

BUSINESS & ORGANIZATIONS

Carver Center, the Comeback Kid, Celebrates its 75th

By Jamie Jensen

On April 21, The Carver Center will celebrate more than just their 75th anniversary with a gala. They are celebrating a terrific comeback 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 moms and dads, along with their children, have given countless hours, holding food drives and volunteering on site.

Carver Center was originally founded by forward-thinking African-American leaders during World War II when fathers were serving their country, mothers

viduals 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 afterschool classes, summer camp, teen center, fitness and swimming classes, a self-shopping food pantry, and senior programs. They provide a home to one of Port Chester's two Head Start programs and the Five Steps to Five program.

At 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, Calvine Dunnan, Dinah Howland, and Irene Waddill, all of whom are Rye residents.

Dinah Howland, a 25-year volunteer and former Board Chair helped lead the Center through a tumultuous decade of organizational expansion to address the challenges of a changing demographic and growing poverty in Port Chester.

Irene Waddill is best known for her commitment to the Citizen Ceremony, an annual celebration of Carver member citizenship. At



Carver Center Gala co-chairs, Marclo Gigliani and Sonia Alcantilla, Christy and Tom Murphy, and Jennifer and Jonathan Prather.

Carver, over 250 immigrants have been helped through the naturalization process to become U.S. citizens since 2015 and Waddill has been integral to this effort. Calvine Dunnan, also a volunteer for more than a quarter of a century, has been a strong and steady steward 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 afterschool program, promoted Joseph Kwasniewski 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 afterschool program directly to the highest need schools in Port Chester — JFK and Edison.

Elementary schools by capitalizing on a generous grant from the Dalio Foundation. Today, Carver provides academic support, enrichment opportunities, social-emotional development, and a hot meal ("snupper") to 800 school-age children. Additionally, 1,400 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 operated out of area parks, it is the Carver Center that feels most like a combination of the Rye Y and Rye Recreation. Approximately 700 students receive swim lessons at the Carver pool, the only public swimming pool in Port Chester.

Carver meets the needs of Port Chester 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



Carver CEO Joe Kwasniewski

were working in factories, and there was a real need to have a safe place for their children to go. Today, Carver serves 5,000 indi-



Always something good cooking for the Carver Market.

appreciate and celebrate diversity. In Dinah Howland's words, the Carver Center "has the capacity to build bridges between communities no matter where they come from."

The Carver Gala will be held Saturday, April 21 from 7-11 at the Greenwich Elyatt Regency in Old Greenwich. If you haven't attended before, this is the year 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.

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