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Neighbors News

Fall 2016

Executive Director's Note

After more than a year of wrestling with this decision, I have told the Board of Directors of my decision to retire as the Executive Director and CEO of Neighbors effective April 15, 2017.

You wouldn't think that making a decision to retire would be all that difficult. I suspect we all know people who had planned their retirement date as much as 10 years in advance! They certainly didn't have a problem. But for me it was a very difficult decision to make, for several reasons.

Truth is, I'm afraid of retirement. I don't know what I'm going to do every day and that scares me. I started working on a farm when I was eight, began working full-time to support myself and my family when I was 19 and have had jobs to go to, and work to fill my day, ever since. Now I know that on April 17, 2017 I will wake up in the morning and I will not have a job to go to and work to fill my day. Some people would find that liberating. I find it terrifying!

By April 15 I will have been at Neighbors for almost 14 years. They have been the most rewarding, satisfying and fun years of my life! I have loved every moment of them. I have had the opportunity to get up in the morning and go to a place where everyone, staff and volunteer alike, are there because they choose to be, not because it's a paycheck. They are there because they get tremendous satisfaction doing the work we do, helping the people we help. It is the finest community of people I have ever been associated with, and I know I will miss them desperately.

And I have loved being a part of this wonderful community that surrounds and supports Neighbors with such great regularity and generosity. I am constantly amazed and humbled by the thousands of people who make Neighbors possible. Those who donate food, clothing, household items, Christmas gifts, Easter baskets, birthday bags...the list goes on and on. Those who contribute funds to help us pay the costs of running what has become a fairly large business.

And those who volunteer their time to serve others in our community who need our assistance. Last year there were 1,847 of these people; this year there will be over 2,000 of them. They are the people who actually serve those in need. Those of us on staff (and there aren't very many of us!) are here to make sure the systems and processes are in place, and the resources are available, for the volunteers to do their work. I have often said that Neighbors is but a conduit through which the goodness and generosity of our community flows, from those who want to help others to those who need the assistance. Our job is to make sure the pipe doesn't break while people donating their time, using primarily donated goods, serve the needs of people in northern Dakota County.

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2016-2017

Board of Directors

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Vice Chair
Greg Kuntz, Secretary
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John Kemp,
Executive Director

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- November 24 - 25 (Thanksgiving)
- December 23 and 26 (Christmas)
- January 2 (New Year's)

As we move into the holiday season, please note that Neighbors will be closed on the following days:

Holiday Schedule

Online Giving Made Easier

Neighbors recently launched a new online giving platform that makes it even easier to donate online. In addition to making one-time gifts, there are also options to set up recurring gifts at any dollar amount or even make non-cash donations.

Plus, you can also donate via text message! Just text @neighbors and your gift amount to 52014. For your first gift, you'll be given a link to set up a text giving account; moving forward, the system will recognize your number and all you'll have to do is the first step! We appreciate your support and are committed to providing you with simple and secure options to give. If you have any questions, please contact Beth Skwira at 651.306.2148.

Cafeteria Confidential

Have you ever wondered what goes on behind the scenes in a school cafeteria? Of course there are sandwiches to be made, fruit and vegetables to chop, and pizza and chicken nuggets to bake. However, there is also a lot of great conversation – which our volunteers discovered as they spent the summer sharing stories and laughing while preparing breakfast and lunch for local kids.

As the program has developed over the years, more and more volunteer groups have been adopting a school site for a week — an opportunity that allows volunteers to get to know each other in a different setting. Parents or grandparents have also signed up with young relatives to teach them how fun it is to help others.



Some groups volunteer with the summer meals program simply because they want to serve others in a fun, practical way. For example, Riverview Baptist Church has been helping with this program since it started, committing to one week at Henry Sibley High School each year. Led by Pastor Harold Lang, everyone in the group is in their 80's, except the “young one” who is 79.

"We, at Riverview Baptist Church in West St. Paul, have been happy to partner with Neighbors, Inc. in serving a week of meals during the summer months since the Summer Meals Program began seven or eight years ago," said Pastor Lang. "As a church we feel it is important to be an active part of our community. This has been a very practical way in seeing that children in the West St. Paul area have access to nutritious meals during the summer. It has been a privilege to support Neighbors, Inc. and our area children in this way."

