

# OUTREACH



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## Opening My Eyes To The Past

*Millie Tomidy, Executive Director*

How many times have you driven out to the Genesee County Park and passed by the old "Poor House" that still stands at the corner of East Bethany and Raymond Roads in the town of Bethany? If you're like me, it's many, and my routine is always the same - I stop at the corner before making the turn- look at the building - have the same fleeting thought - "What a sad looking building"- make the turn and go on about my day.

Like so many other things in life - if we see something too much, we sometimes forget to really look and observe what is right in front of us.

Of course I have always been aware that the Poor House was built in the early 1800's to house the poor and often times the mentally ill, and that it was not a nice place to have to call "home" for any period of time - let alone almost a lifetime for some individuals.

So why have I chosen to write about the old "Poor House" now? Because until recently, I'm embarrassed to say, that was about the extent of my knowledge regarding the building and all that transpired between 1828 when it was built and 1974 when it closed.

It wasn't until recently when I met woman by the name of Linda Conpenelis Schmidt that I was enlightened to the personal side of the people that lived there. Linda is the author of "The Poor House - Revisited" the second book that she compiled about the lives of the people who resided at the Genesee County Poor House. Linda's reason for putting these books together was to bring light to some of the peoples lives- the names that have never been anywhere- sometimes not even an obituary or tombstone inscription. The book contains a compilation of correspondence to the Poor House keeper, inventories of the resident's belongings and letters to and from family and friends. In Linda's words "The letters can tell you a lot about those who lived at the poor house and about those who were in charge. Some of its not "nice" - the past often brings us face to face with problems we haven't dealt with in our lifetime. While we can't un-do the past, we can always learn from it so that we don't repeat it".

Opening the book is indeed opening the door into a very different time in history. The letters refer to "idiots, lunatics and drunkards." In fact the following excerpt from the Batavia Times Newspaper dated December 9, 1826 listed the following as eligible to receive services: *Habitual drunkards, lunatics (one who by disease, grief or accident lost the use of reason or from old age, sickness or weakness, was so weak of mind, as to be incapable of governing or managing their affairs), paupers (a person with no means of income), state paupers (one who is blind, lame, old or disabled with no income source) or a vagrant.*

Of course my eye was drawn to the term lunatic - which we now view as a very derogatory and stigmatizing word for an individual with mental illness, however it was used without hesitation in the 1800's. Individuals with mental illness were housed at the County Home until 1887 when the Board of Supervisors agreed to send "persons suffering with acute insanity" to the Buffalo State Asylum and cases of violent, chronic insanity to Willard.

What I found the most shocking was that children were also often brought to the facility if their families had no means of taking care of them. These children were then considered orphans and indentured out to members of the community to assist with house-keeping or farm work.

One resident in particular is highlighted in the book. Her name was Phoebe Jane White (continued on next page)

# CONGRATULATIONS

## MHANYS AWARD WINNERS!

The Mental Health Association in New York State (MHANYS) has announced the following:

### **Ken Steele Memorial Award for Program Excellence:**

*The MHA in Genesee County's  
Warm Line Program*

### **Friend of the MHA Award:**

*Pastor Marty Macdonald, City Church*

The winners were chosen from nominations from 31 state affiliates and will be presented with their awards at MHANYS Annual Awards Ceremony in October in Albany.

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and she was brought to the Poor House in 1828 at the age of 9 - her condition was termed "idiocy". She spent the rest of her life as an "inmate" of the Poor House. Phoebe became blind at the age of 49 and was found dead in her room at the age of 67. One can only imagine the horrific life that she led; a life filled with isolation, loneliness and discrimination.

It was common practice at that time to confine individuals with mental illness to asylums, and although I did not find it referenced in any of the documentation in this book, it was also not uncommon for these individuals to be restrained with shackles and chains. This unthinkable practice eventually ended with better understanding and treatment of mental illness and in 1953 The National Mental Health Association requested the shackles and chains from the asylums across the nation be collected.

After collection they commissioned the McShane Bell Foundry in Baltimore, Md. to melt them down and recast them into a Bell. The Mental Health Bell stands as a reminder of the past and a symbol of hope for the future. The inscription on The Bell of Hope reads:

***Cast from shackles which bound them,  
this bell shall ring out hope for the mentally ill  
and victory over mental illness.***

May we learn from the past and may we never be too busy or complacent to look at what is in front of us each day. I wish to thank Linda for giving me the gift of this book and for preserving the lives of the people that lived at the Poor House.

## Criminal Justice Day 2010

The definition of collaboration is to work jointly with others. The Mental Health Association is proud to be a part of a network of organizations and agencies that are willing to come together to support efforts to promote a healthy community. Each year, the MHA sponsors Criminal Justice Day, in conjunction with National Crime Victims Rights Week. This year in April *Many Faces: Financial Exploitation of Older Adults* was presented and addressed the issues, including: defining who are the victims of these crimes, why older adults are victimized, how they are victimized and by whom, the impact on the victim, family and society, and the resources that are available when exploitation has occurred.

Keynote speaker, Art Mason, Director of Lifespan's Elder Abuse Prevention Program, presented relevant information on the realities and impacts of Financial Exploitation of the older adult population.

