



NEWS BOX

Volume 2, Issue 1

Winter 2004

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President's Message

Dear Members,

It is with great pleasure that I introduce myself as the new president of The Box Project board of directors.

I am pleased to be in the company of the many talented individuals that sit on the board, and participate in an organization that I have believed in for 18 years. I enjoy working with such a dedicated staff, and having an opportunity to meet and help our many recipient and sponsor members like yourselves. Our outgoing president, Pat Schneider, whose vision and hard work brought The Box Project to a new level of growth and achievement will be a hard act to follow. Since she remains as a fellow board member and a great personal friend, I am confident that she will continue to encourage and guide each of us in our new roles.

We often hear from our members about how The Box Project has changed and enriched your lives. I am truly among you. I was matched over 18 years ago with Marilyn, a woman from Mississippi with 4 sons. Through the shared holidays, life events, growing families and the mutual knowledge that "someone out there" cares, our friendship changed and enriched both of our lives. Marilyn always referred to me as her guardian angel, lending a helping hand when she most needed one. When she unexpectedly passed away two years ago, the loss I felt was great but I had the feeling that she had now become my guardian angel. Although she was not a highly educated person, her knowledge of the heart far exceeded that of most people I meet. It is in Marilyn's memory that I begin my presidency, and through her have gained the inspiration for my commitment to ensure the success of The Box Project.

Much has transpired since my earliest involvement with The Box Project—but our members' care, concern, and deep desire to lend a hand has never wavered. I look forward with great anticipation to this coming year. As we look to the future of the organization, please know that we will continue to work tirelessly to ensure that the good works of The Box Project will grow and flourish.

Sincerely,
Cindy Shearer
President, Board of Directors

"May what you share multiply"

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Best Wishes To Allen Pitts

We know you will be saddened to hear that Allen Pitts resigned from his role as Executive Director of The Box Project in November. We are grateful to him for many things. During his tenure he positioned The Box Project as a nationally recognized organization with a reputation for excellence. Allen showed himself to be an accomplished public relations manager, and he successfully acquired major national endorsements for The Box Project over the years, including the Oprah Winfrey Show and Parade Magazine among others.

Because of his efforts to understand and meet the needs of members, TBP was awarded the Organizational Achievement of the Year, 2002 by the Connecticut Society of Association Executives. In addition, Allen was voted runner-up, for the Executive Director of the Year Award 2002 by the Connecticut Society of Association Executives.

Many people do not know that Allen's talents include holding the highest class HAM radio operator's license, that he was a national champion archer. He is Connecticut's Emergency Coordinator for ARES, which includes over 800 ham radio volunteers. Allen was one of the first state certified, and later licensed, Addictions Therapists in the state of Connecticut.

Many of our members, both sponsors and recipients, developed a personal relationship with Allen over the last three years, and wish him the best in years to come.

Leadership Of The Box Project Next Steps

Rather than hire an Interim Director right away, the Board of Directors has assigned a Transition Team comprised of board members.

This team will lead the organization for a short while so the Board can step back and review the long range, strategic plan, and clarify the organization's leadership needs going forward.

Sue Patneau, our new Vice President of the Board, has taken the lead for the Transition Team. The team is comprised of Cindy Shearer, President of the Board; Sharon Workman; Sue Taylor; and Pat Schneider, Immediate Past President.

The regular committees of the Board are working hard to ensure a smooth transition and we have a strong interim plan to govern the organization and also provide for day-to-day demands.

The Transition Team intends to maintain direct links with all of our partners during this transition and the Board will be working hard to keep the organization thriving and keep on-going projects operating.

Meanwhile, the staff is in the office Monday through Friday from 8 AM - 4 PM to answer your questions or to direct your calls and inquiries to the appropriate team member.

Press Release: The Box Project Pilots New ClassMatchSM Program

Plainville, CT—January 10, 2004—The Box Project, a national, non-profit organization that makes a positive difference for thousands of American families living in rural poverty, recently launched a new ClassMatchSM program.

The ClassMatch program is a correspondence program that pairs classrooms, students, and teachers from around the country creating an opportunity to share their lives, interests, and what they are learning with each other. Through a generous donation, the ClassMatch program was able to offer the Smithsonian American Art Museum's award-winning multi-media educational resource packet, "Public Sculpture, America's Legacy" for each class in the program. The goal is to provide materials that encourage students to look at their local culture with new eyes and share what they see while also learning about other cultures.

Dr. Mohammad Hoque, professor of social services at Mississippi Valley State University, Chair of the ClassMatch development committee, and member of the Board of Directors for The Box Project, commented, "It is wonderful to have the value of this effort recognized as it opens so many more opportunities for the students and teachers."

