



The Magnifier

...news from Magnificat Houses

Magnificat Houses, Inc.

Houston, Texas

Spring Issue, 2016

150 YOUTHS RALLY TO KEEP SOUP KITCHEN NEIGHBORHOOD CLEAN AND DIGNIFIED



Exceeding expectations, more than 150 youths gathered March 12 to spruce up several blocks around Houston's legendary soup kitchen, Loaves & Fishes, founded by Magnificat Houses, Inc. (MHI) in 1976.

Reach Youth Global co-sponsored this "Good Neighbor Campaign," with clean-up teams forming at 6 a.m. to spiff up streets in a three-block radius. The mutual mission of the two organizations was to benefit the neighborhood and the city while providing more dignified surroundings for the homeless and hungry guests. For many of the 200-plus daily diners, the home-cooked hot lunch is their only meal of the day.

Event coordinator is **Deacon David Johnson**, director of Loaves & Fishes, who regularly trains local youth, through their schools and organizations, in compassionate hands-on service to the hungry. "There's something deeply affecting about young people reaching out to those who have nothing, making eye contact with a smile, simultaneously offering sustenance and respect," Deacon David said. "It's the great joy of my calling here."

Event partner Reach Youth Global cultivates moral awareness in young people worldwide by partnering with local ministries and organizations to create positive cultural change. Loaves & Fishes, soon to celebrate its 40th year of service to Houston's hungry, has been in continuous operation since 1976.

(Above) Fox TV 26 interviews Board Member David Taylor, who helped organize the event.

(Below) One of the groups lending their young energy to cleaning up the neighborhood.



Advancing the Legacy of Magnificat



Luke Stuckey

In March, Houstonian **Luke Stuckey** joined Magnificat Houses as *Director of Advancement*. Until recently, he served as *Director of Development* for the Houston Coalition for Life, and previously as *Director of Sales & Community Support* for the Veritas Book Store. Early in his career he was licensed with Morgan Stanley and Invesco, but found his calling with non-profits. Luke has a history of building organizations and starting new foundations. A graduate of St. Thomas University, he helped charter Knights of Columbus councils at his *alma mater* and the University of Houston. Reach Luke at L.Stuckey@MagnificatHouses.net, or at Emmanuel Business Office (3309 Austin St.)

MHI SCORES HIGH MARKS FOR KEEPING COSTS LOW

In March, the Better Business Bureau confirmed that 90.3% of our fund-raising goes to implement our programs serving the poor and mentally ill.

For most non-profits, 85% is considered a responsible ratio of services to administration costs. Magnificat strives to keep administration costs low by employing our residents with special skills and (gratefully) accepting volunteer help.



OUR LONGEST RUNNING RESIDENTIAL SUCCESS

With 32 years of service behind him, **Charles Johnson** is our longest running success story. Born in Mexico, Charles found his way to Houston in 1982 and, after a brief time living on the streets, applied at Magnificat Houses—where he has been a valuable staff contributor ever since.

Since severe, undiagnosed dyslexia impeded his ability to read, Charles's high potential had gone undiscovered until he was ensconced in Anawim House on Stuart Street and set enthusiastically about his assigned duties.

"Things tend to change in Magnificat's houses," Charles said, adding he was happy to move around when his skills were needed in new quarters. "I was Rose Mary's pet," he beams, acknowledging our founder Rose Mary Badami.



Charles Johnson

Over the years Charles lived and contributed in several of our houses — **Maranatha, Dismas, Susanna, and Visitation**—holding many responsible posts, including serving as house manager, staff driver and as salad and sandwich maker. One of his early favorite assignments was the daily bread run, where he confessed to snitching a garlic bread slice or donut every now and then.

Charles is proud of all of his accomplishments, including applying for and gaining citizenship in 1992, serving as house manager of Visitation House (before it became Visitation Convent), and of being a charter member of **St. Joseph Clubhouse** in 1995 when originally formed at Gamaliel House (lost to fire in 1998). He's particularly proud of representing St. Joseph House, as assistant manager, at the worldwide Clubhouse conference in Toronto, where he also toured Madonna House, a model for Magnificat at its founding.

