

Student Raises Funds for Early Reading Program

When it came time to choose a community service project for his Bar Mitzvah, Fox Lane seventh grader Dylan Grant chose something that was especially meaningful to him. Capitalizing on his love of reading, Dylan asked family and friends to sponsor his personal readathon to raise funds for the new Family Center at Neighbors Link. A specific family program to be piloted there, called "Parents as Teachers," piqued his interest because it emphasized the importance of reading to children from a young age. "It's important for children to like reading beginning when they are little," said Dylan, "because reading well can help you in so



Neighbors Link Executive Director Carola Bracco with seventh grader Dylan Grant.

many different ways." He said his love of books has allowed him to build a strong vocabulary and do well academically. "But most of all, I read for enjoyment, not just because I need to for school." For his project, Dylan read 50 books over five months, mostly in the action adventure genre and all over 300 pages each, raising \$3,000 for the Family Center. The money has been earmarked for purchases of new books, writing supplies and other materials for early learners. "I'm excited because I know the money will go right to helping kids."



Gayle Hudson Offers Neighbors Link Volunteers a Warm Welcome and a Purpose

Gayle Hudson may be new to the Neighbors Link staff, but she is a familiar face in the Columbus Avenue center where she has volunteered for several years. Formerly a Social Action Liaison from the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Northern Westchester, Gayle joins Neighbors Link as Volunteer Coordinator, organizing community volunteers and serving as the point person for donations. According to Gayle, most people who volunteer their time to Neighbors Link have a personal interest in the work here. Perhaps they want to use their Spanish language skills, enjoy teaching others, love working with kids, have a parent or friend who has enjoyed volunteering here, are completing a community service or Mitzvah program, or enjoy the cross-cultural connection. No matter what their interest, "Every potential volunteer deserves a warm welcome, a well-placed opportunity to help and a sincere thank you," said Gayle. She especially enjoys finding the perfect match between an



New Volunteer Coordinator Gayle Hudson strives for purposeful volunteerism, matching offers of help with areas of need.



offer of help and an area of need. Gayle is currently on the lookout for volunteers for Family Center pilot programs, and the Summer Links and Family Night programs. "The Neighbors Link mission has always spoken to me," noted Gayle. "It clearly strengthens the whole community."



"Parents as Teachers" is one of the classes that will be piloted in the new Neighbors Link Family Center.



Photos by Rodrigo Fuenzalida

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Neighbors Link



Gerald and Agnes Hassell will be honored at the May 5th Gala, "An Evening at the Kentucky Derby," for more than a decade of commitment to Neighbors Link.

Agnes and Gerald Hassell to be Honored at May 5th Gala

In the earliest days of Neighbors Link, Agnes and Gerald Hassell were among those that saw its promise. This May, the Hassells will be the first-ever honorees of the Neighbors Link annual Gala. The couple will be recognized for a decade of passionate support that helped the organization take root and grow to become a welcoming community center for thousands of recent immigrants in the Northern Westchester area. Said Agnes, "I am just amazed at how invaluable this organization has become to our community. I wonder, what would it have been like if we didn't have Neighbors Link?" Agnes recalls the vision of one, and the commitment of many, that launched the organization in 2001. She credits Neighbors Link Founder Jack Miller with having the "grand inspiration" that brought supporters like Sue Taub, Audrey Koloff, the Hassells, and many others into the founding circle. "It was a combination of a lot of things," noted Agnes. "Jack's vision, the formula, the right timing, the Friends of Neighbors Link, and of course, the leadership." She and Gerald were new to Chappaqua, and came together with key supporters from the surrounding area to make the fledgling Mount Kisco organization a reality. "We saw all our various towns as one community." Born in the Philippines, Agnes said being

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—AGNES HASSELL

Neighbors Link Teen Tutors Earn 'Youth Group in Action' Award



"It's something for us all to be proud of," said Horace Greeley senior Rebecca Passman. Rebecca is part of a team of area high school students who have earned the New York Life 'Youth Group in Action' Award presented by The Volunteer Center of United Way, for their ongoing work at Neighbors Link tutoring recent immigrants in English. Each Tuesday evening, some 30 students—hailing from area high schools including Blind Brook,

Byram Hills, Fox Lane, Hackley and Horace Greeley—gather to help Neighbors Link clients learn and practice a new language. "I like the working relationships that are formed with our English learners, plus I enjoy bridging the gap and learning about another culture," said Rebecca, who is one of five student executives for the group, and who has been tutoring here since she was a freshman. Sarita Roy and Mary Weiss serve as the program's adult coordinators.



