

The Semcac Review



Volume 9, Issue 1

Winter 2009

The power of giving

Semcac is often witness to the goodwill of local supporters—and the last several months have been no exception. Several significant gifts have provided much needed reinforcement for Semcac programs that are seeing increased demand.

In October, the Winona Hims men's gospel choir gave \$14,000 from fall concert proceeds to Semcac's Rushford Food Shelf. This gift has allowed the food shelf to continue serving households affected by the August 2007 flood, as well as the many new clients that have begun to visit the food shelf due to added financial strain on their household budgets. In 2008, as many as 236 households visited the Rushford Food Shelf. In prior years about 100 households visited this food shelf. Households enrolled at Semcac's other food shelves total about 280 in Dodge Center, 290 in Preston and 225 in Caledonia.

The bright spot in this time of growing need has been the tremendous display of community support that continues to keep the shelves stocked at all four locations. The added support has come in part from large gifts—including the Winona Hims' gift, \$11,066 from the East Fillmore County Chapter of Thrivent Financial, \$8,000 from the City of Rushford's donated flood relief funds, \$6,000 from McNeilus Steele, and 18 other gifts of \$1,000 or more from individuals, churches, civic organizations and businesses. Furthermore, gifts of food have been abundant. The Winona Hy-Vee store has given about 1,000 pounds of bread each month since September to the Rushford Food Shelf. The Caledonia Rotary Club gathered 3,000 pounds of food for the Caledonia Food Shelf through a holiday lights show in La Crosse.

Outreach & Emergency Services Director Wendy Todd said, "The examples could go on and on...Local supporters have really stepped up to meet a critical need in their communities. We've been blessed with large gifts lately, but gifts of **(Power of giving, page 2)**

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The Winona Hims donated \$14,000 to both Semcac's Rushford Food Shelf and Grace Place of Winona from their fall concert proceeds.

Power of giving (from page 1)

any size help us to provide food for local families—we can buy 80 pounds of food with a \$20.00 gift.”

Other Semcac programs have also been able to help more clients lately due to donors' generosity. Semcac's Reach Out for Warmth Program offers utility assistance for households just over the regular Energy Assistance Program (EAP) income guidelines and facing a home-heating crisis. In 2008 the program received over \$80,000 in donations—just over half coming from Alliant Energy. Donations are matched by the State so even more people receive assistance.

EAP Coordinator Susan Thompson said, “These donations touched the lives of 422 households during the 07-08 winter heating season—that's over double the number from the year before. The gifts literally help people—including many children and seniors—stay warm during our cold winters.”

Semcac's Contact Centers in Dodge, Fillmore and Houston counties help organize holiday gift projects each year. Christmas 2008 saw 178 *more* households participating than the previous year. Donors stepped forward to ensure that children from 779 families would have a present under the tree. Related to this effort, the Winona Head Start Center again linked with Winona Senior High School's Giving Tree. As a result, Head Start children and their siblings were the recipients of 180 gifts.

The agency's Freeborn County Contact Center received 14 boxes of new women's clothing from the Albert Lea *Christopher Banks* store. Over 20 clients of the Workforce Development Center, a local ESL class and Semcac were able to “shop” for new fashionable clothes—a true gift for those who rarely get this experience.

With all the negative news percolating these days, we hope your heart has been lifted with these few examples of the genuine kindness flourishing in our region.



Pictured center is Health Services Director Christina Feine, RN and members of two WSU clubs—Nursing Students for Choice and FORGE (Fighting for Our Rights and Gender Equality). The clubs held two concert events last fall and designated \$1,800 in proceeds to the clinic because they appreciate the importance of family planning and its value to the community. The funds were used to make improvements to clinic exam rooms.

A Feine new clinic director

Christina Feine began as the new health services director at the Semcac Family Planning Clinic in Winona on October 20. Feine, a Registered Nurse and graduate of the Winona State University Nursing Program, comes to the clinic from the Thoracic Surgery Progressive Care Unit at Saint Marys Hospital in Rochester.

As Semcac's health services director, Feine leads a four-member staff that provides education, information and medical services to about 1,500 people each year who are seeking family planning methods or testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections.

Executive Director Terry Erickson said, “Christina has really hit the ground running. Her first week involved a three-day audit by a major funding source, and within her first six months she'll have submitted two significant funding applications. She's been willing to accept new challenges and overcome obstacles, while demonstrating real enthusiasm for the mission of the clinic.”

