

## Breakfast at Baltusrol Celebrates Our Promise to Children

Nearly 200 friends and acquaintances of Family Promise gathered at Baltusrol Golf Club on October 18 for a one-hour breakfast program called Our Promise to Children. They were in attendance to offer support as well as to learn about how we help homeless families achieve sustainable independence.



Family Promise Chair Cary Hardy served as emcee for the event. Karen Olson, Founder and President, spoke of the great need being addressed – families are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population and one in every four is a child. She shared with the guests her abiding belief, which has informed Family Promise over the past twenty-five years, that one child homeless is one too many.

Former Bergen County guest Shawnée's speech was the high point of the morning. She spoke movingly about finding Family Promise at a time in her life when she and her son had nowhere left to turn. Within a matter of months, with the help of the volunteers at Bergen's host congregations, she had a new job, her son was enrolled in Bergen Catholic High School, and they had moved into their own apartment.

Trustee Neely Dodge closed the program by inviting the financial support of those in attendance. Our guests and sponsors responded with tremendous generosity, donating more than \$159,000 in gifts and pledges. Family Promise offers our heartfelt thanks to all who attended for their support.

*Family Promise gratefully acknowledges our Breakfast sponsors:*

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## Family Promise

EDITOR: Chris Kaul  
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS:  
Chris Kaul, Karen Olson,  
Mary Jo Patterson  
LAYOUT: Sahlman Art Studio

PHONE: 908-273-1100  
FAX: 908-273-0030  
EMAIL: [info@familypromise.org](mailto:info@familypromise.org)  
WEB: [www.familypromise.org](http://www.familypromise.org)

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**Family Promise®** is a national volunteer-based nonprofit organization founded on the belief that Americans are compassionate people who want to make a difference. We are committed to help low-income and homeless families reclaim and maintain their independence through our five program areas: Interfaith Hospitality Networks, Family Mentoring, Just Neighbors, Community Initiatives and Voices Uniting.

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**Family Promise®**



...a publication highlighting our work to help low-income families achieve independence.

### A message from the President...

Dear Friends,

Watching Hurricane Sandy churn toward the East Coast and make landfall in southern New Jersey October 29 was a frightening and awe-inspiring experience – frightening because of the obvious threat to lives, awe-inspiring in its might. All of us were gripped with horror at hearing about the two children swept from their mother’s arms as the tide surged that night, and the other lives cut short by flooding, wind-tossed trees or fires.

The aftermath of the storm was also devastating, as millions lost power for a prolonged period. Many toughed it out, but others whose homes were damaged or destroyed were forced to relocate. For hundreds of thousands of people, getting through the day suddenly became a grim struggle.

Left without power, we fumbled in the dark and put on layer upon layer of clothing to stay warm. Robbed of the basic comforts of home, we grumbled about their disappearance. We appreciated the kindness of others who called or e-mailed to see how we were faring. We learned what it’s like to have no control over circumstances. We were reminded that there are times when even the most self-sufficient of us must lean on others for food, gas and shelter.

Fortunately, for most residents of the Northeast, Hurricane Sandy proved to be a temporary inconvenience. But I couldn’t help but wonder if it provided a glimmer of what our

*(continued on page 2)*

## Family Promise Responds to Sandy

**H**urricane Sandy hit New Jersey on October 29 with a fury that hasn’t been seen in years, perhaps generations. Nearly 3 million lost power in the state, thousands were evacuated from their homes in the face of rising flood waters, and 33 people lost their lives. Houses washed away. Miles of boardwalk destroyed. Entire neighborhoods buried under tons of sand and debris.

Family Promise Affiliates throughout New Jersey answered the call. Many expanded their outreach to include their entire communities, offering food, shelter, warmth and critical supplies to all victims of the hurricane. It’s a story of folks banding together to provide hope and comfort in the face of nearly unimaginable loss and destruction.

The Jersey Shore bore the full brunt of the storm. Family Promise of Southern Ocean County includes the barrier islands and shore communities like Seaside Heights and Long Beach



*Sandy Comes Ashore*

Island that were ground zero when Sandy hit land. “We lost four of our ten host congregations,” said Director Cheryl Polo. “Two of those were right on the beach and handled the majority of our hosting during the winter months, beginning in November.”

