



Unity House of Troy
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VOLUME EIGHT
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Fall 2021



Reflections from a CEO

It's been a big year for Unity House, and I'm not just referring to the impact of

the pandemic. Of course, COVID-19 has loomed large, both for people in need who faced incredible struggles, for which we saw increased demand, and for our workforce who adapted to a changing landscape.

To those who have reached out in kindness on the news of my retirement, thank you. I am looking forward to spending more time with my family, but there is still lots of work to do. Our board of directors is conducting a national search for Unity House's next CEO. Other committees are hard at work on issues such as advocacy, equity, strategic planning, and of course, innovation and efficient service delivery. You can learn more about that inside.

I will say it again: Unity House has an amazing staff that I am so proud of. It has been my honor and privilege to lead Unity House as CEO. So it was with mixed emotions that I announced plans to retire next year. Since 1971 Unity House has had only 2 CEOs: Mary Jane Smith, who was among the founders, and me, who took over when Mary Jane retired in 1991.

This year also marks 50 years of Unity House. Founded by the late Peter Callaghan, Regis Obijiski, and Mary Jane Smith, the trio who set up shop on 8th Street with a goal to help people in need. They were supported by so many people along the way. It was wonderful to catch up with some of those early sustainers at our July *Family Funday* celebration. I want to thank our sponsors, our planning committee including the historical consultants, and volunteers who put together a great celebration. I am especially grateful for Regis Obijiski and John Baackes, the first helper, for joining us and speaking. They each inspire me with their dedication to our mission.

When I reflect on my time at Unity House, I am filled with gratitude. I have often said that the work at Unity House is both heartwarming and heartbreaking, and it's true: like the young mother who was so happy to get help with groceries only for us to discover that she was living out of her car. (We were able to get her into housing.) Some of the work we do seems small, like groceries for someone once in a while, and some of it is large, like supportive housing and case management. None of it would be possible without the support of so many caring people.

While retirement may be a bittersweet milestone, I will leave Unity House in good hands and with a full heart,

Chris Burke
Chief Executive Officer

CORE VALUES With passion and integrity, Unity House embraces the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political, and social rights. We work together to open doors of access and opportunity for everyone, particularly those in greatest need.



ReStyle: Hold the Clothes!

Due to limited ability to process clothing donations, we are asking folks to pause on bringing in clothes. Don't worry! We still are able to serve people with a need for clothes. And we can make exceptions for highly needed items such as winter coats or children's clothing. Meanwhile, look for ReStyle in pop-up form, either in our parking lot or at community events.

Make the Gift of Your Lifetime

By including a bequest to Unity House in your will, you are ensuring that we continue to help people for years to come. One sentence designating Unity House is all that is needed. That bequest gift entitles your estate to a federal tax charitable donation. Contact Diane Cameron Pascone at (518) 274-2607 x4133 for information on bequests, or gifts of life insurance, etc. Seek the advice of your financial or legal advisor. If you include Unity House in your plans, please use our legal name and federal tax ID number: Unity House of Troy, Inc. (23-2378930).

Here is where you or your service group can consider volunteering at Unity House:



Community Resources: help with life's essentials means volunteer tasks in our store, pantry, kitchen, and serving areas.

Housing and Supportive Services: volunteers needed for special projects.

Domestic Violence Services: Non-residential and residential services mean lots of ways to pitch in.

A Child's Place and Northeast Career Planning at Unity House: due to COVID, volunteer opportunities are limited, but one-off projects sometimes create opportunities.

DIY volunteering: host a drive for needed items among your circle of friends for items like new children's toys for the Children's Holiday Program, toiletries/diapers for our shelter, or non-perishable items for our food pantry.

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GOLF FORE Unity House

Thank you for a great day in support of needed programs and services.

Can You Help Us Feed Food Insecure Families This Thanksgiving?

Make a donation to our food programs or help collect needed items for food pantry shelves.



Help make the holidays sparkle for a family in need. Contact Mandy to sign up: (518) 274-2607 x4135

Visit us online!