Dollars & Sense classes gain momentum

The first Dollars & Sense classes provided by Semcac's Outreach & Emergency Services Department have been positively received. Since October, classes have alternated between sites in Freeborn, Mower and Steele counties. The three classes held so far have had a total 29 attendees. Staff relate that classes have been interactive and fun. Participants, ranging in age from 19 to 56, have shared that they really got a lot out of the class. One participant said, "I enjoyed the class and will use the information to help me and my family."

The free, three-hour class is based on the *Four Cornerstones of Financial Literacy* curriculum and covers budgets, savings and spending, credit repair, credit reports, debt



Owatonna participants work together on some class activities.

reduction, and identity theft. All adults staying in Semcac's Freeborn County Homeless Shelter are required to attend a class, and those receiving housing assistance through the agency's other programs must attend a class as part of their case management. Clients of Semcac's other programs, as well as members of the public, are encouraged to attend to learn more about achieving financial stability.

A United Way of Freeborn County grant has helped to cover the cost for participants not enrolled in one of Semcac's programs and has helped to cover child care reimbursement for that county's participants. Future classes are planned in all three counties.

Teacher receives state & regional awards

Semcac Head Start Teacher Jackie Blahnik recently received state and regional recognition. Last fall she received the Minnesota Head Start Association's *Teacher of the Year* award. With this designation Blahnik was then nominated and received the top honor at the Region V level (six states). She is now among ten nominees in national competition for *Teacher of the Year*.

Blahnik has been with Head Start in St. Charles for over 18 years. Her supervisor, Head Start Coordinator Mary Cutliff, stated, "As a classroom teacher Jackie demonstrates an excellent understanding of child development and positive behavior management skills. She is warm and nurturing toward each child and provides a supportive and developmentally appropriate environment for children to learn, grow and be successful."

More than 350 children and their families have benefited from Blahnik's commitment to early childhood development. Her talents of empowering parents and enhancing shared decision-making in the Head Start program is proven by solid attendance at parent meetings and the parents' feedback.

Congratulations to Jackie Blahnik—Minnesota's and the region's *Head Start Teacher of the Year*.



Jackie Blahnik pictured in her classroom

Fourth and final year of Head Start's Oral Health Initiative



Semcac Head Start's Oral Health Initiative began as a result of a grant award in 2006 and has been extended through October 2009 so more Head Start families will benefit when classes begin in the fall. Head Start Health Coordinator Lori Woxland was asked to share the initiative's progress with other Head Start programs from around the country via webinars and during a panel at the Minnesota Department of Education's *Strong Foundations: Minnesota's Birth-to-Three Conference* in January 2009.

To date, the initiative's impact has been significant for Head Start families. The results for just one of the initiative's objectives—to improve dental access for Head Start eligible children—are shown here:

<u>Desired outcome</u>	<u>2005 Baseline</u>	<u>Results through year 3</u>
100% of Head Start children receive dental exams within 90 days of enrollment.	80%	98% of dental exams completed within 90 days of enrollment.
100% of Head Start children needing restorative treatment receive follow-up care.	49%	81% of follow-up restorative treatment completed.
75 % of Head Start families establish a relationship with a dental clinic for ongoing care.	57%	70% of families report having a dental clinic "home."

Semcac Head Start has also made progress in meeting the Oral Health Initiative's other objectives—increasing awareness of the importance of preventative oral health care and understanding of how to use the dental care system among participating families and Head Start staff and increasing awareness of the importance of preventative oral health care and access to dental providers for vulnerable pregnant women.

Woxland said, "This initiative has been successful because of the collaboration with dental providers in our area—they have been tremendous to work with over the past few years." Partner dental offices that have worked closely with Semcac Head Start on this project include Dr. John Flor in Blooming Prairie, Dr. Chris Carroll in Winona and Dr. Michael Flynn in Lewiston. Head Start thanks these dentists and all of their employees for collaborating to improve the oral health care of Head Start families.

Former Head Start student receives regional honor

The Region V Head Start Association honored Heidi Miller of Caledonia with the Phyllis J. Jones Memorial Scholarship Award for Head Start graduates. She was selected among many qualified candidates from the region's six states. Miller is a student at Winona State University. As part of the regional recognition, her application has been sent to the National Head Start Association's competition.

