



Brian Marschhauser



TAPinto
Katonah /
Lewisboro
Your Neighborhood News Online



POWERED BY
Katonah
LewisboroTimes

LOGIN

SUBMIT CONTENT

NEWSLETTER SIGNUP

In Case You Missed It

Doing Good

By DON SCOTT

Published March 17, 2022 at 12:24 PM

Do you have an organization or group you are involved with that constantly amazes you with how well run it is? For me, it is the Community Center of Northern Westchester.

The Community Center was born over 30 years ago. Originally, volunteers from several houses of worship wanted to expand on a food pantry being run by the Presbyterian Church in Katonah. Ralph van Sicklin, of the Katonah Lions Club, saw an opportunity for a permanent home at a dilapidated, abandoned building at 84 Bedford Road in Katonah and reached out to its owner, the New York City DEP, for permission to give the building new bones, a facelift, and a new mission. Ralph stood in front of the bulldozer as the DEP was going to tear down the building down and a partnership was formed between the New York DEP and the town who then leased it to the CCNW.

After the DEP gave the green light and turned over the keys, Van Sicklin was joined by Alexia Jurshak, a board member of the Community Center and the Katonah Village Improvement Society to lead the volunteer effort. The result was an Amish-style barn raising which created the facility we see today.

The “new” Community Center opened its doors in 1998. The breadth of what happens now under that roof and behind the CCNW banner must amaze its founders.

The organization that started as a food pantry to offer support to some of our neighbors experiencing tough times has blossomed into so much more. Three-thousand families from 38 Northern Westchester communities received support from the center. At the height of the pandemic in 2020, they distributed 1 million pounds of food. Thankfully, the need for food from families has ticked down a bit from the height of the pandemic but remains double what it was prior to the pandemic.

Last year, the in-house clothing boutique distributed 6,000 pairs of shoes and 1,800 winter coats. They also offer education through classes and workshops ranging from ESL to computer skills training to job counseling and sewing. Their fundraising drives have also provided fourteen academic scholarships to underprivileged youth to continue their education.

The new Community Shop opened in 2019 under the management of Anne Hardy. Selling the more valuable donations the shop sold more than 14,000 items in 2021 providing significant support to center programs.

A Community Studio opened recently as well next to the Katonah Post Office offering skill building programs, and a place for clients can sell their handicrafts.

Significant resources are required to make the CCNW mission happen. How do they do it? There is so much that all organizations can learn from the Community Center success story. It should be a case study for non-profit business schools—if there are such things. If there aren't, there should be.

The Community Center has built a tremendous network of support through over 40 Community Partners consisting of schools, religious, and civic organizations. The community partners extend the Center's mission.

They have also built relationships with dozens of corporate sponsors who support the cause. Smartly, they have not accepted government support and the red tape and restrictions that go with it. It also helps to have a charming, charismatic, executive director responsible for day-to-day activities like Clare Murray as the face of the organization.

From a governance standpoint, the Community Center excels. A core value is strategic planning and setting goals. They recruit the best and the brightest from our area via an active nominating committee. Since there are term limits on board members, a steady flow of new talent is required. The results have been new people, fresh ideas, new accomplishments, and an ever-improving organization. Other institutions could learn from their example.

Don Scott, a former Bedford town councilman and president of the Katonah-Lewisboro Board of Education, discusses the issues of the day.