Reconstruction of the shore will be measured in weeks and months, not days. On Long Beach Island alone, damages are estimated at \$1 billion. In the meantime, Southern Ocean County’s congregations stepped up to fill the void for families as well as aid in the recovery efforts.

*(continued on page 3)*

## Community Creates Homes



*Gina and family*

**G**ina Wagner came close to the brink not once, but twice. Family Promise of Grand Rapids, MI, stood by her each time, offering her a shot at home ownership and sticking with her when tough times returned.

Not long ago, Wagner and her son, now 9, were facing homelessness. Today, she is about to take title to a two-bedroom manufactured home,

*(continued on page 3)*

## President's Message

from page 1

families go through all the time. The storm certainly underscored how easily homelessness can happen. It also demonstrated how neighbors can help each other in times of need.

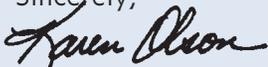
Here in New Jersey, it proved a hectic and challenging time for numerous Affiliates. From the national office in Summit, our Affiliate Services Team stayed in constant touch to make sure all staff, guests and volunteers were safe. A number of our offices grappled with loss of power and two had to close temporarily.

Despite the challenges, congregations in affected areas mobilized quickly, not only accommodating Family Promise guests but also serving the entire community. Volunteers brought in extra beds and offered shelter, food and power to all comers.

At Family Promise in hard-hit Southern Ocean County the storm knocked out four congregations, but others stepped up to fill the void. Volunteers – some of whom were struggling themselves – also organized outreach to the community at large. Ocean Community Church, for example, delivered masks, gloves, bleach and cleaning supplies to residents and helped them clean up; Lacey United Methodist Church set up a distribution center for supplies; and Presbyterian Church of Toms River hosted exhausted relief workers.

The widespread suffering was not easy to see. But the response reaffirmed the conviction that guides us at Family Promise—namely, that we are all in this together, and that we do care about our neighbor. Very much.

Sincerely,



Karen Olson

## Joe Reitz: Passing It On

**V**olunteering for Family Promise is frequently a family affair. Big kids help their parents prepare and serve meals and little kids come along to play with guests' children. But Joe Reitz, a volunteer with Family Promise in Lawrence, KS, has taken family togetherness to an entirely new level.

Three generations of his family are regular Family Promise volunteers. And, on one occasion, four generations showed up to host a dinner for guest families: Reitz, 72, a retired business professor; his wife, Nancy; his parents, who are in their 90s; married daughters Stephanie Fawcett and Elizabeth Dennis; and their children.

"At dinner, my mother had a particularly good time visiting with one mom and her daughter – they were very congenial," Reitz recalls. "On the way home my mother, who is actually a very astute person, said, 'I thought we were going to meet some homeless families.' I said, 'Mom, we just had dinner with them.'"

And that is just the Kansas contingent. Reitz, a father of five and grandfather of 11, has a son in Houston who also volunteers for Family Promise.

"I got my whole family involved. It gives us something in common. When we're together, we talk about it a lot," says Reitz, who founded the Lawrence Affiliate in 2008.

All ages enjoy volunteering, according to Reitz. "For the kids it's a way of living out their faith and serving others. At another level, they understand that these families come from very different backgrounds and aren't nearly so fortunate as they are, and they're willing to do something to make their lives a little bit brighter."

Once one of Reitz's grandchildren ran into a sixth-grader she knew. "It shook her up a little, to know she was going to school with someone who had no place to stay. But they sat down together and had a great time talking about school and their



teachers, as any kids would. But she understood what happens at Family Promise stays there and you don't talk about the people you meet there."

Reitz, who taught business ethics for many years, retired from the University of Kansas in 2006. A few months later a group of pastors who had started a local health care program asked him to take it over. While there, Reitz met a homeless mother and her toddler, whose plight aroused his curiosity about the extent of homelessness in Lawrence, a relatively well-off college town. Then, he began volunteering for the Family Promise Affiliate in Johnson County, Kansas.