The weekly tutoring session complements the more than 20 English language classes offered weekly at Neighbors Link, the majority of which are professionally-led ESL programs taught by Westchester Commu-

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Neighbors Link Honors
Agnes and Gerald Hassell
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an immigrant herself helped her understand the hardships faced by newcomers to the United States. Her former position at the United Nations on its High Commission for Refugees brought the issue into clearer focus for her. For over a decade now, Agnes has used that understanding to advance the Neighbors Link mission, serving as Co-Chair of the Friends of Neighbors Link and on the Board of Directors.

Today Agnes Hassell sits on the Boards of several non-profit organizations including the Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation, Leake and Watts Services of NYC/Yonkers and, most recently, The Jacob Burns Film Center. Gerald Hassell is President, Chairman and CEO of BNY Mellon, and on the Board of



Agnes graciously hosts monthly Friends of Neighbors Link meetings at her home.

Directors of Duke University, The New York Philharmonic and Big Brothers Big Sisters. “But none touch our heart and soul like Neighbors Link,” noted Agnes. “Moving forward, Gerald and I will always be there for Neighbors Link.” “If someone asked me who my life mentors were, I’d first say my father, who taught me that you could make a difference in other people’s lives. In my adult life, my mentor is my husband Gerald. Whether it’s supporting the community, the arts, education, music, he is always generous. And he is proud of what Neighbors Link has become.” “There are so many others that could be honored. While we appreciate being appreciated, we are just so happy to see how people benefit from Neighbors Link.”

You’ve Got to Have Friends



New Friends of Neighbors Link Co-Chairs Nancy Strong (left) of Armonk and Poppy Cummings (right) of Bedford.

A warm welcome to the new Co-Chairs of the Friends of Neighbors Link, Poppy Cummings and Nancy Strong. Longtime supporters of the organization, Poppy is also on the Board of Neighbors Link and Nancy has twice served as Co-Chair of the annual Festival de Primavera gala.

Other new members of the Friends of Neighbors Link Executive Committee include Alison Quinn, Treasurer, Patti Ettinger, Secretary, Agnes Hassell, Planning, Amy Baker, Membership, and Kathy Rothschild, Governance. Former Friends Co-Chairs Agnes Hassell and Judy Murphy are stepping down after several successful years.

With more than 35 members from throughout Northern Westchester, the Friends of Neighbors Link is an extraordinary group of dedicated volunteers whose hard work helps to make the programs at Neighbors Link possible.

For more information, please contact Marianne Delaney at 914-666-3410 ext. 14 or mdelaney@neighborslink.org.



Photo by Rodrigo Fuenzalida

Footloose! Students from Bell Middle School in Chappaqua spearheaded an enthusiastic collection of shoes for Neighbors Link clients, in conjunction with the school’s production of the musical “Footloose.” In late March, the students delivered three bins full of gently used shoes for children, men and women. From left to right: Carola Bracco, Executive Director of Neighbors Link, together with Barbara Marano, Isabella Marano, Raimundo Langlois, and Gayle Hudson, Neighbors Link Volunteer Coordinator.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

FAMILY CENTER PROGRAM DIRECTOR

The Family Center at Neighbors Link will offer new evidence-based parent/child curriculums that promote healthy child development and school-readiness, computer literacy for parents, parent/child ESL and family strengthening programs. The Family Center Program Director will oversee programs, operations and annual budget; supervise and train staff; report on measurable outcomes; and teach parent education.

