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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I'd like to take this opportunity to wish you all a happy New Year. It is amazing how quickly this past year came and went. In watching the clock strike midnight, I think about how I've spent my time this past year and what choices I want to make in how I use my time in this coming year.

Without the gift of time, The Box Project would not be where we are today. The board officers and members, the executive director, the staff and the volunteers all contribute that most precious of gifts...time.

The time that you, the members of The Box Project, spend communicating with your match families, purchasing, boxing and shipping items off to far away homes, reading this newsletter, participating in Chatterbox...it is all appreciated and makes a difference in the lives and hearts of others.

I'd like to personally thank outgoing board member Pat Schneider. Through her years of commitment to this organization, her gift of time truly made a difference.

As I enter into the second and final year as President of the board, I am very excited about the opportunities that are before us. There is a heightened level of passion and creativity in our work as we brainstorm and develop new programs and strengthen those already

in place. We are inspired by the stories we hear from you and the relationships we see everyday through this work and know that it would not be possible without your ongoing support, both financially and in your contribution of time.

2004 was a year of positive changes for our organization; our time has been well spent in building a great foundation for this exciting new year. I think that you will be very pleased with your participation in The Box Project in the months and years to come as together we work to make a difference in our world.

I hope that you all feel that your "imponderably valuable gift" of time is well placed and well spent.

Most Sincerely,

Cindy Shearer

President

"Since time is the one immaterial object which we cannot influence—neither speed up nor slow down, add to nor diminish—it is an imponderably valuable gift."

Maya Angelou



SPONSOR TIPS & IDEAS

Online Shopping

Chatterbox sponsors have told us about a new online vendor offering free shipping for orders over \$50--www.Walgreens.com. Shopping online and having the box shipped directly to your match family directly can be a great time-saver, especially in the months when you might not have time to buy, pack and ship your box. Also, these free shipping offers provide a great opportunity to save money on shipping costs by sending the really heavy stuff like detergent and canned goods. Note: most online vendors are

only able to ship to street addresses, not to PO box addresses.

New Flat Rate Shipping Boxes

The US Postal Service introduced a new Priority Mail flat rate shipping box as part of a 2 year test. They offer these special boxes in 2 sizes: 8-1/2" X 11" X 5-1/2" and 11-7/8" X 3-3/8" X 13-5/8". The shipping rate is \$7.70 regardless of the weight or shipping zone. Check with your local post office for availability, or order them online at <http://supplies.usps.gov>.

SPONSOR FACT SHEET: MAINE

This continues a series of fact sheets for sponsors to learn more about the areas we serve.

While the rural poverty situation in Maine is very real, it is not at all like the Mississippi Delta, Appalachia, or South Dakota. It is important to be aware of these differences to ensure good communications and a good match.

The Rural Community Action Ministry (RCAM) is our primary source of referrals from Maine and covers 13 very rural towns in the central Maine region. The unique challenges there are that the elderly, disabled and low-income people live in sparsely populated and remote areas. Often the nearest grocery store is 25+ miles away. The only mode of transportation is by car, either your own or a friend or family member's. Because of this and the fierce brutality of the winters, most families get the very best car they possibly can—even if it means not having other things we would normally consider “essential” in other states. For them, it's a matter of survival. Without reliable transportation, they cannot access health or other services, and they can't get to the grocery store or to a hospital.

Maine people are proud and independent. They usually want to work if they can, and they are resourceful enough to survive some pretty harsh living. There are few skilled, year-round jobs to be had in the rural areas, and most unskilled jobs are seasonal. When the weather allows, people work at whatever jobs they can find. The Center for Economic Policy's last report on Maine concluded that many Maine people are considered the “working poor” and it often was not possible to earn enough, even if working full time, to pay for rent, medicine, food, the car, essential household supplies and HEATING.

Heating costs are incredibly high even for just a small home. Because people are proud and have a hard time asking for help, several people literally freeze to death inside their own homes each winter. With the rise in fuel prices, there is real

concern that this problem will only get worse over time.

Due to their fierce independence and pride, many of your Maine families may find it difficult to ask for things, or tell you exactly what they need. You may just want to start by writing back and forth and getting to know each other. Then you can move to sending things you think they can use, and asking them to tell you what they liked best, would like more of, or don't think they can use. Often a checklist can be a helpful guide.

The issues of rural poverty in Maine are very different from other areas. Please do not be surprised if your family is trying to work, or has a good car. They have been carefully screened and do need your assistance. Our goal is to help them achieve self-sufficiency. You can find great satisfaction in helping someone who also wants to help themselves. After all, our goal is to increase self-sufficiency, and the active participation of your family is a key factor in their success. We hope you will get to know these special families and learn more about the unique situations and problems they face.

