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# Hearts and Hands: Women Making a Difference in the Community

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Annapolis—home of the very first capital of the United States and the Naval Academy. It is hard to imagine that hidden within our city streets are more than 1,000 homeless people. Even more staggering is the number of homeless children in Anne Arundel County—approximately 960—a number that has more than doubled since 2009.

In a time when the economy is suffering and many families are facing extremely difficult times, there is a place of hope for the homeless to turn: **The Light House: A Homeless Prevention Support Center.**

For nearly two decades, the Light House has served as a beacon of hope to Anne Arundel County's most fragile neighbors. The Light House has been steadfast in the mission of rebuilding lives with service and compassion by providing shelter, preventing homelessness, and empowering people in Anne Arundel County as they work to become self-sufficient. More than 75 percent of people leave the shelter with a place to live, an income, and the tools to lead productive lives.

The Light House shelter, currently located at 206 West Street, has 18 beds and 2 apartments to provide a safe, clean haven for 150–200 adults and children each year. However, with the increasing number of “eligible” homeless people and the lack of space to provide shelter and services, the current facility has been turning away 500-plus homeless people each year, 150 of which are children.

Motivated by the tremendous need and the dedication of volunteers, businesses, board members, and staff, the Annapolis and Anne Arundel County community has come together to build a new, larger facility. Construction of the new facility began in the fall of 2009 and it's scheduled for completion in September this year.

The 24,000-square-foot facility is being built on 1.4 acres of Hudson Street in the Parole area of Annapolis, MD. It will accommodate at least 60 beds for individuals and 5 apartments for resident families, plus a children's playroom and fenced outdoor play area.

The new shelter will house a Day Center where homeless people can access food, showers, healthcare, counseling, mail, and job training services. The new facility will also include an Empowerment Center, designed to provide the building blocks of education, accountability, and support that are necessary to achieve self-reliance. Elements of the center include classrooms, an employment resource room, several private counseling rooms, and a kitchen for culinary job training.

Hundreds of Board members, volunteers, construction crews, Anne Arundel County residents, government officials, school children, local and national businesses, church groups, and other organizations have contributed in a variety of ways to making this project a reality.

At the heart and hand of the success of the Light House, six Annapolis women are truly making a difference. These women are giving selflessly of their time, energy, and passion to improve the quality of life of the homeless in Annapolis and Anne Arundel County.

### **Elizabeth Kinney, President AAMI dba The Light House**

Elizabeth Kinney has been involved with the Light House for more than 17 years and is currently the President of AAMI Board of Directors. When her daughters were very young, they began volunteering at the shelter cooking dinners for the residents, which led her to becoming more active in the service role.

Prior to serving as President, Ms. Kinney was President of the Friends of the Light House Shelter Board. During that time, about five years ago, she and several others started the Capital Campaign for Shelter. With a \$400,000 check from the county and an advisory board, their dream of a new facility had wings. The capital campaign has raised more than \$8 million for the new building.

“The last three years were filled with stories of miracles, each one with someone’s name on it. The right person showing up with the right skills and willingness to help us move forward.” [k2]

### **Kathy Baker, Executive Director, Light House**

Ms. Baker has recently joined Light House as the Executive Director.

As a visionary and leader with extensive experience in the non-profit sector, she understands the need and urgency of the facility, programs, and services offered by Light House.

“The new shelter will allow us to bring what we do in the community to another level of effectiveness and professional standards and will allow us to do so much more.”

Ms. Baker explained that the foundation and success of the Light House has been the support of the community. The immediate needs of the new Light House will offer more opportunities for the volunteers to work directly with Light House clients. Whether it’s preparing and serving meals or volunteering to help with any one of the supportive services programs that will be offered, volunteers are encouraged to participate in work skills tutoring, financial management training, life skills development, and counseling services.

### **Amy Chase, Marketing Specialist/Community Liaison, Whole Foods Market Annapolis**

Whole Foods Market Annapolis has actively supported the Light House Shelter for years with monetary and product donations including sponsoring this year's Ride for Shelter with an ice cream donation to cool down weary riders.

The force behind the Whole Foods Market's involvement in the Light House is Amy Chase, Marketing Specialist/Community Liaison. She is extremely passionate about the Light House shelter and plans to continue supporting its cause at the new shelter site.

Whole Foods plans to help with fundraising activities and donations including a community garden. Their team members will construct and plant the garden and work with other volunteer groups and Light House shelter clients to tend to the crops. All fruits, vegetables, and herbs cultivated will be used to feed the residents of the shelter. Whole Foods chefs will host cooking classes and nutrition classes for residents to help them learn more about healthy eating and making good food choices.

"I am passionate about the Light House shelter as it is a place of peace, love, hope and understanding. Digging in the dirt next to someone is a great equalizer. Social status, net worth and stereotypes tend to be forgotten when sharing a common experience for the greater good."

### **Terri Hussman, Major Donor and Volunteer**

Terri Hussman is involved in two ways with the Light House: as a volunteer and a donor. Terri and her husband John are lead gift donors to the Campaign for Shelter and once the Hussmans were on board as donors, it seemed only natural to them to spend time at the shelter getting to know the organization and the clients. Ms. Hussman now volunteers at least once a week to help with the lunches and the pantry.

"I usually go to LHS on Monday's and I can honestly say it is the best way to start off a week, working with some wonderful people who come together simply to make the day of a less fortunate neighbor a little easier."

### **Debra Bird, President of Friends of the Light House Shelter (FLHS)**

Debra Bird has been actively involved with the Light House since late 2004, when she volunteered to be part of the organizing committee for the inaugural Ride for Shelter. She was looking for a fun and worthwhile community service activity. Her kids had packed lunches for the shelter during their Kindergarten and early elementary school years, so she was aware that Annapolis had a homeless shelter. Being involved with the very first Ride for Shelter was both challenging and daunting, but tremendously rewarding, she says.

"I met so many fantastic people who had been involved with the LHS for years, and I was totally blown away by their compassion and enthusiasm. When the event was over, Elizabeth Kinney approached me about joining the board of Friends of the Light House Shelter, and I did not hesitate to accept"

## **Stacey Smith, Board Member FLHS, Owner Smith Marketing & Events**

After being laid off from a local homebuilding company in the summer of 2008, Stacey Smith started her own business.. A few months later, after reading an article in the local paper that mentioned the effect the poor economy was having on Anne Arundel County and the increased need for volunteers at the Light House, Ms. Smith was moved to help at the shelter.

“It just broke my heart. After all, in time, had my new business not been a success, I could have ended up in their shoes.”

Ms. Smith has created and organized events over the last two years that have raised more than \$20,000 and donated more than 2000 canned good items. In addition to being very active as a volunteer with the Light House, Ms. Smith’s company, Smith Marketing & Events, was selected to plan the Grand Opening activities for the new building in the Fall of 2010.

To celebrate the collaborative efforts and grand opening of the new facility, plans include a Garden Party in early October to thank those who have made substantial financial contributions to the Campaign for Shelter.

A special Ribbon Cutting Reception will also be held at the new Light House, which will include a ribbon cutting, a brief program, self-guided tours through the new facility, food and drink from local restaurants, and live music from a local musician.

It’s no wonder the theme for the grand opening celebrations is Hearts and Hands: Look what one community can do when they bring their hearts and hands together to help those in need.

Each of these women has their own personal story to tell about her involvement, passion, and commitment to the Light House, but there is a common thread that binds them together. These women are working together to help the community better understand who the Light House clientele really is, break the perception of who the homeless are, and create an awareness of how the community can help prevent homelessness.