



Founded on Agape

Thea's Notes

A Newsletter of Thea Bowman House

Spring 2021

Elevator Going Up!



The DeSales Center will literally be getting a lift very soon thanks to part of the Downtown Revitalization Initiative funding that was awarded to the City of Utica by New York State. These monies will help bring new life into our community through the sixteen projects that were announced by Lt. Governor Hochul on May 18.

Thea Bowman House and Academics First Child care centers currently call the DeSales Center home. The former Saint Francis de Sales School has been re-purposed many times. For years after the school closed, it served as an incubator for the projects of local visionaries. Some have stayed and some have moved on. Thea Bowman House gratefully took on ownership of the building when the parish closed. The cornerstone of the original school reads 1931 and in the year 2021, the 90-year-old building has come full circle. It is a place of welcome to all, a place of education and recreation, a place where the community can gather. And thanks to DRI funding for an elevator, soon it will be a place where people with handicapping conditions can be served throughout this magnificent center.

On The Road Again



Transportation has always been a key element in the ability of Thea Bowman House to serve our children and families. Some families have limited or no access to reliable transportation, others need to work at jobs with varying shifts and need another responsible adult to help their child on and off our bus. The COVID-19 epidemic hit our busing program dramatically.

Thanks to the Community Foundation of Herkimer and Oneida Counties and three of its donor-advised funds - the Margaret Gaffney & VanWaes Fund, the Mele Family Fund, and the M&T Bank/Partners Trust Bank Charitable Fund - Thea Bowman House was able to purchase two brand new twenty-four passenger buses through Leonard Bus Services. We now have a fleet of small vehicles to make the "wheels of the bus go 'round and 'round again."

Find us on the web: www.theabowmanhouse.org or facebook.com/theabowmanhouse

The Legacy of Katharine Winter, Friend of Children



Thea Bowman House was saddened to learn of the death of Katharine Winter on January 19, 2021. Katharine and attorney Richard Parker, Esq. were co-trustees for a fund established by Katharine's father named the John Winter Family Fund. The children of Thea Bowman House were treated to so many wonderful educational, recreational, and cultural events thanks to the grants received from this fund. We explored the Adirondack Mountains, Niagara Falls, and museums all across New York State and in all seasons. We were treated to events at the Stanley Theater and even to transportation back and forth to our annual camp-out at Camp Kingsley. So many of our alumni recall those experiences with so much joy that they bring their own children to places filled with happy childhood memories. Childhood should be a time of fun and exploration. Katharine's legacy is that she made that possible for so many kids who would not have otherwise had those opportunities. We honor her memory with deepest gratitude, and we thank Dick Parker for all of his work in helping Katharine with this fund.

Veronica Evans, Friend of Children



Veronica L. Evans died on January 22, 2021. She had been employed at Thea Bowman House since 2001. Veronica was a woman of many talents. She was fun-loving, hard-working, and she had a heart of pure gold. She found the spark of possibility in the most challenging of children. Her demeanor was of someone who "told it like it was" in a way that spoke of authority but never unkindness. Veronica knew just how to talk to a child in crisis and many of us looked to her for guidance in dealing with children facing trauma or behavioral issues. She was loved by staff and children alike, especially her beloved teens.

Veronica and her cousin Diana were the foster parents in a home operated by Thea Bowman House on Summit Place from 2005 until 2014. It was called Agape House. This dynamic duo took in children in need of permanency in their lives. The list of children Veronica helped to raise would be very long indeed. Her own daughter Qiaja continues her mother's commitment to helping others.

This will be our first summer without Veronica. We will miss her most especially on those field trips to the beach where she watched vigilantly over the children that she loved and savored the sounds of their joy.

Nancy Ballerstein, Friend of Children



Nancy Ballerstein answered the urgent call to be the health consultant for Thea Bowman House in the summer of 2008. Although Nancy was a full-time registered school nurse at the Fonda-Fultonville School District, she came faithfully to Thea Bowman House each Tuesday and Thursday evening to review immunization records and to help us in the making of individual health care plans for the children in our care. In the summers, Nancy had more time to spend and she became part of our annual camp-out team. We would go to Camp Kingsley during the second week in August and take 50 or so overnight campers with us, not to mention the 50 day campers who would arrive with shouts of joy each day. This 24-hour job was her favorite time of the year. She would give out meds, bandage wounded campers, and even find time to help with arts and crafts projects. Nancy would end her days enjoying the campfires and applaud at the very silly skits that always ended with a marshmallow or s'mores. Nancy died this year on April 12 after a short battle with cancer.

