

• • • Circles of Mercy has more than a thirteen-year tradition of providing hope, hospitality and empowerment to individuals in the Rensselaer Community, especially women and women with children. • • •



SPONSORED BY  
THE SISTERS OF MERCY  
NORTHEAST COMMUNITY

**Mission Statement:**

Circles of Mercy honors the dignity of each person, offers hospitality and provides services to instill hope and empower individuals to reach their full potential.

WINTER/SPRING 2011

VOLUME 10

Number 1

**Director:**

Richard Zazycki

**Hours:**

M-F, 9 a.m.– 4 p.m.

**Programs:**

- Mentoring
- Tutoring
- Computer Training
- Support Groups
- Parenting Classes
- Self Enhancement Groups
- Professional Clothing
- Advocacy
- Catherine's Closet

# Connections

## Christmas 2010 Adopt-A-Family Program

Circles of Mercy's 2010 Christmas Adopt-a-Family program was very successful despite the economic climate. This year, 50 families enjoyed gifts for the holiday season because of the generosity of our donors. This number is unchanged from Christmas of 2009.

The families served consisted of 176 people, with 114 of these children and 62 adults. The total contributions of cash and gifts were close to \$19,000, with an average gift from each donor of \$100. Circles of Mercy is grateful to the many individual donors, employee groups, and area schools who participated in this program and made the holidays happy for those less fortunate than themselves.

We especially appreciated the efforts of Sarah Clark, a Siena College social work

student intern, who worked with the staff at Circles of Mercy to make this year's program so successful. We extend a special thank you to Siena College's Franciscan Center for Service and Advocacy which adopted 10 families. Thanks also to the Senior and Freshman student classes from The Academy of the Holy Names and for the participation of over 25 individuals and 17 employee groups who helped with shopping and wrapping gifts for the families adopted.

It is because of the Mercy spirit of everyone who participated, that Circles is able to carry out its mission to minister to the underserved, especially women and women with children. •



Santa Clause, Mrs. Clause and Chief Elf Michael Stewart checking to make sure all gifts are in order for our Adopt-a-Family program



Santa's Workers from the NYS Assembly Program Development Group are busy wrapping a portion of the many gifts donated for Circles' Adopt-A-Family Christmas project.



## Circles of Mercy Board Members

Rose A. Barba  
Sister Patricia Houlihan, RSM  
Janice Labas  
Nancy L. LaRow  
Shannon O'Neill, Ph.D.  
Kathleen G. Pingelski  
Sister Jane S. Somerville, RSM  
Jack M. Sweeney

## Corporate Sponsors

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Sisters of Mercy Northeast Community  
Stewart's Foundation  
Walmart Store East Greenbush  
W.J. Lyons, Jr. Funeral Home, Inc.

## CATHERINE'S CLOSET THRIFT SHOP

11 Washington Street • Rensselaer

Open Monday – Friday  
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.  
Tuesdays only, until 5 p.m.  
Clothes & Household Goods

## Connections

A newsletter to promote the mission and values of Circles of Mercy, a program sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy.

Eleanor Guerin, RSM, Editor  
Joanne Scheibly, Editor

### CONTRIBUTING WRITERS:

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Kathleen Pingelski  
Shannon O'Neill  
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www.circlesofmercy.org

## Honorary Gifts and Memorial Donations

Circles of Mercy gratefully acknowledges the following donations.

### In Memory of:

Sister Maureen A. Joyce, RSM – by Terry Ewell  
Jeannette Tondreault "Jan" Renaud –  
by Volunteers and Staff at Circles of Mercy  
James F.R. "Jimmy" Knowles, II –  
by Volunteers and Staff at Circles of Mercy  
James C. and Anna Venter –  
by James and Diana Venter  
Peg McMahon – by Katie Dermott  
Patricia Hayes Burns – by Eleanor H. McCoy  
Kathryn Murphy Gorman – by Richard S. Zazycki  
Sister Madelene Colaneri, RSM –  
by Richard S. Zazycki  
Ellen Bobersky – by Theresa A. White  
Margaret Jones – by Shane and Maureen Somerville  
Ralph Lemme – by Shane and Maureen Somerville  
Anne C. Benson, Mercy Associate –  
by Volunteers and Staff at Circles of Mercy  
Julia C. Riccobene –  
by Shane and Maureen Somerville  
Harriet A. Proctor –  
by Shane and Maureen Somerville  
John Chenette – by Diane Chenette Cleveland  
Elizabeth "Betty" Lawless –  
by Volunteers and Staff at Circles of Mercy  
Fortuin and Siligato Families – by Corrie Siligato  
Sister Mary Angela Baniak, RSM –  
by Volunteers and Staff at Circles of Mercy  
Burton Handy (Sister M. Cabrini Nellis' brother-in-law) – by Richard S. Zazycki  
Alan Houston –  
by Volunteers and Staff at Circles of Mercy  
Mary Lemme Giminiani –  
by Shane and Maureen Somerville  
Fred Fleitz – by Shane and Maureen Somerville  
Diana Tompkins – by Shane and Maureen Somerville  
Joseph L. Druke –  
by Volunteers and Staff at Circles of Mercy  
Dr. James E. Graber, MD – by Sisters Jane S.  
Somerville, RSM, and Barbara Dudley, RSM, Shane  
and Maureen Somerville and Richard S. Zazycki  
Richard R. Rowley –  
by Shane and Maureen Somerville  
Dr. James Marrow Orr, MD –  
by Shane and Maureen Somerville  
Louis Collen – by Shane and Maureen Somerville

