BUSINESS & ORGANIZATIONS

Carver Center, the Comeback Kid, Celebrates its 75th

By Jamie Jensen

On April 4, the Carver Center will celebrate more than just their 75th anniversary with a gala. They are celebrating a terrific 75-year story, too.

Long one of Rye's favorite charities, Carver, which has served Port Chester families since 1943, is often associated with its food pantry to which Rye residents and schools, and volunteers, from throughout the area, have donated countless hours, countless food drives and volunteerism on site.

Carver Center was originally founded by forward-thinking African-American leaders during World War II when families were serving their country, mothers were working in factories, and there was a real need to have a safe place for their children to go today. Carver serves 3,000 individuals annually and is the largest and longest-running community center in Port Chester.

Their programs are designed to meet the educational, recreational, cultural, and civic needs of families in Port Chester and include after-school programs, summer camps, teen center, fitness, and swimming classes, a self-defense program, and senior programs. These programs are housed in a new building at 755 East Post Road.

As Carver Center's upcoming gala, they will present the inaugural Sister Rosemary Sheehan, Service Award. The award honors the memory of a lifetime board member who passed away in June 2017. Sister Sheehan was a beloved volunteer and friend for over 50 years and showed an unwavering dedication to the families Carver serves. The award will be presented to three former board members, Calvina Dunn, Dinah Howland, and Jeanette Waddill, all of whom are Rye residents.

Dinah Howland, a 25-year volunteer and former Board Chair, helped lead the Carver Center through a tumultuous decade of organizational change to address the challenges of an aging, changing demographic and growing poverty in Port Chester. Waddill is best known for her commitment to the Citizen Council, an armchair-embellishment of Carver member citizenship. At Carver, over 250 immigrants have been helped through the naturalization process to become U.S. citizens since 2005 and Waddill has been integral to this effort. Calvina Dunn, also a volunteer, made a 50-year commitment to the Board, starting a long-lasting tradition of serving on the board, chairing numerous fundraising events, supporting program growth through the decades, and playing a critical role in governance issues during her tenure.

Under the stewardship of former and current board members, Carver has, over the last decade, responded to the changing demographics of its residents, transformed its after-school program, promoted Joseph Kwasnicki from Facilities Director to CEO, and built stronger partnerships with civic and community organizations.

When the Port Chester Schools lost 21st Century Community Funds a few years back, Carver Center brought their after-school program directly to the highest need schools in Port Chester—JFK and Edison Elementary schools by capitalizing on a generous grant from the Philp Foundation. Today, Carver provides academic support, enrichment opportunities, social-emotional development, and a host of other services ("snippets") to over 800 schoolchildren.

Additionally, 2,000 individual hot meals are made-on-site and delivered across the community.

Over this same decade, Carver's generous donors have provided funds for extensive renovations of the building and the aquatic center. The food pantry was redesigned as the Carver Market—a mini Whole Foods—that encourages healthy eating while addressing the needs of the hungry. Though the Village of Port Chester has a recreation program opened out of area parks, it is the Carver Center that feels unique and like a combination of the Rye Y and Rye Rec Rec. Approximately 700 students receive swim lessons at the Carver pool, the only publicswimming pool in Port Chester.

Carver meets the needs of Port Chester's underserved families while building a more welcoming center for all its residents. The Carver Center also extends its message to families beyond Port Chester—it reaches into the lives of Rye families who want their children to appreciate and celebrate diversity.

In Dinah Howland's words, the Carver Center "has the ability to build bridges between communities on no matter what they come from."

The Carver Gala will be held Saturday, April 21 from 7-11 at the Greentree Yacht Club in Old Greenwich. If you haven't attended before, this is the night to buy a ticket and celebrate your Rye neighbors who have modeled for so many the kind of commitment it takes to build a brighter future for all our children. You can purchase tickets or make a donation at carvercenter.org.