"There were Catholic churches and Evangelical and Protestant churches, big and small, and they were all in this thing together full bore. That's when I decided, 'This is what I am going to do,'" recalls Reitz, who joined the national board of Family Promise last February. "There was something about homeless families and children that just grabbed me. It's become my passion."

**Welcoming our  
new Affiliate...**

**Bristol, VA**

## Family Promise Responds to Sandy *(continued from page 1)*

- Lighthouse Alliance housed Operation Blessing International, a disaster relief organization.
- Lacey United Methodist took in dozens of volunteers and displaced families. They acted as a distribution center for food, clothing and supplies.
- Ocean Community Church formed a bucket brigade, bringing masks, gloves, bleach and cleaning supplies to peoples' homes.

Polo has been overwhelmed by the outpouring of compassion, but not surprised. "In the midst of this great misfortune, the silver lining is that everyone can see what we see all the time, neighbors and volunteers coming together to help each other in their time of need."

Our Ocean County Affiliate, in the picturesque town of Toms River, is situated on Barnegat Bay about 70 miles south of New York City. They were full to capacity when Sandy hit. The host site had a gas leak so the families were moved to the Toms River Day Center. Although the Day Center was without power for a

week, volunteers continued to bring in hot meals, even in the face of mandatory evacuations. Presbyterian Church of Toms River set up space and a couple of hundred cots for disaster relief workers working around the clock.

Sandy did bring Southern Ocean County one small blessing. Forked River Presbyterian Church—one of their support congregations—decided to become a host congregation after seeing the need created by the storm.

Director Patricia Cash doesn't know what tomorrow holds, much less how long it will take their community to recover. "We don't have tools for this. We were slammed. We're just figuring it out



*Day Center Damage*

as we go. This isn't going to be a few days. We'll be feeling Sandy's effects for many, many months. This is a new normal we're going to have to adjust to."

The reason Family Promise was able to respond so quickly and efficiently to this crisis is that each Affiliate's network of congregations provides them access to a wide variety of resources at a moment's notice. But those resources—the shelter space, the cots and air mattresses, the bottles of water and boxes of clothes—can only go so far in helping families pick themselves up and put their lives back together.

The secret ingredient is the volunteers who give of themselves so selflessly when called upon, as they were with Sandy. As Family Promise of Hunterdon County Director Geleen Donovan explained it, "We have a powerful network ready to mobilize at a moment's notice. This is the power of what we do—we have 51 congregations from which to draw a great faith-based force. What other agency can do this?"

## Community Creates Homes *(continued from page 1)*

bought and rehabbed by the Grand Rapids Affiliate. "It came fully furnished, with most everything I needed. My office is not even three miles away, my son is in a good school, and the community is nice," says Wagner, whose troubles began when the property management company where she had worked nearly 16 years eliminated her position. "I'm more than thankful. I had literally nowhere to go."

Since November 2008, the Affiliate's "Partners in Housing" program has come to the rescue of 31 individuals or families. Family Promise buys and restores properties that come on the market in three different developments; families who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, are offered

the opportunity to become tenants provided they have sufficient income to afford rent and utilities and meet other eligibility criteria.

For the Affiliate, the approximate cost from start to finish is about \$6,000. For tenants, monthly lot rentals tend to run between \$315 to \$400 dollars. "I case manage and, after six months, if they've demonstrated good homeownership, inside and out, I hand them the title," Assistant Executive Director Barbara Zylstra explained.

The program is the result of an unusual collaboration between Zylstra and Jack Boelema, a Kent County, MI commissioner and retired teacher. "Homelessness really touched him," said Zylstra.

"One day, he came up to my organization and told us his vision. He said, 'I'll do the fundraising piece if Family Promise will find the individuals and do case management.'"

Zylstra said she and Boelema have developed great working relationships with the manufactured home parks, whose managers now let them know when someone plans to move out. Volunteers from participating churches supply their talents and labor to rehabbing the properties. "We have a wealth of talent – retired plumbers, electricians, roofers. I had one small group of women who went in there and scrubbed appliances until they looked beautiful," she said.