Joseph Evans (Bing) Arborio –  
by Volunteers and Staff at Circles of Mercy  
William M. Schanz –  
by Shane and Maureen Somerville  
Edmund C. Spizowski –  
by Volunteers and Staff at Circles of Mercy  
Alice Hunter – by Maureen Somerville  
Joan P. Gorzynski –  
by Volunteers and Staff at Circles of Mercy  
Hazel S.jevons – by Shane and Maureen Somerville  
Sister Alva Lucy Mayone, RSM –  
by Volunteers and Staff at Circles of Mercy  
M. Jane Tyrrell, Mercy Associate –  
by Mary Femia and Richard Zazycki

### In Honor of:

Sisters of Mercy Celebrating Jubilees in 2010: Helen Klee (75th); M. Vincentia Devine, M. Albertus Mathis and M. Christopher Letzelter (70th); Patricia Casla, Jeanne Conley, Martha Joyce, A. Marion Rafferty, Joyce Ross and M. Claude Ruehl (60th); Mary Costello, Mary Hartnett, Mary Margaret Hickey, Patricia Mannion and Gail Waring (50th) – by Mary A. Femia, Sister. M. Aloise Almond, RSM, Richard S. Zazycki, Sister M. Anitra Patrie, RSM, Sister Pat Mannion, RSM, Sister Theresa Gottstein, RSM, Sister Shelia Christensen, RSM, Sister Marilyn Hickey, RSM, Sister Josephine Reynolds, RSM, Joanne Scheibly, Sister Pat Casla, RSM, Sister Marilyn Murray, RSM, Sister Rose Hobbs, RSM, Sister Barbara Dudley, RSM, Sister Jane S. Somerville, RSM, Sister Mary T. Hartnett, RSM, Sister Joyce Ross, RSM, Deborah Dugan and Sister Marie E. Matthews, RSM.  
Sister Lindora Cabral, RSM (50th Jubilee) – by Sister Jane S. Somerville, RSM and the Staff and Volunteers at Circles of Mercy  
New Mercy NE Candidates: Amanda Carrier and Angela McCormick – by Richard S. Zazycki  
Christine Guerin – by Sister Eleanor C. Guerin, RSM  
Vera Carman – by John Carman  
Hilda Talantino –  
by Deborah Wood Zanin and Jennifer Wood  
Elsin Collins –  
by Deborah Wood Zanin and Jennifer Wood  
Nina and Tom Kryzak – by Cornelia Schmitter  
Vera and John Carmen – by Todd Daukas  
Mary Lou Flavin – by Mary Ann Wilson •

"The poor need help today, not next week..."

– Catherine McAuley

## Director's Remarks by Richard Zazycki

### Thank You VITA Volunteers!!!

Circles of Mercy has a tradition of providing economically challenged individuals, families and seniors, appointments with an IRS-certified volunteer who helps them file their federal and state tax returns free of charge. It is one of the most popular and requested services that Circles provides, and has become an invaluable resource for the residents of Rensselaer, where nearly 50% of the households live below the state median household income.

Circles participates in a regional coalition called CASH (Creating Assets Savings and Hope) which supports and coordinates the VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) program. Circles is the lead faith-based agency for both the local County CASH Chapter as well as the Capital Region Coalition, where it partners with the IRS and other community service agencies including AARP Tax Aide volunteers from the Rensselaer Senior Center and the United Way. The Circles VITA site is one of the busiest in Rensselaer County and is staffed by 11 volunteer tax preparers.