Volunteering to comfort children

As a volunteer for Semcac's Retired & Senior Volunteer Program, Sheila Rislove spent more than 450 hours last year crocheting unique afghans for Fillmore County foster care children. Along with these afghans, Rislove put together care bags with stuffed animals, books and snacks that she



Sheriff Jensen thanked Rislove at a recent event for the afghans and care bags she provides for local children.



purchased. Sheriff deputies keep the bags in their vehicles to give to children placed in emergency foster care. Sheriff Daryl Jensen said that the bags can be important tools to help comfort children during a very difficult situation.

RSVP at work in our schools

The Semcac Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) volunteers have been busy in Southeastern Minnesota schools this year.

Rushford-Peterson Elementary teachers started a Battle of the Books project last fall. With a grant, the teachers purchased 180 books—primarily Newberry Award winning books. The 44 fifth grade students read a total 250 books and then formed teams to compete in a battle of comprehension. RSVP volunteers assisted as score keepers, time keepers and judges during a two-day battle. Donna Ciangiola, the local RSVP coordinator, helped set up the project and hopes to expand the idea to more area schools next year so that interscholastic competitions can be held. Teachers reported that the Battle of Books has increased students' excitement for reading and taught important reading comprehension skills.

Another RSVP project at Rushford-Peterson Elementary was the annual *Math Wizards* event—an evening for parents, teachers and students to enjoy the fun of mathematics. Children from pre-K through elementary school played math-related games and won prizes. Nineteen RSVP volunteers helped with the project, which began in 2002 as an effort to reach parents of students struggling in math. An amazing 300 parents and children attended this year.

RSVP also has Pen Pal Projects in progress in Dodge Center, Rushford-Peterson and La Crescent. RSVP volunteers exchange monthly letters with fourth grade students to help with reading and writing, while also forming a bond between generations.

A new bus for Houston County

Semcac's Houston County Bus was replaced last fall due to high mileage and increasing maintenance costs. This bus service provided over 14,400 public transit rides and traveled nearly 40,000 miles last year to ensure that Caledonia, La Crescent, Hokah, Brownsville and Eitzen residents got to work, local shopping sites and their medical appointments. The bus also transports children to and from daycare centers and preschools.

Transportation Director Erlene Welshons commented, "The activity of the Houston County Bus is about 38 percent of our total five-county bus service. It is an extremely busy service."



The new bus operated by Semcac. Duane Beckman and Michael Olson are the regular drivers.

Semcac received 80 percent of the funds to purchase the bus through the MN Department of Transportation. The required 20 percent local match support was requested from Houston County businesses,

civic organizations, cities and the county. Thanks to the following respondents who acknowledged the importance of public transit in their communities through a contribution: **Merchants Bank of Caledonia, Caledonia Haulers, City of Hokah and American Legion Post No. 595.**



An RSVP volunteer works with a first grade student during Math Wizards fun night.

Program saves 15 homes from disrepair

(Published in the Albert Lea Tribune: Saturday, September 6, 2008. Reprinted with permission.)

Albert Lea resident Bruce Spilde was ready to leave his house. He had lived there for 12 years but couldn't afford the repairs it needed. Not only that, he couldn't do the repairs himself. The former trucker lives with an injury that impairs his mobility. "It was just a matter of time before I was going to leave it there and go. It would have been one of Albert Lea's abandoned homes," said Spilde, 53.

Then someone from Semcac, a community-oriented nonprofit organization serving seven counties in southern Minnesota, mentioned the Small Cities Development Program and encouraged him to apply. He did. Spilde applied through the Albert Lea Housing and Redevelopment Authority, which along with Semcac and the Albert Lea city government received a \$371,000 federal grant to offer loans to the homeowners at affordable rates—and possibly for nothing in return if the homeowners live in houses long enough. In all, 15 homes in Albert Lea participated. Some heard through housing officials going through neighborhoods and knocking on doors. Others saw advertisements in this newspaper. Sixty applied. The work on repairing the 15 homes began in April.

The U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development offers block grants for community development to states. In Minnesota, the funding comes through the Department of Employment and Economic Development, which then doles out grants in its Small Cities Development Program.

The maximum that Spilde could borrow was \$22,000. But his house needed more than \$30,000 of work, so Semcac found other state and federal assistance programs to make up the difference. The \$22,000 is a 12-year deferred loan. In the third year, Spilde's loan decreases by 10 percent and continues to decrease each year until the loan total is zero. He won't have to pay back the extra Semcac assistance either. Spilde called it the best government program he has ever encountered and said he looks forward to living in his home for another 12 years.