If you do have any questions or concerns, the RCAM (our referring agency there) is a great resource to us for addressing any challenges or concerns that arise. They make a point of having regular contact with their match families and are ready and willing to help when we call on them.

Please join us in welcoming Gil Ward as the new Executive Director for the RCAM. With more than 35 matched recipient families located in Maine, the RCAM is an invaluable resource to us, and the only authorized referring agency working with us in Maine.

STORIES FROM OUR SPONSORS

My life changed many years ago. I was matched with my dear friend Annie and her family over 35 years ago. At that time, I lived in an apartment in the Bronx and Annie lived in a shack in Mississippi with her 4 children and her parents.

Time went on. Annie's father passed on, and her son with Cerebral Palsy also died. As to her children, some went into the service, some to other jobs.

I moved to New Jersey and had problems with my now ex-husband who was abusive and drank. I divorced him and my life was in a mess. At that time, I could no longer send boxes, but Annie stuck by me, with comforting and sage advice. In time my life got better. Annie's mother passed on and Annie's grandchildren lived with her and helped her, as did her children.

I don't even remember what things I sent to Annie over the years, but she tells me it meant a lot to her family. So I will have to take her at her word. I have saved Annie's letters, some from as long ago as the '70s. Now and then I re-read them and recall that time. Perhaps we have been good for each other...each there when the other needed someone.

So today, which is my 65th birthday, I opened the front door to find a box from UPS with a California return address on it. Who could this be? What could it be? It was a beautiful sculpture in the African tradition. The tag reads, “She is a wise woman with a gentle countenance... gives thanks to the lord and offers him the very best of all she has”. I think the giver chose this piece and meant those words for me. Who sent it? It was from one of Annie's daughters. The card just said “thanks for all the help you have given to my family”.

Although I have written and spoken to another of Annie's daughters who lives with her, I have not heard from this daughter since she was little. So this gift was such a surprise, but so appreciated. A few hours later came a knock at the door. It was an arrangement of flowers, a candle and a balloon from Annie and her family in MS. All of this attention for me! I was in tears.

A 35-year relationship. It has been a gift to me to have Annie in my life. Who can say who got the most out of it? I say me. Especially today.

Barbara S. - New Jersey

FROM THE DESK OF SUSAN PATNEAUDE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



I meet a lot of people in my travels, and more often than not, they tell me they have never heard of The Box Project. That's when my passion kicks in and I tell them all they ever wanted to know about us and the wonderful concept of matching families in need with families that want to help them.

One of our most difficult challenges has been getting the word out consistently and effectively across the country. We still hear from people who saw us on Oprah a couple of years ago, or saved the

clipping from an old issue of Woman's Day or Family Fun Magazine. This December we were fortunate to have been mentioned in Family Fun Magazine again as well as Nick Jr., Child Magazine, and UrbanBaby Daily.

With your help, the Board of Directors has been successful in getting some effective public relations in hometown America this year. In 2004, we were featured in newspapers in Michigan, Illinois, Ohio, West Virginia, New Jersey and California with some heartwarming articles about sponsors and their match families. In early December, a sponsor family was featured on a special Fox segment in Detroit that highlighted the value of teaching children about giving back and about caring for others. Inevitably, we receive many new sponsor applications from this media exposure, and I often wonder if the publishers realize the power they have over our waiting list! Just the slightest mention in the right place can change a family's life.

When you're willing to tell your story, it inspires others, and it personalizes the face of poverty and the face of generosity. It gives people the message that if you can do it, they can too... so making a difference seems more achievable. Thanks to all of you who have participated in getting us noticed in the news and in these magazines.

Although our move this summer and our evacuation for three hurricanes this fall delayed some of our work for the holiday

matching program, we eventually made up for lost time. We even extended our usual October 31st deadline by almost two weeks to accommodate the late start.

Over 125 recipient families were matched for the Holiday Match program this year. Every year a large percentage of our new holiday match sponsors decide to continue participating year round in our family match program, and we're always excited to handle those requests. The avalanche of generosity in response to our 2004 Holiday Match program exceeded our expectations. Thanks so much to the sponsors and recipients who have been very patient with us, your feedback will help us make it even better next year.

We have over 140 sponsors currently waiting to be matched. Normally we can match sponsors as soon as they apply, but this holiday season we have received 3 to 4 times more applications than a typical month.