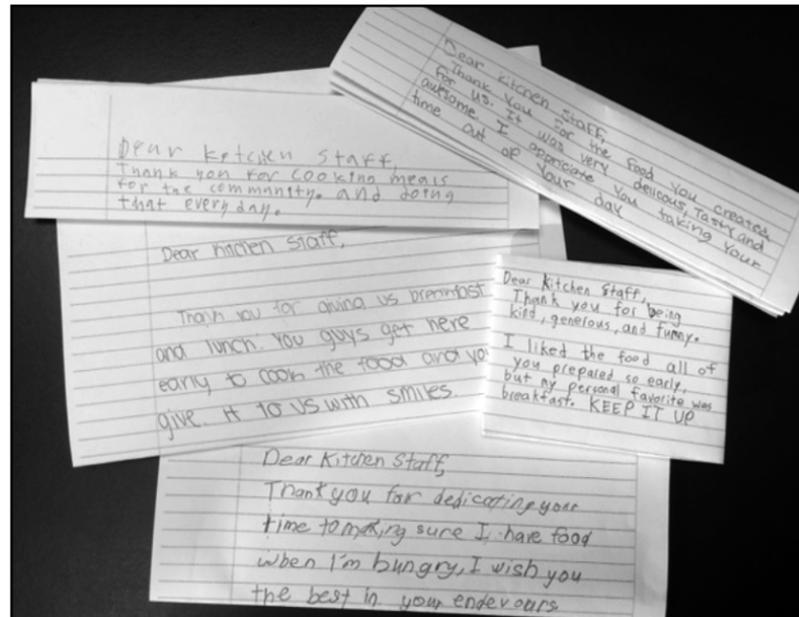
This summer, 220 volunteers spent 1,296 hours serving 45,165 meals.

The staff at the five participating schools – Henry Sibley High School, Kaposia Education Center, Moreland Arts & Health Sciences Magnet School, Somerset Elementary School and South St. Paul Secondary – have been great to work with, training volunteers in how to prepare and serve meals. They also lead the way in forming meaningful relationships with the children. For instance, on a recent visit almost as soon as one boy came in the door, a staff member asked if he was feeling okay or if he had a stiff muscle in his neck. He said he slept on it strangely, but that it would be better in a few hours. This was just a brief exchange, but reinforces the connections that can be made through this program.

Many of our volunteers have also learned a lot about the recent federal regulations put into place for school nutrition programs. For example, whole grains are included in all the breads, and fruit is carefully portioned to make sure it qualifies as a serving. Needless to say, it has been fun to get a sneak peek behind the scenes of the local cafeterias, and to make sure our young ones have the nourishment they need to be active and healthy.

Thank you to all the volunteers and staff who helped make the summer meal program a success!

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Quack, Quack – That's a Wrap!

The 9th Annual Great Neighbors' Duck Races is in the books! We couldn't have asked for a better day to be out in the community raising money to help our neighbors in need. This year's event brought in a total of \$25,270 – all of which stays in the community to support local programs at Neighbors.

Thank you to everyone who helped make this year's Duck Races such a big success. Whether you volunteered, bought ducks, helped spread the word or stopped by to say hi, we appreciate your support!

A special thank you to our 2016 Great Neighbors' Duck Races Sponsors:

Title Sponsor: Fury Motors

Event Sponsors: MidWest One, South Robert Street Business Association

Partner Sponsors: South St. Paul Lions Club, South St. Paul / IGH Rotary Club

Race Sponsors: Albarella Design, Bremer Banks of South St. Paul & Inver Grove Heights, Croatian Hall, Ideal Credit Union, Langer Construction, RBC Wealth Management / Dave Paton, River Run Team / REMAX Results, Sherman Insurance, Tapemark, Twin Cities Foot & Ankle Clinic, Volkswagen of Inver Grove Heights, Waterous

Duck Sponsors: Anchor Bank, Antonsen Construction, Bester Brothers, Bisanz Brothers, Camelot Cleaners, Christopher Kisch State Farm Insurance Agency, Jodee Paape & Associates, Key Community Bank, Krech, O'Brien, Mueller & Associates, Paces Tire & Service, Royal Star Furniture, S&S Tree Service

Contributors: Dakota County Electric, Deerwood Bank, Heartland Credit, Kaposia Convenience Center, Lofton Label, Sportsman's Guide, Tennis Sanitation



Congratulations to Jose and family, who won the grand prize – a year-long lease on a Jeep!

Give Back Before Giving Thanks



Start your holiday off right and join Neighbors for the Walk to End Hunger on Thanksgiving morning at the Mall of America! Since 2008, the Walk has raised more than \$1,200,000 to fight

hunger in the Twin Cities metro area, where one in five families with children don't have enough to eat. Want to help even more? Participants are encouraged to raise additional funds – and could win some great prizes for doing so.

For more information, to register or to support a walker, visit www.walktoendhunger.org!