Christine Schieber of Department of Employment and Economic Development's Office of Community Assistance toured some of the repaired homes in Albert Lea on Thursday. With her were Albert Lea Mayor Randy Erdman, Albert Lea Housing and Redevelopment Authority Executive Director Jon Ford and officials from Semcac. This was the first year Semcac and the Albert Lea Housing and Redevelopment Authority has sought to participate in the home-repair program. Schieber praised Albert Lea's efforts and said the city's 2006 housing study helps state officials assess Albert Lea's needs. The state compares Albert Lea to other cities seeking the same grant funds. "It's a competitive situation," she said.

Ford said the Albert Lea Housing and Redevelopment Authority *(continued next page)*



The Small Cities Development Program helped to rehab the homes of Bruce Spilde (above) and Trinidad Juarez (below).



Photos by Tim Engstrom of the Albert Lea Tribune

(continued from previous page)

and Semcac will request to repair 20 homes in the next round of grants. He said there are now 40 on a waiting list. "Their project list is way ahead of schedule," Schieber said.

"This is all made possible," Erdman said, "because of that housing study we did. It's more than paid for itself." The 2006 housing study cost the city \$30,000. Ford said more than \$15 million in assistance can be traced to that document.

Spilde's house, 1436 Frank Hall Drive, had a subroof covered by shingles underneath another subroof covered by shingles, and [Jon Ford of the Albert Lea HRA] said in between water would be trapped and add weight, among many other problems at the house. Now it has a new roof, new siding, new spouts, new outside meter box and conduit, new windows, new living room ceiling, new central air and furnace, new shower, new insulation, new furnace, new doors, new water heater, new carbon-monoxide detector and new handrails. Lead paint was abated. Even a tree branch that hung perilously over the house was cut. The Albert Lea City Council waived building permits for the work done on the 15 houses.

Trinidad Juarez, 76, found out about the program through her grandson's girlfriend. She said she would have had to let her house at 313 E. Eighth St. go without the loan program. "I really don't know what I would've done," she said. The contractor put in new siding, roof, doors, bathroom, furnace, steps and rails, light fixtures and some plumbing. Lead paint was removed, and a garage and a deck were torn down.

Wayne Stenberg, the community development director for Semcac, said the most exciting part of the program is seeing the final product. "It has an impact on the whole neighborhood. People see a home get fixed up and they want to do repairs to their homes," he said.

"And that's what we're hoping for," Schieber said.

Small Cities Development Program update

As noted in the Albert Lea Tribune article from September 2008 reprinted on pages 6 and 7, Semcac's Community Development Department began administering its first Small Cities Development Program (SCDP) project in the spring of 2007 after funds were awarded to the City of Albert Lea. In partnership with the city and the Albert Lea HRA, Semcac has helped to rehabilitate 15 homes in a targeted area of the city. Rehab work has included new roofs, siding, bathroom updates, plumbing, electrical, windows, sidewalk repairs, handicap accessibility and more. To date, 13 homes are finished and the final 2 will be completed later this spring. Semcac has also been able to offer Weatherization and Conservation Improvement Program funds to qualifying homeowners, which has meant the addition of high-efficiency furnaces, insulation, central air conditioning units and Energy Star appliances. The project has meant about \$385,000 worth of improvements to the homes in this neighborhood.

To continue the SCDP momentum within the department, staff took on the administration of the City of Rushford's project in 2008. The project includes rehabbing 15 owner-occupied homes and 12 rental units, for a total of \$500,000+ in improvements to the community's housing stock. Construction is beginning on some owner-occupied homes. Homeowners with incomes at 80 percent of Fillmore County's Median Income are eligible to apply for 0 percent deferred loans of up to \$20,000 for housing rehab. Applications continue to be taken for both owner-occupied and rental properties.

The department is awaiting response on two 2009 SCDP grant applications submitted for southeastern Minnesota communities.

Employees recognized for service

Each year, Semcac recognizes employees who have reached five-year milestones. In 2008, 18 employees were honored for their continued commitment to the agency's work.