If you're waiting for a match family, please accept our gratitude for your patience. We are as anxious as you are to find you the perfect fit. Brandy and I will work to find your match family for you and complete all the initial paperwork and data entry that's required to make things easier for everyone. We have over 200 recipient families waiting to be matched. If the information on their application form is more than a year old, we will request an updated form from them by mail so we can send you their most current information. This process takes a little time, but is a very important part of making sure we make a good match. Sponsors that signed up by December 31st should receive their match information by the first of February, or as soon after that as possible.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of our active members and donors for your continued support. Your membership dues and your generous contributions are of the utmost importance to the operation of The Box Project. Our budget is modest and we work hard to keep our expenses low. We pride ourselves in being good stewards of the trust you place in us.

I appreciate your donations and kind thoughts of us during this fall/winter appeal, and for all you do for your match families throughout the year. Best wishes to you for happiness in the New Year.

RESOURCES FOR INCREASING SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Website To Determine Government Benefit Eligibility

For families in poverty, the winter can be particularly challenging, with higher heating costs, the need for warmer clothes and other financial pressures. For families in need of assistance, a new government website provides a valuable service by identifying potential benefit options available to citizens.

www.GovBenefits.gov is a free, on-line resource that helps citizens determine their potential eligibility for benefit programs. The site provides information and links to nearly 1,000 federal and state benefit programs, including the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, the Community Food and Nutrition Program, Emergency Food Assistance Program, Food Stamp Program, Housing Counseling Assistance Program, Low Income Home Energy Assistance and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. It features benefit programs for seniors, students, children, veterans, retirees, people with disabilities, and many more.

Tax Credits: Earned Income Credits (EIC)

Many of our recipient families may qualify for the IRS Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) program. It is a federal income tax credit for low-income workers, especially those with children, who are eligible for and claim the credit as part of their tax filing and refund process. The credit reduces the amount of tax an individual owes, or may even mean a refund.

The refundability of the credit is especially important since it allows low-income families with no net tax liability to potentially receive help through a cash refund.

In 2004, that earned income credit has increased. The IRS Website, www.irs.gov, is a great source of information on this program—search for "earned income tax credit" or "publication 596". General online searches will also provide a wide variety of links to other online resources with more details of qualifications, payments, and information about filing.

PAT SCHNEIDER RECOGNIZED FOR HER PASSION AND DEDICATION

At the last Board of Director's meeting for 2004, the Board of The Box Project recognized Patricia Schneider for her dedicated and passionate service to the organization. Pat, who is the Immediate Past President of The Box Project, just finished two consecutive 3-year terms of service. She also served on The Box Project Board beginning in 1992 through 1997, going off the Board for one year between terms as required by the organization. During her term as President, she says that she was "committed to developing a long-term strategy for the organization."

She feels that The Box Project is stronger in reaching out and recruiting in all areas. Pat says, "We transitioned from working sporadically with field representatives to working with stable local organizations and referring agencies that screen our recipient applicants. We have developed a professional atmosphere on our Board of Directors, transitioning that body from a grass roots organization to a national group with a strategic perspective to ensure the growth and continued success of the organization. I am pleased that we have such a dedicated, professional Board whose members have a 'heart' for our mission and bring expertise in areas that will help us grow the organization-including strategy, technology, fundraising, business, finance and legal matters."

Pat explains modestly that she became involved on the Board of Directors thinking that as a Board member and a professional consultant she could contribute her "gifts" to the organization. She enjoyed traveling to areas that The Box Project serves to see first hand the challenges that face the families that we serve and was delighted that she was able to visit her own Match Family in Mississippi many times.

In retrospect she says, "After being involved for over 30 years, I thought that most of the poverty issues would change, and they haven't." Pat has been a Sponsor for 31 years for the same Match Family. In the years since 1973 when The Box Project matched her with Irma, she has been a part of the successes and challenges of Irma's family and has reaped the rewards of being a friend and a mentor.

She says, "Irma and her husband did not have indoor plumbing when we were first matched and she worked chopping cotton. After her husband died, she went to live with her son and daughter-in-law and their five children. I was delighted to have another family to surprise with gifts at Christmas! When we went to Mississippi for board meetings, my Match Family always welcomed me warmly. We went out to breakfast

and dinner, laughed a lot, and took field trips to stores and doctor's appointments. They brought up five children and two grandchildren and over time saved enough money to buy a modest 2-bedroom house.

They wrote to The Box Project about 10 years ago, sent us \$100 donation, and thanked us saying they didn't need our help anymore and to please use the money for others less fortunate. Due to their strong, family work ethic, all of their children are presently employed.