Hard At Work



The school-age children were delighted when schools reopened over a month ago. They cheered for the school buses when they arrived and left our morning program donned in masks and face shields. The kids had missed their teachers and their friends and were happy that Thea Bowman House became their “fun” place again. Remote learning has been challenging and heroic efforts were made by educators to keep children learning while in safe surroundings. Parents still had to get to work and our center welcomed our school-age children for full day care from April 2020 until school’s re-opening. Our staff worked diligently to keep children on track as you can see from the photo. Happy back to school, everyone!!!!



On June 25, 150 Thea Bowman House pre-kindergarten students will be on their way to kindergarten. It was a most unusual year as some very dedicated staff and teachers adjusted to the new normal of COVID-19. We adapted to the hybrid model of learning, which meant that 75 children came to school on Mondays and Tuesdays and the other 75 attended on Thursdays and Fridays. Wednesdays were reserved for deep cleaning every surface. It also meant the preparation of lessons and learning packets that would be sent home for children whose parents requested remote learning through Zoom or Google Classroom. The teachers and their assistants deserve high praise for a job well done. Parents did their part by bringing the children to school each day without our usual transportation support, which was limited by the health concerns of busing. The year spoke clearly about the resilience of the staff, children and families. The fact that so many four-year-olds adapted to masks and social distancing is a miracle in itself.



Pre-Kindergarten teacher Julie Callard (right) appreciates the significance of butterflies. Besides being beautiful, these Painted Lady butterflies are symbolic of so many of life’s mysteries. They represent transformation from the hidden life of the cocoon to the first winged flight to freedom. Shouts of joy were heard in the Utica Public Library’s gardens and could be heard a block away as the children witnessed over 50 butterflies being released into our community.

Thea Bowman House

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Mission Statement

The mission of Thea Bowman House, Inc. is to provide a safe, nurturing environment to enable culturally diverse children and families achieve their full potential.

The foundation on which Thea Bowman House is built is *agape*, "unconditional love."

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Earl Cunningham



Earl Cunningham was an avid advocate for the education of children, especially those who lacked the financial resources to achieve their goals and dreams. He and his wife dedicated every afternoon of the school year to helping tutor children and teens in math and reading until they were no longer able to do so due to health issues. Together Earl and Sara established the Cunningham Fund for Thea Bowman House, which has made it possible for minority students to receive funding for post-secondary education. Many of our young adults credit Earl with their ability to master algebra and science. The legacy of the Cunningham family will live on through the impact they made on so many young lives.

Shout Out to All St. Francis DeSales Alumni and Friends

There are so many people in our community who attended St. Francis de Sales as students and still others who met their spouse at one of its famous dances. The school has become home to two childcare centers. They are Thea Bowman House and Academics First. Both are continuing the tradition of education for newborns to 18 years-olds. We will be keeping you updated on progress as we make improvements in the building including handicap accessibility and new windows.

We are launching a webpage on the Thea Bowman House website dedicated to the DeSales Center. A memorial brick campaign and an adopt-a-window opportunity are planned.

Visit www.theabowmanhouse.org/desales to learn more.

NEEDS LIST

Diapers - size 5
Diaper wipes
Diaper Genie refills
Canned meats, fruits and vegetables
Socks and underwear - children's sizes 3-8
Children's shorts and tee shirts - sizes 3-8

Items may be dropped off at either the Lafayette or DeSales sites.



United Way of
the Valley and
Greater Utica Area

PLEASE SUPPORT THE UNITED WAY

United Way of the Valley and Greater Utica helps to support four Thea Bowman House programs. These are child care for low income families, the DOVE program (Domestic Violence Ended), the Kids with Promise Teen Program, and our food pantry called St. Clare's Cupboard. They also fund many of our collaborating partners. Our local United Way works tirelessly on behalf of our community through advocacy and volunteerism.