In an act of generosity exemplifying the values of the "Pay It Forward" concept, a student who had previously received educational funds from The Box Project designated \$7000 for the organization to use in new ways "to help other kids". The Box Project Board of Directors knew just what they wanted to do with those funds. "For years, we had teachers in various parts of the country ask if we could match their classrooms with other classrooms-similar to how we match families in our Family Match program. Sometimes we were able to make these matches, and the positive results underscored our philosophy that education is truly the key to self-sufficiency. Our vision was to grow this concept into a large-scale program," said Cindy Shearer, President. "One student's request to 'help other kids' put the wheels in motion that allowed us to turn our vision of the ClassMatch program into a reality."

With the new ClassMatch program, The Box Project matches pairs of elementary school classrooms across miles and cultural lines. Participating classrooms come from across the United States. Twenty-two classes are involved in the pilot program and the initial results have been extremely positive.

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The Daffodil Principle

By Jaroldeen Asplund Edwards

Several times my daughter had telephoned to say, "Mother, you must come see the daffodils before they are over." I wanted to go, but it was a two-hour drive from Laguna to Lake Arrowhead. "I will come next Tuesday," I promised, a little reluctantly, on her third call.

The next Tuesday dawned cold and rainy. Still, I had promised, and so I drove there. When I finally walked into Carolyn's house and hugged and greeted my grandchildren, I said, "Forget the daffodils, Carolyn! The road is invisible in the clouds and fog, and there is nothing in the world except you and these children that I want to see bad enough to drive another inch!"

My daughter smiled calmly and said, "We drive in this all the time, Mother."

"Well, you won't get me back on the road until it clears, and then I'm heading for home!" I assured her.

"I was hoping you'd take me over to the garage to pick up my car."

"How far will we have to drive?"

"Just a few blocks," Carolyn said. "I'll drive. I'm used to this."

After several minutes, I had to ask, "Where are we going? This isn't the way to the garage!"

"We're going to my garage the long way," Carolyn smiled, "by way of the daffodils."

"Carolyn," I said sternly, "please turn around."

"It's all right, Mother, I promise. You will never forgive yourself if you miss this experience."

After about twenty minutes, we turned onto a small gravel road and I saw a small church. On the far side of the church, I saw a hand-lettered sign that read, "Daffodil Garden."

We got out of the car and each took a child's hand, and I followed Carolyn down the path. Then, we turned a corner of the path, and I looked up and gasped.

Before me lay the most glorious sight. It looked as though someone had taken a great vat of gold and poured it down over the mountain peak and slopes. The flowers were planted in majestic, swirling patterns--great ribbons and swaths of deep orange, white, lemon yellow, salmon, pink, saffron, and butter yellow.

Each different-colored variety was planted as a group so that it swirled and flowed like its own river with its own unique hue. There were five acres of flowers.

"But who has done this?" I asked Carolyn.

"It's just one woman," Carolyn answered. "She lives on

the property. That's her home."

Carolyn pointed to a well kept A-frame house that looked small and modest in the midst of all that glory. We walked up to the house. On the patio, we saw a poster.

"Answers to the Questions I Know You Are Asking" was the headline.

The first answer was a simple one. "50,000 bulbs," it read.

The second answer was, "One at a time, by one woman." "Two hands, two feet, and very little brain."

The third answer was, "Began in 1958."

There it was, The Daffodil Principle. For me, that moment was a life-changing experience. She had created something of ineffable (indescribable) magnificence, beauty, and inspiration.

I thought of this woman whom I had never met, who, more than forty years before, had begun -- one bulb at a time--to bring her vision of beauty and joy to an obscure mountain top. Still, just planting one bulb at a time, year after year, had changed the world. This unknown woman had forever changed the world in which she lived.

The principle her daffodil garden taught is one of the greatest principles of celebration. That is, learning to move toward our goals and desires one step at a time -- often just one baby-step at a time -- and learning to love the doing, learning to use the accumulation of time.

When we multiply tiny pieces of time with small increments of daily effort, we too will find we can accomplish magnificent things. We can change the world.

"It makes me sad in a way," I admitted to Carolyn. "What might I have accomplished if I had thought of a wonderful goal thirty-five or forty years ago and had worked away at it 'one bulb at a time' through all those years. Just think what I might have been able to achieve!" My daughter summed up the message of the day in her usual direct way. "Start tomorrow," she said.

It's so pointless to think of the lost hours of yesterdays. The way to make learning a lesson of celebration instead of a cause for regret is to only ask, "How can I put this to use today?"

I also learned on that gray and golden morning what a blessing it is to have a child who is not a child anymore but a woman perceptive and loving beyond her years--and to be humble in that awareness.

Thank you, Carolyn. Thank you for lessons of that unforgettable morning.

Thank you for the gift of the daffodils.