One of their sons is in the Air Force and a daughter works in a local factory. Irma's great-granddaughter is the first in the family to go to college. Unfortunately, lack of employment opportunities has recently impacted the family. The plant where Irma's daughter-in-law worked for 20 years moved to Mexico. Although she is working hard to get her GED at 60+ years old, she knows this is the end of employment for her. There are no jobs. This just underscores the long-term challenges that are faced by so many families in rural poverty."

Pat says that her experience with her own Match Family, and her pride in their strong work ethic and commitment to education, has strengthened her own dedication to The Box Project. She says, "It has been an honor and a privilege to have served on the Board. The organization is poised for growth, and although I will miss being a Board member, I will continue to stay involved."

She continues, "I look forward to seeing the organization continuing its growth and increasing family self-sufficiency. I support continued efforts to empower our sponsors to help their families set goals for themselves, to learn life, and career skills and how to "navigate the system" to get the health care, services and the educational assistance they need."

We've come a long way. With the knowledge, involvement and dedication of our board and membership, I know we can—and will—accomplish so much more."

Although this was the last meeting for Pat and her second and final term as a Board member, she is determined that The Box Project will always remain a part of her life.



HAIL AND FAREWELL—2005 BOARD ELECTED

The annual board meeting, held each Fall, is a time for fond farewells and for making new friends as we elect new board members and officers for 2005, and say goodbye to those with terms ending in December.

We bid a fond farewell to both Pat Schneider and Sharon Workman, whose terms are ending in December. In addition to recognizing Pat's service, we want to extend our heartfelt thanks to Sharon Workman. Sharon's tremendous wisdom and tireless behind-the-scenes efforts have been inspirational to all that have worked with her. She has been truly devoted to ensuring the growth and success of the organization. Please join us in thanking Sharon for all she has done, not only for The Box Project, but also for the many others whose lives she has touched.

At the same time, we are very excited to welcome and introduce to you our three newest board members for 2005: Jan Crossen, Thespine Kavoulakis, and Kathleen Mahoney.

YOUTH GANGS FLOURISH ON INDIAN RESERVATIONS

By Chris Grant

This article was originally printed in the Know Gangs newsletter (www.knowgangs.com) as the result of an article in Reuters. It is reprinted with permission of knowgangs.com.

Over the past 15 years, violent youth gangs have invaded Indian reservations, bringing terror, drugs and vandalism to societies that were already in deep distress.

On the Pine Ridge Reservation of South Dakota, inhabited by 15,000-20,000 members of the Lakota Sioux, police believe there may be 3,500 acknowledged gang members.

"In the village of Pine Ridge alone, we have a dozen gangs—Outlaws, Wild Boyz, Trey Trey, Nomads, Iggy Boyz, Aimster Gangsta, Wild Girls, Bad Ass Bitches, Southside Boyz, Northside Boyz and Gangsta Disciples," said John Mousseau, an officer with the Bureau of Indian Affairs tribal police who specializes in combating gang activity.

"Every little community on the reservation has its gang or gangs. There's one little place—Potato Creek. It only has 40 residents but it has a gang with 15 members," he said.

The gangs deal in cocaine, marijuana and increasingly in methamphetamine. Some, like the Nomads, have a command structure with a ruling council and a set of laws.

"Gang members are responsible for close to 70 percent of crimes on the reservation—assaults, sexual assaults, intimidation, harassment, burglaries, vandalism, graffiti and sometimes murder," Mousseau said.

Police chief James Two Bulls said there were 10-12 homicides on the reservation each year. Alcohol is almost always involved. Although the reservation is officially dry, residents can easily buy beer across the Nebraska state line.

The population is highly transient. Young people who joined gangs in cities bring gang culture to the reservation. Others learn the gang lifestyle in prison.

Last July, Mousseau responded to reports of gunfire in a house. Mousseau was questioning a girl when someone inside the building opened fire with a semi-automatic assault rifle.

BULLET GRAZES EAR

"The girl was hit and a bullet grazed my ear, Mousseau recalled. "I took cover in the weeds and pulled the girl to safety. I called for backup but the guy was still shooting. It was dark but I fired back in the direction of his muzzle flashes. I hit him and he died on the scene. He had fired 30 rounds."

The girl survived. The dead man, a known gang member, had been drunk as well as high on drugs.

Mousseau believes he was the target of an organized hit because he was interfering with gang operations. He had to move himself and his family out of town for a time after receiving death threats from other gang members.

Residents of South Dakota's reservations are among the poorest in the nation. Unemployment hovers around the 80 percent mark. Of those employed, 96 percent live below the poverty line and alcoholism is rife. Apart from school athletic teams, there are few organized youth activities.