Susan Thompson, Energy Assistance—30 years
Pat Georgens, Administration—35 years
Terry Erickson, Administration—5 years



Vonda Budde,
 Community
 Development
 —15 years



Shirley Schwake,
 Senior Nutrition
 —15 years



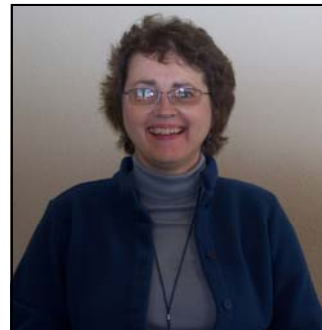
Head Start staff (left to right): **Brenda Thissen**—5 years,
Larry Duxbury—5 years, **Melissa Monroe**—5 years,
Loren Tufte—10 years, **Kari Srsen**—15 years



Kathleen Ozmun
 Senior Nutrition—10 years



Sandy Moger
 Senior Nutrition—10 years



Cindy Burt
 Senior Nutrition—5 years



Donna Ciangiola
 Senior Nutrition—5 years



Roda Mahamud
 Head Start—5 years



Wayne Henderson
 Weatherization—5 years

Last November, Semcac's Board of Directors also recognized members that had 4-year anniversaries of service.



Randy Dahl
 Fillmore County
 8 years



Jerry Heim
 Winona County
 4 years



Deborah Spitzer
 Winona County
 4 years



Nan Elsbecker
 Senior Nutrition—5 years



Darlene Dix
 Senior Nutrition—5 years

Thank you to these board members for their years of volunteer service to Semcac.

Getting to know the Board...

Linda Tuttle, Freeborn County

Board Service: Since January 2009

Sector: Public Official—Freeborn County Commissioner

Residence: Albert Lea

Occupation: Owner of Albert Lea Abstract & Title Co. and a County Commissioner

Family: Linda and her husband Steven R. Olson have two adult sons (and two daughter-in-laws), one adult daughter (and one son-in-law), one grandson and one granddaughter.

Community Involvement: Linda is a member of Trinity Lutheran Church, the Southeast MN Realtor Association and the local Chamber of Commerce. She was formerly a member of the Trinity Lutheran Church council, a Chamber Ambassador for the City of Albert Lea, a BPW member, and a member of the Noon Kiwanis.

Personal Interests: Linda enjoys photography, gardening, traveling and walking.



Tim Gabrielson, Mower County

Board Service: Since January 2009

Sector: Public Official—Mower County Commissioner

Residence: Austin

Occupation: Insurance Agent and a County Commissioner

Family: Tim and his wife of 35 years, Diane, have an adult daughter, an adult son and one granddaughter.

Community Involvement: Tim teaches classes to first-time homebuyers at Riverland Community College. He also teaches Austin High School students about getting their drivers licenses, safe driving practices, and how their driving affects their insurance costs. Tim participates in his church's "van gang," which picks up children, the elderly and disabled so they can get to Sunday School, church service and special functions. The van gang has fundraisers to maintain this service at no cost to the people that need the assistance.

Personal Interests: Tim's interests include stock car racing, golf, bowling, fishing and spending time with friends and family.



Photo: Austin Daily Herald

2009 Board of Directors

Dodge County

Klaus Alberts, Jr.
Beverly Ofstie
Lyle Tjosaas

Fillmore County

Chuck Amunrud
Randy Dahl
Ruth Fallon
Merle Peterson
Jim Robertson

Houston County

John Bashaw
Larry Connery
Tom Knutson
Patty Miller
DeLorace Reed

Freeborn County

Linda Tuttle

Mower County

Janice Ball
Tim Gabrielson
Norm Flugum
Dave Tollefson

Steele County

Richard Schaefer
Mark Schultz
Janice Schultz
Theresa Zilm

Winona County

Joe Hoffman
Mena Kaehler
Deb Spitzer
Robert Youngerman
Marcia Ward

Head Start Policy Council Liaison

Kevin Voltin

There are currently Board member vacancies in Semcac's service area counties. For more information, please call Executive Director Terry Erickson at (507) 864-7741.

Semcac Board of Directors 2009 Schedule

January 12

February 9

March 9

April 13

May 11

June 8

July 13

August 10

September 14

October 12

November 9

December 14

Meetings are open to the public and begin at 6:30 p.m. in the St. Charles Community Center (830 Whitewater Avenue).



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***Administrative Office—(507) 864-7741**

Contact Centers

- *Dodge County (507) 374-6401
- *Fillmore County (507) 765-2761
- Freeborn County (507) 373-1329
- *Houston County (507) 725-3677
- Mower County (507) 433-5889
- Steele County (507) 451-7134
- Winona County (507) 452-8396

Family Planning Clinic—(507) 452-4307

*Food Co-op Site



The Promise of Community Action
Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.



Please send information that you would like included in ***The Semcac Review*** to Semcac, attn: Jennifer Hengel, P.O. Box 549, Rushford, MN, 55971 or e-mail jennifer.hengel@semcac.org.

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