold numbers of young people for service to those in need.

About the time he has spent with Catholic Charities, John put it simply: "It has always been about helping those who really needed help."

John is now retired from his leadership post to spend more time with his wife, children and grandchildren. We will miss you, John. Our gratitude, prayers and best wishes as you begin this new chapter in your life.

**By Ken Goldfarb**

## CC Caregivers meet with local Boy Scouts

Alex Rosa, a 17 year old Boy Scout with Troop 75 in Delmar, N.Y. chose Catholic Charities Caregivers Support Services Kinship Caregiving Program as part of his Eagle Scout project. Alex began scouting at the age of 6 as a Tiger Cub. His aspiration, like many boy scouts, is to one day become an Eagle Scout, Boy Scouts highest rank. In addition to Boy Scouting, Alex, a senior at Bethlehem Central High School, also volunteers his time with the Selkirk Fire Department as a volunteer firefighter and with the Bethlehem Volunteer Ambulance Services as an EMS crew member. In thinking about an eagle project, Alex wanted to combine his interest in fire safety with his strong desire to help others who are less fortunate. The project which Alex proposed was to provide fire extinguishers and instructional training to the families of the Kinship Caregiving Program.

This program provides services to relatives caring for relatives children and is mostly made up of grandparents caring for grandchildren. Alex solicited financial assistance from Wal-Mart in Glenmont, New York who generously agreed to contribute 36 First Alert Fire Extinguishing Sprays, a value of \$593.00, to Alex for his proposed project. With the help of Chris Schaffner, Kinship Care Family Case-worker, Kinship Care families were surveyed as to their level of interest in receiving the product along with 10 minutes of fire safety training. Thirty-three families out of a total of 85 responded that they would be interested. After weeks of preparation, on April 18, 2009, Alex met with a group of 8 fellow Boy Scouts and provided them with a training presentation on the use of fire extinguishers together with the Kinship Caregiving Program Director who provided a brief educational session on Kinship Care. The group was divided into teams together with parents and 29 fire extinguishers were distributed among our Kinship Caregiving families in Albany, Rensselaer, and Schenectady Counties. The families were grateful to receive the product and safety information and welcomed the Boy Scouts into their homes.

For many families, although fully aware of the importance of fire safety, they did not have fire extinguishers or those that they had, had expired and had not been replaced. When you are struggling to put food on the table and pay the month's rent, purchasing a fire extinguisher isn't always a priority. Fire safety is a serious issue for those families who are financially disadvantaged, particularly in the winter months. Due to lack of heat, families often keep warm by using space heaters and boiling water on the stove top, both of which are serious fire safety hazards. Two of the families currently in our program have suffered serious fires due to use of these heating methods, so Alex' project has helped to provide a safer environment for these families.



**Scout Alex Rosa with homeowner Sam De Benedetto and a First Alert Fire Extinguishing Spray donated by the Glenmont Wal-Mart**

# Troops train to defend home front

Slowly but surely, New York is training a small army of foot soldiers in a war on foreclosure. Many of them now work for nonprofit agencies geared to helping low- and moderate-income New Yorkers get into homes, but will shift to assisting anyone facing trouble with a mortgage – at no cost for the service.

The call-up began last summer when \$25 million allocated in the 2008-09 state budget began to be disbursed to nonprofits that established financial counseling, mediation, legal and support services for borrowers facing default or foreclosure.

Locally, a handful of housing groups in Albany, Schenectady and Troy, operating as the HomeSave Coalition, and the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York secured \$735,000 in grants. (United Tenants of Albany, both a Catholic Charities agency and a member of the HomeSave coalition showing how Catholic Charities agencies often partner with other organizations to meet an overwhelming need, in a bid to aid renters who might be displaced if their landlords face foreclosure.) To date, every county in the state has at least one agency now

offering foreclosure-prevention services, according to the state Division of Housing and Community Renewal, which is marshaling the build-up.

In January, a training session was held in Albany that drew 100 of these new troops, and regional information meetings have been held across the state since then.

There, participants were walked through the nitty-gritty of recent federal and state legislation designed to keep foreclosures from growing by helping homeowners negotiate better payment terms with their lenders.

California, Florida, Arizona and Nevada consistently lead the pack in the number of homes in some stage of foreclosure, while New York usually ranks in the back half of the 50 states. Within New York, though, the foreclosure rate is higher downstate.

A report recently released from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York put the share of subprime mortgages in foreclosure in the 48 counties north of Dutchess, Ulster and Sullivan at 7 percent as of Dec. 31.

Six of those counties – including Albany, Rensselaer and Schenectady – accounted for half of the roughly 2,000 upstate mortgages in foreclosure.

Grants awarded under the state war plan are for two years, and Deborah VanAmerongen, commissioner of the Division of Housing and Community Renewal, said she was happy to learn that additional funding is likely under the federal stimulus package "to expand on what we did last year" in drafting an army. Because, after all, waging war can be expensive.

For information on free foreclosure-prevention services, contact these participating groups: Affordable Housing Partnership, Albany: 434-1730 Better Neighborhoods Inc., Schenectady: 372-6469 TRIP Homeownership Center, Troy: 690-0020 Albany County Rural Housing Alliance, Voorheesville: 765-2425 United Tenants of Albany, Albany: 436-8997 Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York, Albany: 462-6765.

**By Marlene Kennedy, Times Union Executive Business Editor**

## Empowered People Can Uproot Poverty in Their Communities

— St. Teresa of Avila students in Albany used art to illustrate this theme in order to better understand and respond appropriately to the root causes of poverty.

*Students displaying their awards, l to r, front, Sister Maureen Joyce, Elizabeth Holland, Sarah Diomande, Kimberly Nimer, Sister Jane Herb; back, Clare Herubin, Elizabeth Courcelle, Cailin McKenna, Jennifer DuMond, Julie Czerwinski.*



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