Young people in the reservation are in deep crisis, said Bryan Brewer, principle of the Pine Ridge High School.

"About 50 percent of our students drop out, mostly in the first two years of high school," Brewer said. "We don't know where they go. They just stop coming. Of the kids who enroll, only one percent graduate college."

Gang members constantly deface the school with graffiti. They bring guns and deal drugs on school grounds. They sometimes make homemade weapons in the school metal workshop. Three years ago, scores of rival gang members fought a violent battle in a school corridor.

Brewer once asked a couple of gang members how many students were members of the Trey Trey gang. "They told me over half of our students were in that one gang alone," he said.

MIMIC BEHAVIOR

Indian gangs mimic the behavior of black and Hispanic inner-city gangs—the colors, the dress, the violent initiation ceremonies, the hand signals, the graffiti, the tattoos. But they have developed one wrinkle of their own, said Captain Christopher Grant, chief of detectives in Rapid City, South Dakota, who is an expert on the subject.

"They will burn and brand designs into their arms and bodies, such as pitchforks or other gang symbols. They will heat a knife or a metal clothes hanger until it is red hot and then press it to their flesh and leave it to fester so it makes a big vivid scar that announces their involvement in the gang subculture.

"Sometimes, they just slash themselves with knives to create markings that depict their gang involvement, and oftentimes both the burning and cutting become a rite of passage for the young people who choose this path," he said.

Chris Eagle Hawk, a police human resources officer on the reservation who would like to revive Indian cultural awareness, said young people have no sense of their own identity or culture and look for something to fill the gap.

"They need to belong somewhere, to be part of something. They don't know anything about who they are and where they come from. We have our own colors, our own songs, our own language. We even have our own signs," he said.

Despite the problems, police officers said it was difficult to persuade parents and some members of the tribal leadership of the gravity of the situation.

One day this month, Mousseau and several other police officers went to the village of Wounded Knee, site of a notorious massacre of Indian men, women and children by U.S. troops in 1890. The police had invited members of the community to a question-and-answer session about gangs.

Only three people showed up.

TAX DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS

The Box Project is a non-profit 501(c)(3) charitable organization. This means your membership fees and donations made directly to The Box Project are deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

Contributions made payable to a specific individual or intended for the benefit of a specific individual or family would likely not be tax deductible. Similar rules apply for non-cash donations, such as food, clothing, household goods, etc. For additional clarification we urge you to consult your tax advisor.

The Internal Revenue Service has issued guidelines for substantiating charitable cash contributions. If the contribution is less than \$250, you're required to have a least one of the following: canceled check, credit card or bank account statement, letter or statement from the organization or other reliable written records with the date and amount given and the name of the organization. For contributions of \$250 or more, a canceled check is not sufficient, you must have in your possession an acknowledgement letter from the charitable organization.

In January, The Box Project will be sending the IRS required acknowledgement letters to all sponsors or donors that made contributions totaling \$250 or more during 2004. For contributions of less than \$250, we ask you to use your cancelled check or credit card statement as your record.

FREQUENT FLIER TICKET DONATIONS

The Box Project is asking for your help. We need frequent flier tickets donated to us so we can convene a meeting of volunteers, teachers, program planners and others for the purpose of developing an improved school matching program

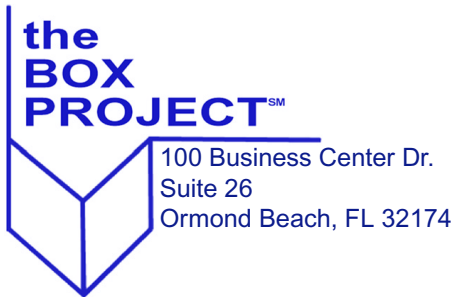
Although many airlines offer the ability to donate your frequent flier miles to select charities, we have been unable to find any open to adding new charities to their list.

However, we have found that most airlines allow individuals to use their mileage to have a ticket or certificate for a ticket issued in someone else's name. We have a continuing need for these for our staff or volunteer travel.

If you know of anyone that has frequent flier tickets that they may not be able to use before the miles expire, or would like to donate a frequent flier ticket to The Box Project for travel, please let me know. We will work with you to review the rules of the specific airline to ensure we meet their requirement; or we will put it on a list to have the ticket issued once we have the traveler's name and travel dates.

If you know of any organizations where donated tickets can be requested, or if you have experience or connections for getting a charity set up for mileage donations from specific airlines, we'd love to hear from you too.

Email your recommendations to: editor@boxproject.org



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