Remember Neighbors on November 17

Do you participate in Give to the Max Day? If so, consider a gift to Neighbors! A generous anonymous donor has agreed to a dollar-for-dollar match up to \$10,000, so it's a great time to increase your impact. Watch our Facebook and Twitter accounts for additional details, or schedule your donation at www.givemn.org.



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Neighbors Helping Neighbors: Greg Kuntz

“Living in a community means being a part of it, and doing things for the community,” says Greg Kuntz. This philosophy is one that he learned from his parents, grew up with, taught his children and continues to live by.

A long-time supporter of Neighbors, Inc. – along with many other organizations – Kuntz started by donating food and clothing throughout the year and adopting a family during the holidays. Since then, he’s spent eight years serving on the Neighbors’ Board of Directors (of which he is currently a member) and has participated in countless events benefiting the organization.

Volunteering, participating and donating is just what he does. As a volunteer driver for our transportation program, he (and many others) provide rides to medical appointments for community members who otherwise wouldn’t be able to get there. “It’s not just about the ride – it’s about letting people know that we care about them,” he says. “Volunteering for the transportation program gives you an opportunity to connect and interact with people who need help in the community on a personal level.”

His parents instilled the value of giving back to the community in him from a young age, and he’s carried that message to his children and grandchildren. In fact, each year his family make a day out of shopping for, wrapping and delivering gifts together for the family they’ve adopted. “It’s a way for us to help people in our community that we may never meet, but who need us,” says Kuntz. “That’s what Neighbors is all about – bringing people together to help each other during times of need.”



The “Neighbors Helping Neighbors” column features members of the community who give of their resources in a variety of ways. If you’d like to learn more about different giving options, please contact Beth Skwira, director of development, at 651.306.2148.

Greg Kuntz (at left) and members of the local Lions club during On The Road Again.

Recent Grants

Thank you! In the last few months, we were honored to receive grants from the following organizations:

- SpartanNash • Target • The Richard M. Schulze Foundation • The Stevens Square Foundation

Holiday Help for our Neighbors in Need

The holidays can be a magical time of year, but they can also be stressful. For some, the biggest questions will be how to get everything done in time or what to make for the big party. Others, however, will face greater challenges – how to put food on the table or pay the heating bill, not to mention buy gifts for the kids.

For those who need assistance, Neighbors is here. For those who may have time or funds to give, we ask for your help. In this newsletter you will find a list of volunteer opportunities, as well as donation suggestions. In addition, financial contributions are always welcome and allow us to respond to other needs and gaps.

Thank you for your continued support. May this holiday season bring you much joy.

Enjoy a Night Out for a Good Cause this Holiday Season

Join us for a special performance of It’s A Wonderful Life: Live Radio Play at The Saint Paul Hotel on Wednesday, December 7, at 7:30 p.m. The amazing cast will transport you into the 1940’s as you watch them tell the timeless tale of how George Bailey discovers the blessings in his life. This annual tradition is a great way to kick-off the holiday season, so bring your loved ones and friends! Tickets are available at www.neighborsmn.org/events.



Holiday Donation Suggestions

Food Shelf

The holidays are a particularly busy time for the food shelf. Currently, we could use:

- Stuffing
- Gravy
- Broth
- Pie filling
- Hygiene items, especially: shampoo, feminine products and toilet paper

Love Your Neighbor Holiday Program

Neighbors is once again coordinating Adopt-a-Family, Adopt-a-Senior and Christmas for Kids efforts to ensure that everyone in our community has a happy holiday. If you are interested in adopting a family or senior, visit www.neighborsmn.org or call 651.306.2152

If you’d like to contribute to gift packages for those not adopted, all new clothing and toy donations are appreciated. This year, our greatest needs are gifts for kids – especially boys – ages 10 to 18. Suggested items include:

Teens

- AMC movie cards, Game Stop and iTunes
- Men’s active wear pants (size S-XL)
- Headphones and wireless speakers
- Flat iron and curling irons
- Art kits and sketch pads
- Science kits
- Sports team jerseys and sweatshirts

Boys (age 8 to 12)

- Active wear pants (size 8-16, S-XL)
- Legos
- Nerf guns, skateboards
- Superheroes

Girls or boys (age 6 to 12)

- Snow pants
- Waterproof gloves and mittens
- Winter jackets
- Sleds and scooters

Providing Resources and Reassurance

Many of our clients are overwhelmed by the time they walk through our doors. Trying to figure out how to make ends meet on a limited income is stressful enough – then add in the possibility of utility shut-off, eviction, a medical emergency or other crisis situation and it can seem too much to handle. Thankfully, Neighbors is here to provide resources and reassurance when our community members need it most.