In The News

The Box Project Board Meets in Maine

The Board of Directors of The Box Project met in October at the Riverwatch Hilton in Auburn, Maine. We were hosted by one of our fantastic referring agencies, Rural Community Action Ministry (RCAM) in Leeds, Maine. Sue Patneau, their Executive Director said, "The RCAM is the only referring agency in the State of Maine. We screen applicants and send their applications to TBP staff for matching. Currently 33 Maine families are matched with sponsors from across the country." Sue has been a member of the national Board of Directors for The Box Project since October 2002 and is the newly elected Vice President of the Board.

"One of the reasons that I became involved," said Sue, is the parallel between The Box Project and RCAM's mission: to address issues of homelessness, hunger and basic well-being. I saw this as a great opportunity to travel to other parts of the country to learn what poverty is like in those areas as compared to Maine, learn from others about how to combat the effects of poverty, look at programs and services that might help the RCAM to do our work better, and share our own wisdom with others to help them do their jobs better as well. I have traveled to the Mississippi Delta and to the Native American Reservations in South Dakota, and I've learned that geography and culture have a big impact on the differences in the impact of poverty between states. I also learned that no matter the condition of people economically, that poverty can also be a state of mind."

The shared goal of both the RCAM and The Box Project is to help people in need while also preserving dignity and increasing self-sufficiency. "Too often people with good intentions can do more damage than they do good if they are insensitive to social and cultural issues that affect how people view themselves," said Sue. "Many times in my work I have heard people say that they did not know they were poor until someone who came to help them told them so. I think we make assumptions that people see themselves as poor just because we think they're poor. On the contrary, many people who are seen by some as economically disadvantaged may see themselves as rich, at least in the things that are important to them."

Both The Box Project and the RCAM strive to help people understand and respect differences and learn more about culture and attitudes while respecting people where they are in their lives.

Spotlight On...

Referring Agencies

Rural Community Action Ministry—Maine

The Rural Community Action Ministry (RCAM) is a private, non-profit organization that has provided services to vulnerable rural families in 13 towns in Maine since 1970. The mission of the RCAM is to reach out to people of rural Maine who are in need and assist them to help themselves. Our purpose is to work with people to meet their needs for safe, adequate shelter, clothing, food and basic well-being in a manner that maintains or improves their self worth and dignity.

For many low income, elderly and disabled people, living in rural Maine is a way of life that can sometimes be very grim. Since the RCAM is the resource of last resort, we help the people who fall through the cracks or have exhausted all of the traditional services.

Small, grassroots organizations such as the RCAM rely heavily on the concept of neighbor to neighbor investment. When all is said and done we believe we have made a life easier to live, a home safer to live in and have helped a family to stave off hunger, and homelessness and increased their basic well-being.

Currently the RCAM has nearly 100 active community volunteers. Most of them live and work in the communities in our service area. They serve on the Board of Directors, on Program or Board committees, and/or work in 14 RCAM Sponsored Food Banks. In addition, about 350 volunteers come on mission trips each summer from churches all over the country to work with the Housing Program, building or rehabbing homes. We have the only rural family homeless shelter in the State of Maine, we have an extensive homelessness prevention program that strives to help people avoid homelessness, and a Faith In Action Program to help the elderly and disabled to access their basic health and other necessities. Each spring and summer the RCAM offers a Gardening Program that helps people to learn how to plan, plant, harvest and preserve their own food from their own backyard gardens.

The Rural Community Action Ministry is the only referring agency for The Box Project in the State of Maine. We screen applicants and send their applications to The Box Project staff for matching. Currently 33 Maine families are matched with sponsors from across the country and monitored for success and continued need and compliance. RCAM's Executive Director, Sue Patneau, has been a member of The Box Project Board of Directors since October 2002, and is the newly elected Vice President of the Board.

The Box Project thanks the RCAM staff, board of directors, donors, friends, and especially the RCAM's recipient members of The Box Project. We appreciated your wonderful hospitality during our visit. It was wonderful to meet you and learn from you!



ClassMatch Pilot Program... Cont. From Page 2

"There's no sponsor or recipient in this program," said Ms. Shearer. "It's just kids and teachers sharing across cultures. They describe for each other what life is like where they live, and everyone benefits from it."

The teachers use shared cards and letters as exciting ways to teach literacy, sociology, geography, history and many other topics. Classes have even written and produced videotapes to share with their ClassMatch friends whom they have never even met.

"The kids are really excited, and that's what counts," wrote teacher Kristie Tays of Knollwood Elementary, a Rapid City, South Dakota school participating in the pilot program.