On our website you can find our **Annual Report** detailing financials, program highlights, and a list of donors. Want a copy of your own? We are happy to mail you one. Contact Diane at (518) 274-2607 x4133



Historical Video



Many thanks to everyone interviewed for our 50th Anniversary video. We wish we could include the hours of stories! You can find a link to the video on our website.



If you'd like to wish outgoing **CEO Chris Burke** a happy retirement, please send him a card or make a donation to your favorite UH program in his honor. Consider: The Deuteronomy Fund, founded by Mary Jane Smith and John Henry Lyons, this fund helps with needs for which there are no other funding sources.



Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter

You can find information about events, volunteer opportunities, advocacy efforts, and community news we want to share.

PERSONAL CARE ITEMS NEEDED IN OUR SHELTER:

Toiletries such as soap, shampoo, tampons, toothpaste, and diapers are always needed.



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Did you know our domestic violence services has a collective 100+ years of expertise to help victims become survivors? Read about amazingly talented staff on our website.



A huge thanks to everyone who pitched in to our Playground Improvement Fund. There is still time to help update the outdoor play spaces for our littlest learners. Consider a gift to help this program that serves children ages 6 weeks to 5 years old. If you or someone you know is looking for a spot for their little once, please call to learn more.

OCTOBER IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS & PREVENTION MONTH

Stay up to date on live and virtual events via our website and social media channels.



BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Advocates in action: Noreen McKee

Interview has been edited and condensed. You can read the full interview on our website.

Our committed board of directors are not just the ultimate volunteers, they are a deep bench of expertise.

A passionate community advocate and volunteer whose connection goes back to 1975, Noreen McKee recently sat down to talk about equitable access.

Q: How did you first learn about Unity House?

A: "When I first met my husband, Steve McKee, he talked admiringly about his close cousin, Peter Callaghan, in Troy. Peter and his best friend, Regis Obijiski, had just been ordained Catholic priests in the Franciscan Order and were working with their good friend, a nun, Sister Mary Jane Smith, on a grassroots effort in the spirit of Dorothy Day. They wanted to address the poverty and racism affecting Troy."

Q: You have long volunteered for Unity House and other social justice causes. What does your volunteer work look like today?

A: I am now a member of the Board of Directors at Unity House and serve on its Advocacy Committee, which is dedicated to giving voice to the voiceless. From its earliest days, this has been key. Mary Jane was a dedicated advocate for the poor. She often met with civic leaders to shine the spotlight on injustice and the racial inequality that fueled poverty.

Q: What issue do you think is worth advocating for?

A: Personally, I have worked for voting rights, and equitable access around early voting. Voting is a fundamental right that sustains our democracy. Studies have shown that in states where early voting has existed for years, turnout has risen. Nine days of early voting including two weekends when polls are open during the day and night gives greater flexibility for those who confront barriers that make it difficult to cast ballots when voting occurs on just one day of the year. Early voting in downtown Troy would provide equitable access, particularly for minorities and low income voters living in the most densely populated part of the County, many of whom may rely on public transportation.

During the presidential election in 2020 the only early voting location in Troy was at the Holy Cross Armenian Apostolic Church on Spring Avenue. Because this site is not on a bus route, a group of community organizations led by T.E.A.M. Hero sponsored an initiative, Souls to the Polls, to make it easier for people from inner city Troy to vote early. This gave some who otherwise would not have voted at all, the opportunity to be heard at the ballot box.

Q: What would you want others to know about the people Unity House advocates for?

A: The people we advocate for are just like you and me. They want to live a full life and become a part of the broader community. They work hard, many hold two jobs. They want good health care, quality child care, a sound education for their children, safe neighborhoods, and a decent home. Just like anyone.



Summer Luv'in

Many thanks to SEFCU for including the Unity House food pantry in their *Summer of Luv* campaign, in which they donated a dizzying quantity of diapers to help parents in need.



Hello Hoosick Falls!

Thanks to a partnership with local law enforcement, Unity House has a satellite office in Hoosick Falls. The space, located in the local armory, means greater access for people in rural areas, especially those dealing with domestic abuse. The partnerships that made this possible are an example of the collaborative model that best serves people with sometimes complex needs.



Check online for job postings and please share with job seekers.