



Casa de Amigos

Helping People Help Themselves

Casa Caller

Quarterly Newsletter of Casa de Amigos

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Hellen Johnson passed away on June 22, 2009. In her 65 years, Hellen was a child care provider, elder care provider, hospital nurse, private nurse, advocate of peace and an entrepreneur. She carried the titles daughter, wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother.



LEAVING A LEGACY OF HELP

This winter, Citywide Community Services celebrates 15 years as a program of Senior Services provided through Casa de Amigos. In 1986, **Hellen Johnson**, founder of Citywide Community Services, recognized that some elderly and disabled low-income citizens in east and southeast Midland needed assistance keeping their homes clean. Due to health problems and living longer lives, the people's homes had gone unattended too long. Hellen realized a clean environment would enable persons to stay in their homes longer and possibly avoid going to a care facility, thus she founded a free cleaning service for older and disabled people.

Hellen operated her home cleaning service known as Citywide Community Services until 1989 when **Cathy Byrd** became Program Coordinator. Three full time homemakers provided the home cleaning.

From 1990 to 1993, upon the recommendation of United Way of Midland, Casa de Amigos provided administrative management for the agency's home cleaning service. Citywide Community Services board members Joe Dominey, Rhett Gist, Marge Savage and others then approved merging the two organizations.

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Tonja Eckert of Safe Place talks with teenage girls at the Junior League Family First event.

JUNIOR LEAGUE OF MIDLAND FOCUSING ON FAMILIES

Christian Comedian Bob Smiley was the main speaker/entertainer at the third Family First program presented by the Junior League of Midland, Inc. on Saturday, October 17. More than 200 people attended the event.

Shea Thompson, Junior League's event chairman, commented, "Smiley shared his amusing views into family and home life plus his insights with elementary-aged students about surviving the teen years."

The Junior League centered the free program around *parenting, mentoring and being part of a family*. There were sessions and activities for the whole family, ages six through adults. The League's renowned Kids in the Kitchen program was available to all children to learn to make healthy snacks. The League served a free hamburger and hotdog lunch for the families attending the event.

Previous Family First events focused on nutrition and exercise with jump rope and cooking being the activities at Casa de Amigos in October 2008, and the importance of education held in Spring 2009 at Greater Ideal Baptist Family Life Center in southeast Midland.

LETTER FROM LAEL: *Learning from Others*

I participated in a two day "Family Strengthening" Conference in Houston in October and I can't stop talking about it! The **Annie B. Casey Foundation** funded grants through United Neighborhood Centers of America (UNCA) and members were invited to attend the awards ceremony. The keynote speaker was a young man named **Armando Rayo** who serves as Vice President, Engagement at Cultural Strategies and Director of Community Engagement with United Way of Texas in Austin. He spoke about the value of the work we do as community centers to effect change. In summary, he prioritized 1) Authenticity, 2) Innovation and 3) Collaboration.

The next day, we toured two community centers for Neighborhood Centers, Inc., a 100-year-old organization that reviewed its history over the past

several years and then set about defining its future for the next century of service. The timing and process seem appropriate for Casa de Amigos as we have observed our 45th anniversary and prepare to move forward to our 50th year of service in 2014. The process also ties in with the transition of United Way of Midland toward multi-year funding for three focus areas: *Promoting Self-Sufficiency, Promoting Health, and Promoting Education.*

The tour made me even more excited and I'm brimming over with enthusiasm and ideas. I also learned that Neighborhood Centers intentionally positioned themselves (staff, volunteers and community leaders) to develop Affinity and Appreciative Inquiry Skills along with Cultural Awareness. A specific example was that it's not 'those people,' but our neighbors affected by Hurricane Katrina

that we seek to empower. We also learned that Neighborhood Centers is all about Community Based Initiatives. They hold Cultural Fairs, Arts and Crafts Sales for Self-Sufficiency, Financial Education classes and Economic Development through Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and Asset Building.