- Requirements:
- Masters Degree in the area of Education, Social Work, Psychology or other related field;
 - Three plus years of experience in not-for-profit program management;
 - Fluency in Spanish

Please send resume and salary history via email to srosado@neighborslink.org.

CHILDREN’S PROGRAM COORDINATOR
Part-time

Our children’s program provides engaging and developmentally appropriate activities for children whose parents are attending adult continuing education classes and programs on-site at Neighbors Link. The part-time position includes developing, implementing and supervising activities for children ages 3-10.

- Requirements:
- BA with a focus in Education or other related field;
 - Reliable, creative and able to take initiative;
 - Able to work evenings and weekends.

Please send resume via email to lgranda@neighborslink.org or via fax at 914-666-3430.



Photos by Rodrigo Fuenzalida



Photo by Rodrigo Fuenzalida

SKILLS
DEVELOPMENT

Skills training is an important part of the Neighbors Link employment mission. Landscape workers receive specialized training in tree trimming to improve their job readiness (left). EcoCleaning participants practice green housekeeping techniques and show off their course completion certificates (below).



Building Skills
Strengthening Families

PARENT
EDUCATION

Neighbors Link is currently piloting classes that teach about early childhood development and the importance of parental involvement in the health and education of their children, from birth through high school graduation and beyond.



Teen Tutors Recognized as
a ‘Youth Group in Action’

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nity College instructors.

This long-running Neighbors Link tutoring program was launched by students from Greeley High School’s SHARE (Students Have a Responsibility Everywhere) Club and its “Casa de Lengua” program. Since then, student volunteers from area schools have become an integral part of Neighbors Link’s English language education program, which also includes adult language education, computer-based learning, “job” English classes and certificate training through a partnership with Westchester Community College.

“It is inspiring to watch high school teenagers work with immigrant adults to practice English while simultaneously learning about one another’s cultures,” remarked Neighbors Link Executive Director Carola Bracco. “That’s how integration is achieved.”

The Volunteer Center of United Way 2012 awards were presented at a ceremony at the Rye Town Hilton on April 20th as part of National Volunteer Week. ■



Board Chair Barbara Jackson Considers
Neighbors Link Role in Patch Interview

Barbara Jackson talks about her work with Neighbors Link and the community in this article by writer Tom Auchterlonie, excerpted from the January 27, 2012 edition of Patch.com.



Board Chair Barbara Jackson addresses Neighbors Link supporters.

For Neighbors Link Board Chair Barbara Jackson, the Hispanic immigrant community that lives in Mount Kisco has similarities to historical patterns of immigration, with successive groups coming to America in search of a better livelihood.

Jackson has chaired the board for two years and was recently elected to serve two more. On her watch, Neighbors Link has seen several milestones in the past year. Last spring, the Mount Kisco chapter celebrated its 10th anniversary with an event at Fox Lane High School. Its “A Nation of Immigrants” was held last fall in downtown Mount Kisco in partnership with a local Italian-American Club and attracted about 2,000 people. And there was the



launch of Neighbor’s Link in Stamford. Today, Jackson notes, Neighbor’s Link gets support from a number of people and organizations in the area. This ranges from a Mount Kisco police program called Police and Community Together (PACT), in which officers visit the center, to Open Door Family Medical Centers providing a mobile healthcare van at the center’s site near Lexington Avenue.

There is also buy in and support from both the Bedford Central and Chappaqua school districts. Mount

Kisco Elementary School hosts the Neighbors Link after-school childcare program for kids called Learning Links while their parents are working. “She is incredibly selfless,” said Carola Otero Bracco, the executive director for Neighbors Link.

Bracco described Jackson as someone who brings people together for a common mission and has respect in the community.

“I’ve learned so much from her,” Bracco said.



Teen Tutors make connections with English Language Learners on Tuesday evenings at Neighbors Link.



The program’s high school ‘Student Executives’ make a great leadership team. From left to right: Samantha Auerbach, Divya Talwar, Zak Krooks, Rebecca Passman and Cara Goldfarb. Sarita Roy (behind Zak) is the adult coordinator together with Mary Weiss, not shown.