This filing season's figures are not yet available. However, last year our



(From left) VITA volunteer Joanne Scheibly (Mercy Associate) assists client Bernie Ryan with filing of her tax return.

volunteers, including business students from Catholic Central High School, filed 354 returns. This resulted in combined tax refunds and earned income tax credits of over \$667,000 for the working poor of our community. Regionally the VITA program last year generated over \$13 million dollars, most of which clients put right back into the community by paying their bills or creating assets through the purchase of saving bonds. Through the VITA program, the IRS provides Circles with all the training and software programs, allowing us to prepare a client's tax returns absolutely free and submit them electronically. This way clients don't need to use a commercial preparer, they avoid paying high prep fees or getting hit with huge interest

rates on refund anticipation loans (RALs)".

This all takes place because dedicated volunteers spend over 3,000 hours in support of this effort. The VITA program is a unique and exceptional way for Circles to carry out Catherine McAuley's goal of joining those who need services with those individuals who can best provide them. The staff of Circles of Mercy also deserves recognition for the support work of scheduling, intake and documentation they do to make the VITA program run smoothly. This program is one more important way in which Circles of Mercy makes a difference in the lives of an otherwise underserved population. •



VITA site coordinator Marilyn Hart (center left) and VITA volunteer Dick Klee (far right) assist Catholic High student volunteers and tax clients with returns.)

### Great Support for the Back to School Program

"Cate's Kids Back to School Program" at Circles of Mercy is held each year to assist low-income families obtain free school supplies for their children. Our program was chaired again this past fall by Academy of the Holy Name student Allison House and assisted by Allison's mother Lisa House. The donations of both supplies and monies collected from many of our benefactors and employee group donors

amounted to over \$5,000! More than 110 children from Rensselaer were given all the supplies they needed to begin school this past fall. This is an increase of 33% over last year.

In addition, the extra supplies received were also shared with the Rensselaer City School District, the Rensselaer Boys and Girls Club and CEO's Rensselaer Family Resource Center – Head Start program.

A big "thank you" to the SEFCU Foundation and also Jack Yonally at B. Lodge's in Albany who contributed over 110 new back packs for our client students, as well as the many Mercy Sisters and Associates and the parish communities of St. Mary's at Clinton Heights, Holy Spirit of East Greenbush and St. Lucy's/St. Bernadette's in Altamont-Berne who assisted the program with donations. •

## Mark Your Calendar!

Circles of Mercy is planning some wonderful events so mark your calendar. You will have the opportunity to warm the heart of a child by donating to the **Cate's Kids Easter Basket Program**. All baskets need to be at Circles by Monday, April 18<sup>th</sup> so that they will be ready for the Easter Bunny to pick up. Also this summer (during July and August) we will begin to collect needed supplies for **Cate's Kids Back to School Program**. This way we can assist the parents with needed items for when their children go back to school this fall. Again Allison House will coordinate these important programs.

### We have three great fundraisers planned this year...

We will again participate in **The 23rd Annual Freihofer's Community Walk** done in memory of Sister Gail Rieth, RSM, which will be held on Saturday, June 4<sup>th</sup>, starting at 12:30pm. Check-in on Walk Day will take place at the Empire State Plaza's South Concourse in front of the main cafeteria and bus turn-around between 10:00 am and 12:30 pm. **The non-profit code for Circles of Mercy is 202;**

We will also have our Gala, **"A Taste of Mercy"**, which will be held at Carmella's (Formerly Casey's Banquet House) in Rensselaer on Thursday, June 16<sup>th</sup> from 5:30 to 7:30 pm;

Finally, we will have our **Annual Irish Night Celebration** at Mercy Center on Saturday, October 1<sup>st</sup> from 6:00 to 10:00p.m.; featuring the music of our dear friend **Frank Jaklitsch**.

These are wonderful community builders and can be great opportunities to introduce more people to the works of Circles of Mercy. See who you might like to invite so that our Circle of Mercy continues to grow!

## Make a Gift to Circles of Mercy

Is there a loved one whom you would like to remember in a special way for a birthday, anniversary, or even at the time of death? Why not honor him or her with a donation to Circles of Mercy? If you choose, donations will be recognized in future newsletters. We will also send a personal acknowledgment of your gift. Contributions to Circles of Mercy are tax deductible. Please call us at 518-462-0899 for further information.

I am enclosing my gift of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

In honor of: (living) \_\_\_\_\_

In memory of: (deceased) \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE SEND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TO:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Please mention my loved one (name only) in your newsletter:

Yes  No