It was gratifying to observe that many of the Centers' services are already provided through Casa de Amigos as a local community center, yet it's always good to get a fresh perspective and see other organization's services in action. The experience renews one's spirit and commitment for our mission of "improving the quality of life throughout the community by helping people help themselves."

Lael Cordes-Pitts, LMSW
Executive Director

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NICHOLAS HONORED

Mark Nicholas was named the 2009 Outstanding Fundraising Volunteer by the Permian Basin chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals. A luncheon and awards ceremony was held at Midland Country Club on November 19. Mark, now in his third year as Board of Directors President, discusses the activities available to seniors with Gloria Granado, senior participant, and Catarina Medrano, Social Services Program Director.

THE CASA CALLER

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EMPLOYEES INCREASE GIVING

Casa de Amigos' employee giving to the United Way of Midland increased more than \$400 (10 percent) over last year, according to Liz Martinez, Business Manager and employee campaign chair for the agency. Ninety-eight percent of employees participated in the campaign either by pledge or participation in agency-sponsored fund raising events. The agency was recognized last February at the Century Level for per capita giving averaging \$100 to \$200 per employee in the 2008/09 campaign.

Currently, 55 programs representing 25 agencies receive funding through United Way of Midland. Promoting Education, Health and Self-Sufficiency are the primary focus areas for funding.

PROGRAM HAS CLEANED OVER 200 HOMES

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Vergia Collins began serving as Citywide Community Services Program Coordinator in 1994. Vergia says, "Often, elderly or disabled citizens are recommended to receive the cleaning service by agencies like Meals-on-Wheels, HospiceMidland and local healthcare providers. The public may also recommend an elderly or handicapped person for the service."

Vergia completes an interview with each potential client be-

fore agreeing the program will provide service for them. Once approved, homemakers are assigned for deep cleaning, home cleaning or seasonal yard work. Vergia later makes follow-up home visits and referrals for additional service as needed.

As a result of Hellen's efforts over 20 years ago more than 200 low income elderly and handicapped individuals each year have a safe and sanitary environment and remain independent in their homes as long as possible.

NEVER A DULL MOMENT

There's no such thing as a dull day at Casa de Amigos. From visiting with friends to choosing from a variety of activities, the seniors stay busy. Health is an important issue and some members start the day with exercise. Others take advantage of health screenings and fairs at Casa de Amigos. And there is always time to recognize the people who fought to keep this country free.



Roberto Magallanes, from left, Juan Gonzales and Raul Granado, participants in the Senior Services Area and veterans, were honored on Veterans Day in November with a special cake.



Two employees of Calvert Home Health Care test seniors for cholesterol, left, while other seniors exercise together.

HEALTH PROBLEMS DIFFICULT FOR COUPLE

Mr. and Mrs. P are very grateful for the Health/Dental Services Program at Casa de Amigos. **Silvia Lemos**, Health/Dental Services Program Director arranged an appointment for Mr. P to see **Mohsin Syed, MD, FACP** who volunteers two nights per month to help patients at the agency. Mr. P had previously worked with Dr. Sandeep Dhindsa, but had not been taking his daily medicine, insulin and other diabetic medications since 2008 because he could not find a doctor due to lack of medical insurance.

When obtaining help, Mrs. P shared Mr. P's diabetes story with Silvia: *Mr. P recently had minor surgery on his foot for an infected sore, which is common with diabetes. Mr. P is unable to work at this time because he lost weight and is weak. Mrs. P, who has health problems of her own, has been driving him to the hospital every morning for clean bandages which has prevented her from working fulltime. At each hospital visit, Mr. P received only enough medicine until the next trip to the hospital emergency room.*

With Dr. Syed's help, the couple now has medical care plus prescriptions and refills. Mr. P also received a walker that was donated to the agency. As their health improves, the couple both hope to return to work.