Since 1963, The Box Project has acted as a matchmaker, pairing sponsors from around the country with carefully screened individuals or families living in rural poverty that want to become self-sufficient and overcome the cycle of poverty. Their Family Match program is unique in offering a direct connection between the matched families and eliminating any intermediary. Sponsors control how much time they spend and what finances or resources they will contribute to their matched family. Sponsors offer long-term friendships, including encouragement and advice, along with assistance such as boxes of food, clothing, or supplies sent directly to the families about once a month. As they come to know each other more, trust and friendships grow-providing a positive and valuable experience for both the recipient and the sponsor.

Plans are already being formed for the 2004-05 school year as more and more teachers and schools have heard of the program and wish to join in next year.

"We're looking for a major sponsor for this program," said Ms. Shearer. "We have the people and the experience to make miracles happen and have a positive impact with these students. But we still need help if we want to see it grow and expand to even more classrooms next year."

A Little Help From Friends

Looking for a place to communicate with other sponsors to ask questions, get advice, pick up great box ideas, or find out about the latest discounts or money-saving finds? The **Chatterbox** is just the place for you!

In the Chatterbox online discussion group, you'll find a wonderful group of over 300 sponsors that can relate to your experiences and share the joys and challenges of being a sponsor.

For more details or instructions to sign up, read about it on our Website at: www.boxproject.org/discuss.html

We Need You!

Publicity has been our most successful method for recruiting sponsors. Although press releases and national media appearances are a plus, we also need your help to spread the word in your local area.

We are launching a grass-roots public relations campaign targeted at local media opportunities. The articles tell why sponsors get involved, and about what both recipient and sponsoring families get out their relationships. Although several Family Match sponsors have already volunteered to be mentioned in their local press, we need additional volunteers to help us get the word out to even more areas.

You won't have to write a press release. We can supply a press release that you can send to your local newspaper or have inserted in a newsletter at your place of worship, business, or other local group.

If you are interested in learning more about how you can help with this public relations initiative, call the office or email media@boxproject.org to provide your name, address, telephone number, and email address (if available) and we will get in touch with you to discuss details.

If you have ideas, suggestions, or contacts that can assist us with national exposure, we'd love to hear from you too. Thank you all in advance for helping us with this campaign to meet the needs of **over 500** screened families that are on our waiting list to receive a sponsor.

Winter Box Ideas

We often receive requests for box ideas. This includes many items that would be appreciated by many families.

- Lysol Disinfectant Spray
- Anti-bacterial Soap
- Cold Medicine
- Baby Wipes
- Children's Educational VCR Tapes
- Bandages and First Aid Supplies
- Fabric Softener Dryer Sheets
- Smoke Detector
- Carbon Monoxide Detector
- Flashlight and Batteries

For more ideas, take a look at a sample checklist we have on the Web at: www.boxproject.org/checklist.pdf

Short on time? Grocery store, Target, WalMart, or other store gift cards are quick, easy, and inexpensive to ship. Make sure the store is easily accessible to your match family. Or, consider making a payment to the utility company for them to help with winter heating bills.

Our Heartfelt Thanks

The heartbeat of an organization is an entire community of volunteers, donors, staff and members.

As The Box Project begins a new year, fresh with things to come, we want to take this opportunity to look back and thank the many donors that contributed financially to the organization last year to ensure that our future works and goals can be realized.

A big thank you to the The Karma Foundation and Inland Paperboard and Packaging, Inc. for their program grants. Your contributions support special projects for the overall growth and enhancement of our organization.

Also, a special mention to a few volunteers who so generously assisted us on projects:

Lisa Braun and Laura Rottmann for their work with the messaging and technology committees; Joan Campbell for editing and proofreading; Margaret Midlick and Marilyn Marquardt for moderating the Chatterbox; and Eric Blumenthal for implementing the FedEx program.

Ron Barto, Carol Binnington, Larry Cascino, Amanda Chilton, Jody Pace, and Rob Santa, of the ClassMatch committee, who did an incredible job of bringing this pilot program to reality. We would also like to thank Linda Maxwell and the Smithsonian American Art Museum for their contributions of materials and support to the effort.

FedEx Program Changes

Wow! The excitement over the new FedEx discount program created such a large number of requests, we were a little overwhelmed. Our apologies to anyone that experienced difficulties while we rolled out the program.

We've made some changes to the program to clarify the discounts offered, streamline the enrollment process, and help ensure that we can sustain the program without too much time for FedEx staff or our own staff and volunteers.

Effective December 1, 2003, we implemented a new process for requesting a FedEx account and setting it up with The Box Project discount. If you have not yet signed up, or made a request and did not receive a response, do not contact Eric, please follow our new guidelines.

You can get a copy of the program description and enrollment information at www.boxproject.org/fedex.pdf or call the office to have it faxed or mailed to you.

Only select FedEx services are eligible for the discount, so make sure to take a look at the documentation to ensure you meet the requirements for the discounts.

Thanks to everyone for your patience and understanding as we get this program up and running.



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