The single mom was crying before we even sat down to discuss her food shelf visit. The stress seemed to literally pour out of her body. Her renter's rebate from her tax return was later than she'd anticipated and she was convinced her utility services would be shut off. Due to a clause in her lease, if her utility services were disconnected, her landlord also had the right to evict her. "And then me and my children will be homeless," she pronounced, the tears turning from drops to rivers down her cheeks.

Her fear was palpable. I passed her a box of tissues and asked more questions. Did she have a disconnection notice? No. She'd made a payment arrangement, but a neighbor told her if she broke the arrangement the company would turn her electricity off. "They don't do that," I assured her. "You have to have a disconnection pending, and have received a disconnection notice, before that can happen." We called the company, which Neighbors' intake workers can do when given permission by the client, and they confirmed that this mother's utility services were not going to be shut off. She'd actually met the terms of her payment arrangement and was now current.

However, she'd taken extra shifts at work and extra shifts at worrying, and was overwhelmed by fear. I repeated the confirmation that she was in no danger of being disconnected and got her the energy assistance application for CAP Agency, an income-based utility assistance program for which she was eligible. I also told her about a monthly discount program she could receive for her utilities from the Energy Cents Coalition. I told her everything was going to be OK, and invited her to set down that incredible weight she'd been carrying on her shoulders.

"You're doing a good job," I said. She cried a little bit more, but I could see her body starting to relax a bit. She thanked me, gave a small smile and headed down to our food shelf.

Sometimes we get to provide more than food and clothing. Sometimes we get to ease the burden carried by our neighbors walking in the door, and for that we are grateful.

Continued from cover

In the end, despite my trepidation, the decision has been made, and acted on. I will retire on April 15. I may be frightened at the prospect, but I'm also okay with the decision.

I remember as a young man going to Shea Stadium in New York City with my wonderful wife Marti to watch the New York Mets. Willie Mays, one of the greatest baseball players of all time, was ending his career as a Met and I was determined to get a picture of him getting a base hit. I bought an expensive camera and set of lenses, spending money we couldn't afford to spend, and off we went to New York. We sat way up in the stadium but with one of my new telephoto lenses I could zero in on Willie. Each of the four times he came to bat I snapped a picture on every pitch. When the game was over I had a series of pictures of Willie striking out four times.

I don't want to be the Willie Mays of the non-profit set, staying around a bit too long and striking out instead of getting base hits.

This isn't farewell, at least not just yet. I'll be around for a few more months. The Board of Directors, who have been wonderfully supportive of my indecision and finally my decision, are conducting a regional search for a new CEO and I have total confidence that the board will find exactly the right person to lead the organization to new heights.

I pray that this new person will feel as supported and cared for as I have for the last 14 years. - John Kemp

New at Neighbors

We are thrilled to have welcomed two new staff members recently!



Mandy Iverson has hit the ground running as our new director of volunteer programs! She comes to Neighbors after three years at the University of Minnesota, Carlson School of Management. There she served as the assistant director of alumni relations and was responsible for recruiting and managing alumni volunteers for a variety of events and services. Prior to joining the University, she was the volunteer manager for WATCH, a volunteer coordinator for Lutheran Community Services in Spokane, Wash., and taught English in South Korea. A native of Fergus Falls, Minn., Mandy now calls South St. Paul home.



Brigid O'Rourke is also new to the Neighbors' team. Joining the organization as a development associate, she will be assisting with donor outreach, donation tracking, data management and online donations. A born and raised St. Paulite, Brigid graduated from the University of Minnesota with a degree in history. Following graduation, she lived in Austin, Texas, for four years before moving to New York City. After two years in the Big Apple, she is thrilled to be back in her hometown. Outside of work, she is busy planning for her upcoming wedding and taking night classes at MCTC.

Welcome New Volunteers

We are also excited to welcome our newest ongoing volunteers – thank you for helping your neighbors in need!

Clothes Closet

Maggie Coughlan
Shae Evazich
Merilee Inman
Marilyn Jungbluth
Darby Keech
James Miller
Deb Tikalsky

Donation Pick Up

Dale Harteneck
Alicia Richter

Food Shelf

Cora Abramson
Joe Brausen
Andrew Grice
Konstantin Ivkin
Michaela Vondrum

Come As You Are

Tobias Doncon
McKenzie Hollar

Last Continuing Education Workshop for 2016

The last continuing education workshop of the year – "Nudging to Health: Promoting Healthy Choices at your Food Shelf" will be held on Tuesday, November 15, from noon to 1 p.m. Contact Dylan at 651.272.1133 or dylan@neighborsmn.org to reserve your spot today.

Workshops will resume again in January.