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Make Your Mark, Help A Neighbor

Just across the river from New Hope, the letters arrive daily at the unprepossessing building on York Street in Lambertville, NJ, as do the donated boxes of food items and gently worn clothing. In fact, so unassuming is this house on this street, if it weren't for the construction pit and handsome new brick and glass tower directly to the south of it, one might easily pass it by without a second glance.

Yet to many of our neighbors, this site is the genuine home of “new hope”—and new chances, and the where-with-all to get through another day. The hand-lettered sign on the front porch is purposefully low-key, reading simply: “Fisherman's Mark.”

Many of us might have supposed this was... what? A new restaurant in town? An erstwhile bait and tackle shop? Perhaps anything but what it is: Bucks and Hunterdon Counties' single most vital and important social services agency.

Founded in 1980 as an independent adjunct of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, the mission of Fisherman's Mark is powerfully simple: to help anyone in our community who is in need.

Hunger, poverty and abuse are just some of the issues that confront Executive Director Barbara Petty and Board President, the Reverend Richard Townley, daily. For them and their dedicated staff, this is difficult and emotional work, and so when one of the letters arrives, it is particularly meaningful.

“We wouldn't have gotten through these past three months without you.”

“I saw my kids smile for the first time since their father left.”

“I didn't know where I was going to turn and then there you were.”

“We wouldn't have had a Thanksgiving without you.”

“Your generosity and understanding kept our family together. God bless you.”

Last month, Fisherman's Mark fed 1,190 people. It provided two tractor-trailer loads of reduced-price groceries from their food pantry to people in need, dressed dozens of children and adults in warm, clean clothes from its “Business Best” and Thrift Shop, counseled countless clients dealing with everything from spousal abuse to drug addiction, and assisted many more with job training, literacy, and health issues.

All this in the midst of the enormous construction project that will allow them to reopen their child daycare facilities up to state code for 160 children, as well as new client rooms, a refurbished kitchen and pantry, and a new town meeting room.

Preserving the anonymity and dignity of its clients is foremost in the minds of the Fisherman's Mark staff, which is perhaps why so many of us are unfamiliar with the importance and breadth of their work. But right now, as they push to complete their much needed renovation and expansion, it's a good time for all to take a closer look, and to support their efforts with our own to make sure that no one in need in our close-knit community ever goes unheeded or unhelped, particularly in this season of charity and giving.

The New Hope Gazette will be running several Fisherman's Mark case histories in its editions leading up to Christmas, each showcasing an aspect of the important work of this irreplaceable community resource.

It is the hope of those at Fisherman's Mark that each will find increased understanding of their mission in these articles and, in turn, help in whatever way possible.

Especially at this time of year, it's worth noting once a gain that nothing makes one feel as good as doing some good for someone else. There are many opportunities for both private and corporate gifts

as Fisherman's Mark reaches towards the dream that will help so many, and needs ranging from floors and ceilings to desks, furniture, and beyond.

For more information on gift opportunities or to take a tour of Fisherman's Mark, please contact Executive Director Barbara Petty at 609-397-0194.

Checks made payable to Fisherman's Mark will be gratefully received at 50 York Street, Lambertville, NJ 08530, and donations of clothing or food may be dropped off any weekday between nine and five.