COORDINATING HEALTH/DENTAL SERVICES

Below is a list of groups, organizations and businesses who give their expertise and time to help clients in the Health/Dental Services Program:

- Angels Care Home Health
- Rhonda Carr – MMH Dietician & Certified Diabetes Teacher
- Casa de Amigos Health/Dental Services Program Advisory Committee members
- Encompass Home Health
- Express Nursing Home Health Care Services
- Family Care Clinic
- Dr. Mohsin Syed
- Sharla Carver, Nurse Practitioner
- Midland County *AgriLife* Extension Agency
- Midland Health Department
- Midland Memorial Hospital
- Premier Retina Specialists
- Rightway Medical Supplies (Diabetic Shoes)
- St Joseph's Home Health, Inc.
- Elizabeth Tavarez (Motivation of Life Style Changes)
- Texas Prevent Blindness Agency
- Texas Dept. of State Health Services
- Texas Services Network (CHIP/Medicaid)

“Many thanks for the services which offer health education and prevention for low-income persons.” – Silvia Lemos

CLIENT PROVES CLASSES WORK

A client in the Diabetes Nutrition sessions offered in the summer lost more than 30 pounds practicing what she learned in the class taught by **Lindy Tefteller**, *AgriLife* County Extension Agent. Interesting and “almost-like” original recipes plus food measurement for the diabetic were included.

Silvia Lemos, Health/Dental Services Program Director, shared that the course for diabetics was called Diabetic Cooking. It encouraged people who have been dealing with diabetes for quite some time, but needed menus with some new ideas.

Lindy states, “If the participants in the class apply the materials presented, they should be able to keep their blood sugar count under control and therefore feel better. Losing weight is a side benefit some of the clients enjoy. A favorite dish Lindy made for the class included black beans, corn, tomato and onion.”



Lindy Tefteller, AgriLife County Extension Agent, presents an overview of her four-evening class on Diabetic Cooking.

GRANTS FUND AFTER-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES



Lauren Curry, right, outreach teacher with Midland Festival Ballet, leads a group of students in some dance steps as part of Casa de Amigos' after-school arts program.

Casa de Amigos recently received a \$5,000 grant from the **Arts Assembly of Midland (AAM)** and **Texas Commission on the Arts** for the After-School Arts activities in 2010.

Keisha Hailey, violinist, will be instructing a strings class during the after-school program, and art instruction will also be offered. Other activities funded by the grant include dance, poetry, music and drama.

The agency's Senior Services Program received a \$500 grant for cultural activities for the senior participants. Previous cultural activities have included making homemade tortillas and paper flowers for the Tex-Mex Celebration. These same activities will be offered as part of the *Tardeada* (Sunday afternoon gatherings) for the senior citizens and their families and weekly as scheduled.

Midland High School graduate and current marketing student at Northwestern University in Chicago, Ill, **Kaitlin Miller** spent her summer days as an intern with agency staff. In September she was recognized as the organization's Volunteer of the Year for the Arts Assembly of Midland.

Kaitlin's artistic abilities helped with decorating for the agency's Celebrity "Waiters Gone Wild" fundraising event. Using her journalism knowledge, Kaitlin created flyers and brochures for recruitment and wrote and recorded quality Public Service Announcements for the AmeriCorps program.



A SUCCESSFUL PAIRING

Midland Need to Read and Casa de Amigos have had an on-going partnership for over 20 years that has helped their clients, programs and staff members. Midland Need to Read directs adult learners to General Education Development (GED) study and English Language Development (ELD) classes while Casa de Amigos refers adult learners to Midland Need to Read for one-to-one individual tutoring.

