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With a Little Help from Some Friends

Lambertville's Fisherman's Mark prepares to expand its capabilities to better aid a growing community in need.

By Gina V. Stevens, Assistant Editor

If walls could talk at Fisherman's Mark, the Lambertville, N.J. non-profit organization's 19th century three-building corridors would echo the inaudible mantra, "Those who enter will prevail."

Since 1980, thousands of individuals and families throughout Hunterdon and Bucks Counties have turned to Fisherman's Mark with seemingly insurmountable challenges that run the gamut, and through its support network have received the necessary assistance to turn dead end situations into hopeful resolutions.

At the help for 23 years, Barbara Petty, executive director at Fisherman's Mark, has navigated the often choppy waters of social services and social change.

For most, Fisherman's Mark is not the first stop on the road to recovery. In fact, it is only after bouncing around the likes of the Division of Youth and Family Services, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation or even women's crisis centers that some finally find a crack too small to slip through in Fisherman's Mark.

Upon arrival, Petty and her staff take note of this history to help create a safety net for those in need of a pro-active resolution to troubling, life altering issues, which may include anything from employment and money management counseling to GED and ESL tutoring, or even just supplying a means to basic needs like food, clothing and housing.

"Many people don't realize that when someone comes to Fisherman's Mark with a dilemma, i.e., employment, their wanting to work is not the problem," Petty said. "They do want to work, but don't know how to get

to the end game. That's just the tip of the iceberg. The individual wants to work, but may not have the resources available to achieve these other things necessary to go out and get the job. The roadblocks can keep them from even trying. Many social service agencies provide 'help line' phone numbers, but our client needs multi-level assistance.

“It's about empowerment,” Petty said. “People in need, whatever that need is, don't want to be beholden to others. They want to be independent and self-reliant. They need a helping hand. They need someone in their corner.”

Maintaining that dignity while restoring the foundation is what Fisherman's Mark is all about.

As a United Way agency, Fisherman's Mark supplements its operations staff with an army of volunteers. Adam Flager is one such volunteer.

As a sophomore at the University of Pittsburgh, Flager caught the bug, and what once seemed like an obligation now has become a joyful commitment.

Last year, Flager, at the advice of his father, opted to put some of his spare time to good use by volunteering in Fisherman's Mark's food pantry.

“It started as a short term project, and now I'm hooked,” Flager said.

“He even helped out with the distribution of food and gifts during Christmas break, which is much appreciated at that time of the year,” Petty said.

A Hispanic student attending The College of New Jersey was in search of a community service project that would earn him an Eagle Scout badge. He approached Petty and took on the task of converting 11 Fisherman's Mark client forms into Spanish text.

He also came in twice a week to avail those same clients of a

Spanish-speaking volunteer.

The client-volunteer relationship is a clear example of how empowerment ended up benefiting both parties involved.

While another volunteer begrudgingly came to Petty saying, "My school says I have to volunteer 'x' hours for my school project." He found satisfaction by taking what he felt was mundane work, teaching mathematical averages to Lambertville Academy students, and created excitement in the classroom with his concept of applying math to the game of baseball.

"The children were learning how to apply the same processes they'd learn from studying battering ERAs to the math curriculum," Petty said. "The kids loved it, and the adults loved being a fly on the wall, seeing that young man in action."

Now, Fisherman's Mark is looking to do even more, and it's beginning that process by tackling several reconstruction projects, including the Kohl House on York Street, which will be renamed the Hilde Wachtel Youth Services Center in honor of The Gazette classified manager and New Hope philanthropist.

The facility will offer three full, state-of-the-art floors dedicated to infant care and youth counseling.

The Austrian-born Wachtel is an integral member of the Greater New Hope community, and is regarded by close friends such as Renny Reynolds and Jack Staub, of Hortulus Farm, Wrightstown, as a tireless fundraiser for the likes of The Riverside Symphonia and FACT Bucks County. She's also been a great supporter of Fisherman's Mark.

On August 2, Reynolds and Staub will celebrate two special events with one spectacular reception at their Wrightstown estate-Wachtel's 80th birthday and the growth of Fisherman's Mark.

Proceeds from the party will be put towards the renovation of the center named in Wachtel's honor, as well as other projects at

Fisherman's Mark.

“Hilde is a charming woman, who cares deeply for Fisherman's Mark,” Petty said. The sunset cocktail reception on August 2 is set to raise \$125,000, with proceeds to benefit in the reconstruction efforts within the next year on campus-adding a parenting resource library, and furthering medical services for the youth in our community through local hospitals.“

On the eve of its 25th anniversary, Petty and the Fisherman's Mark crew are celebrating by expanding their reach to keep hope alive for even more people.