The program was a huge success due to partnerships with the following: The Batavia City Police Department, CASA for Children, GCASA, Genesee County Office for the Aging, Genesee Justice, Genesee County District Attorney's Office, Genesee County Department of Social Services, Genesee County Probation, Genesee County Sheriff's Office, Justice for Children Advocacy Center.



Criminal Justice Day panel presenters Letizia Tagliaferrero, Special Council from the NYS Attorney General's Office, Ed Minardo, (center) Director of Genesee Justice, and Greg Gramiccioni, Special Agent with the US Secret Service, Buffalo Field Office following their presentations.

## **THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!**

Thank you to the Wal-Mart Foundation for the donation to the MHA on behalf of the volunteer efforts of Mrs. Brenda Westhoven. Brenda is a Wal-Mart employee and has volunteered as a co-facilitator of the Life Bridges Support Group for the past several years.

Wal-Mart supports employees' volunteer efforts in the community by making a financial contribution to their volunteer organization! Way to go Wal-Mart!

**Thank you for your dedication  
and volunteer spirit Brenda!**

### TF Browns Ramble Jamble

Thank you to all who volunteered with us at the Ramble Jamble at TF Browns on Saturday, June 26th. A special thanks to Rick Mancuso for his hospitality and support of the event. Along with a Chinese Auction with donations from community businesses, people were treated to 3 live bands that night: The OHMS Band, Monster Johnson, and Blues Way Jam. The night was a huge success!



### Batavia Ramble

Thanks to the organizers of the Batavia Ramble, especially MHA supporter Bill McDonald, The Place to Be Social Club Band was given the opportunity to perform live on the Acoustic Stage. Although the day was jam packed with music, there was time for band director Charley DePlato to challenge Leonard W. to a duel with help from Colin Dentino from En Garde Fencing Academy (pictured above). The Ramble is a wonderful annual event that allows the MHA to participate in the community. Thank you to all who supported our Annual Guitar Raffle Fundraiser! Congratulations to the winner of the guitar, Jeff Gillard of Batavia! Special thanks to Roxy's Music for their support!



In 2005, the MHA established a Memorial Garden to celebrate the memory of Social Club Members who have passed away over the years. In June, Bob Fleming from the Independent Living Center, shared a message and club members shared memories of those who had passed.



### MHA Annual Meeting

This year's Annual Meeting was held at Terry Hills Restaurant with guest speaker, Dr. Paul Harrigan, a psychologist at the Batavia VA PTSD Clinic. Dr. Harrigan spoke about the experiences of Veterans living with PTSD. Several Veteran Volunteers from the Vietnam Era were present and were able to share their personal experiences and perspectives about the benefits of the PTSD Clinic.

Mr. Dennis Whitman, Retired Director of the Genesee Justice Programs and Child Advocacy Center, received the 2010 Constance E. Miller Award of Excellence for his work in the community.

### Gift and Estate Plan~Leaving a Legacy Michael DePlato, Attorney at Law

The Mental Health Association is an organization that is important to the community in many different ways. The Association may have been of assistance to us or a family member or friend. For this reason, a person may wish to remember the Association by a gift or bequest. These wishes can be accomplished in different ways.

You may include the Association for memorials upon the death of a loved one. To do this you should make arrangements with the funeral director at the time the funeral arrangements are made. Of course, these wishes can always be made in advance as part of your advanced planning.

You may also make provisions for the Association to receive a disposition through your Will. To do so you would request that your attorney include the following language in the Will: "I give and bequeath to the Mental Health Association in Genesee County., 25 Liberty Street, Batavia NY the sum of \$\_\_\_\_\_."

You can also make provisions for amounts in excess of a specific bequest or the balance of your Estate to the Association. Keep in mind that if you leave a gift of a percentage of your Estate or the remainder of your Estate to the Association or any tax exempt entity, the New York State Attorney General's Office will carefully monitor all of the actions of the Estate representative.

You can also make a gift to the Association at any time during your lifetime. The Association has IRS 501(c)3 charitable status so the gift would be deductible to the donor in the year of the gift.

You may also gift appreciated assets to the Association. By doing this the donor would receive a deduction for the present market value of the appreciated property on the date of the gift. The Association would receive the appreciated assets and then be able to liquidate those assets in the Association's name and, because of the not-for-profit status, would not pay tax on the increase in value. The donor of the gift gets to deduct the higher value and the Association receives the benefit of the increased value with no tax consequence.

# WONDERING WHAT TO DO WITH ALL THOSE EXTRA CLOTHES?



*Looking for a way to help others in your  
community?*

**Want to recycle?**

# WE CAN HELP!

Did you know that the MHA Social Club has a fully operational clothing store at 25 Liberty Street? Your donations of new or gently used clothing not only provides professional attire for re-entry into the workforce, the items you donate provide opportunities for our members to learn valuable employment skills including; inventory/stocking, cash register training and customer service skills.

Items can be dropped off anytime Monday-Friday during regular office hours or we would love to come and set up a "clothing drop" for you at your workplace. Designate a week, where employees can bring in their gently used items and we will pick them up. **Talk about convenience!** Call us today at 344-2611.

*\*\*Larger size clothing is a priority at this time!*

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

On the Web: [www.gcmha.org](http://www.gcmha.org)

Batavia, NY 14020  
25 Liberty Street

Mental Health Association in Genesee County

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