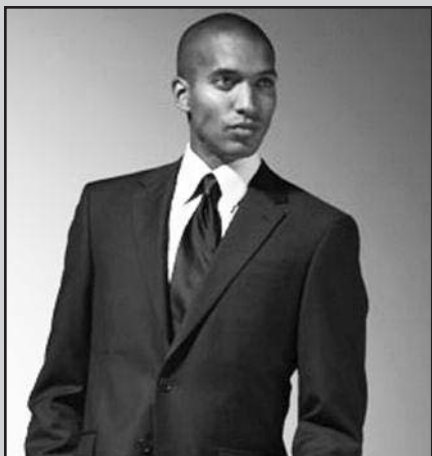
This fall **Cris Shaw**, Midland Need to Read Program Director, tested 40 ELD and GED adult learners as they enrolled at Casa de Amigos. **Paul Brooks**, Education Program Director, says, "Midland Need to Read provided Cris' time, expertise and materials to ensure the success of the adult learners enrolling in the classes." Cris and **Patti Groce**, Midland Need to Read Executive Director, also held an in-service training for the agency's ELD and GED instructors. In addition, they donated 24 tutor manuals and led the literacy training for 30 AmeriCorps members on September 8 (National Literacy Day).

Patti says, "Supporting GED and ELD classes which serve the educational and literacy needs of the adult learners at Casa de Amigos is a priority with Midland Need to Read. The General Education Development (GED) study is essential to individuals who have not graduated from high school. Working together as partners, we can help people pass the GED."

STUDENTS WORK ON GED EXAMS

Latasha Collins, a 30-year-old mother, came to Casa de Amigos to prepare for the General Education Development (GED) exam. On her second day of review the instructor told her, based on her pre-test scores, she was ready to take the test. Latasha took the test in November and hopes to learn in mid-December that she passed.

A young man, age 23, took the GED exam recently and passed the math and science sections, but needs to retake the English and history sections of the exam. It is usually the math and science sections that have to be taken for the second time. He said he uses math every day in his job. He anticipates studying the other sections and receiving his certificate in the near future.



STORE SPONSORS SUIT DRIVE

In September **Men's Wearhouse** held its National Suit Drive to help at-risk men make a good first impression for job interviews as they prepare to re-enter the workforce. Casa de Amigos was selected as the Nonprofit Partner for the Midland Men's Wearhouse store.

Midlanders donated 130 suits and Men's Wearhouse enhanced each suit with a new tie. A large number of dress shirts, slacks and sport coats were also donated by the public. Much of the clothing came straight from the donor's cleaners with shirts and khakis already laundered and pressed.

Rodney Norris, manager of the Midland store, stated, "Men's Wearhouse had a great response from the community to assist clients of Casa de Amigos and other agencies in Midland. We were excited to be the gathering point for clothes for men who need a hand-up to the next step in their lives."

STRENGTH IN PARTNERSHIP

Catarina Medrano, Social Services Program Director, partners with other social service agencies in Midland as part of her daily responsibilities. She assisted more than two weeks at The Salvation Army in October taking clients' applications for Christmas gifts for children. Catarina was also able to interview some agency clients while at The Salvation Army. In turn, Casa de Amigos provides EZ Rider bus passes to Salvation Army's clients.

First Baptist Church and Safe Place are additional partners who refer adults for General Education Development (GED) test preparation and English Language Development (ELD) instruction at Casa de Amigos. Safe Place is also able to fill appointments that the agency reserves for clients in the Legal Aid of Northwest Texas legal clinic.

Partnering in social work means working together and combining strengths to achieve great results. In social work the staff finds a variety of needs. Coordinating resources with other organizations helps meet those needs most effectively.

Weight Watchers employee Sandy Haynes, left, shared canned food her clients contributed during the 2nd Annual "Lose For Good" Campaign. Accepting the canned goods for Casa de Amigos were Social Services Program Director Catarina Medrano, center, and Ida Fletcher, Life Skills & Self-Sufficiency Program Coordinator. Midland Weight Watcher clients lost 2,601 pounds from April 30 to October 17, which will result in a \$2,601 contribution from national Weight Watchers to the Action Against Hunger, Share Our Strength and No Kid Hungry programs.



LOWE'S BRUSHES UP AGENCY

The employees of **Lowe's Home Improvement Center** helped with several tasks at the agency. **Ruth Ford**, Human Resource Manager for Lowe's, said one major effort was tiling the ladies' bathroom in the Senior Services area. Other tasks completed were putting down new sand in the children's playground area and fixing a hole in a wall and painting an office. "Lowe's Heroes" also removed trees from the flower beds. Thank you!

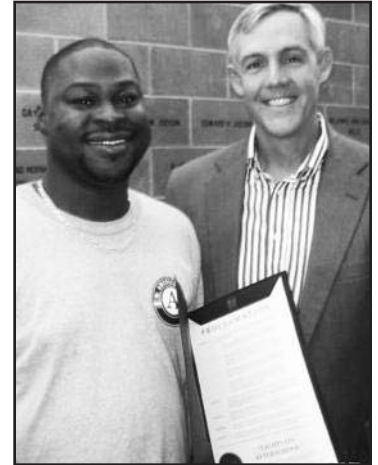
STARS WORK IN COMMUNITY

AmeriCorps STARS (Student Tutoring Assessment Readiness Success) members tutor elementary age children in reading to “make a difference,” and they are also charged with serving the community at large during their terms. As a result, members have participated in eight service projects since they began serving in August.

On September 11, the 30 members participated in the Remembrance Volunteer Fair with the Retired Service Volunteer Program (RSVP). On September 12, they joined in a Recovery Walk with Midland Independent School District to locate possible high school drop outs who had not returned to school this fall. Subsequently, more than 45 students promised to give school another chance.

In October members worked on a house with Habitat for Humanity and volunteered for the Junior League’s Family First event, which focused on parenting. The members’ “Make a Difference Day” Project on October 24 was to volunteer for a Senior Health & Services Fair at the agency. On October 22, the 30-member group undertook Lights On Afterschool Recognition Day. The recognition focused on after-school programs and how they keep children safe and active. Mayor Wes Perry was speaker for the event and gave AmeriCorps a proclamation from the City of Midland.

In November, AmeriCorps members worked for Recycle Midland at Midland College with Keep Midland Beautiful.



Mayor Wes Perry, right, hands a proclamation to Reggie Bryant with AmeriCorps Leadership Council.

VITA NEEDS VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are needed to help low-income families and individuals with their 2009 tax returns through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program. Casa de Amigos will be offering free tax return service in the afternoons and evenings starting in late January through mid-April 2010. To volunteer for the tax return program or for more information call **Anita Green**, Financial Literacy Specialist or **Paul Brooks**, Education Program Director, 682-9701.

Internal Revenue Service (IRS) employees and a trained Casa de Amigos’ staff member will be organizing the volunteer orientation and training for new volunteers at Midland College in January 2010. Appointments will be made beginning in mid January for free tax return filing by calling Casa de Amigos, 682-9701.

Sign Me Up

Carmen Gonzales, facing camera, raises her hand during a recent AmeriCorps training session. The members were trained in working with young children to improve their reading skills.



GATHERING AWARDS

The second Asset Building Awards hosted by Midland College Business & Economic Development Center selected **Casa de Amigos** and **Community National Bank** for the **2009 Partnership Award** recognizing collaboration by the two entities in the *MoneySmart* program for the past five years.

Don Hellinghausen, a former board member with Casa de Amigos, was recognized as the 2009 Individual Awardee along with **Habitat for Humanity** as the 2009 Non-Profit Awardee and **ConocoPhillips** as the 2009 For-Profit Awardee.

Executive Director Lael Cordes-Pitts, LMSW, spoke to the 60 attendees as the 2008 Non-Profit and Partnership Awardee Representative. The Awards Luncheon was held in the Marie Hall Academic Building on the Midland College campus.



Remember

THE SEASON



*To Our Friends,
 We are blessed by the time, talents, resources and friendship
 that you willingly share.
 Many people are served in Midland
 as a result of your generosity.
 May love, peace and hope be with you during the holidays
 and may faith and love sustain you in the New Year.*

– Casa de Amigos
 Board of Directors and Staff



Casa de Amigos

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