His longtime friend and former Clubhouse Director **Ron Gregory** shares those memories around the inviting dining room table at the center of life at Dismas House, a charming blue cottage in northeast Houston managed by resident **Fred Robinson**. He comments:

"With all the responsibilities Charles has had over his long years here, he's been an inspiration to all those who came after him. They have always been inspired by how well run all his projects are and by the positive energy he exudes. And they give more of themselves."

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'SEEDS OF THE SOIL' ORG BEFRIENDS CLUBHOUSES

Magnificat's various patches of land—some gardens, some potential gardens—gained a welcome new friend this Spring. Working with **Seeds of the Soil** will improve and enrich our existing gardens, help new smaller gardens spring to life, increase our understanding of horticulture, and offer our residents and Clubhouse members a productive purpose.

First attention to increasing output will go to our two established Clubhouse facilities serving the mentally ill, many of whom experience planting and harvesting as healing. Later, the volunteer organization will help create resident-tended garden patches in most of our 13 neighborhood homes, according to **Adam Gamble**, our hands-on coordinator

with Seeds of the Soil.

Resident horticulturist **Chipp Thompson**, who oversees the 2-acre organic garden at St. Joseph House, wholeheartedly welcomed Seeds' input. "We're a perfect match in that we share a common mission to generate healthy communities through self-empowerment," Chipp said, adding that **Sharon Smith**, staff horticulturist at the Dona Marie House and farm, agrees.

Seeds of the Soil, an offspring of **The Last Organic Outpost**, focuses on horticulture education to empower underserved neighborhoods through urban farming. All over Houston, the volunteer organizations teach the locals to produce sustainable agriculture that is safe, healthy and accessible to all.

"Volunteers are always needed to help sustain the gardens," Chipp said, noting that churches and organizations are welcome to "adopt" a garden patch for flowers, herbs or vegetables, and take a fair share home, if they like.

Contact Chipp at: info@stjosephhouse.org.

Above left) Chipp and a volunteer enjoy a St. Joseph onion yield.

(Right) Dona Marie Clubhouse members prep new beds.

ANAWIM THRIFT STORE REVITALIZED, LIFTS ITS NEIGHBORHOOD

An iconic graphic arts landmark in northeast Houston was just given new life by dozens of Magnificat residents and volunteers, drawing rave reviews from the large crowd attending its grand reopening, called a “Friendraiser”—and raise friends it did, to the tune of a volunteer band. The store has had dozens of local visitors per day ever since.

Anawim Thrift Store, freshly painted and newly stocked, was revitalized to serve its economically stressed neighborhood, providing a needed source of affordable clothing and household goods to area families. Prices are purposely set at rock bottom and volunteers authorized to offer needed items for free if they sense hardship. This is where a job applicant can find a suit for \$5 and new, or like new, t-shirts for twenty-five cents.

Fr. Frank Wittouck, SCJ, inspired the two-month effort, recruiting his “Anawim Angels” to mobilize volunteers to clean up, restore, and completely re-stock the 3,000 square foot structure, with **David Young** spearheading roof repairs and installation of shelves and light fixtures.

Suzanne Young, the effervescent thrift store manager (and full time Angel) proudly offers a tour of the facility, its sizable clothing depot, with separate furniture display room, household goods and knick- knacks display areas, and even a small open office nook—a luxury to help those needing the Internet. In the storage/pricing area one meets the other practicing Angels: **Giselda Chomer**, **Donna Jeansonne** and **Wendy Clark**, who gathered church friends to form a band to play the opening.



The building’s eclectic graphic exterior was created by **The Common House**, a neighboring creative cooperative for visual artists which seeks to enhance communities.



(Above) The volunteer staff makes ready for opening day.

(Right) The “Anawim Angels” Giselda, Donna, Wendy and Suzanne celebrate with Fr. Frank, the champion of Anawim Thrift Store.



How can Magnificat Houses help you?

- Day program (or a home) for a **family member** or friend in need of Magnificat’s special services
- Mustard Seed & Anawim thrift shops offer new treasures (or accept your used ones for write-offs or **consignment**)
- Offer meaningful **volunteer** opportunities (& new friends)
- **Tax deductions** may be available for donations

For more options/ to share your ideas, call Luke Stuckey: **(832) 326-9153** or contact him by email at **L.Stuckey@MagnificatHouses.net**



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FATHER FRANK CELEBRATES 50th YEAR IN PRIESTHOOD

“The pure joy of living with the poor,” Father **Frank Wittouck, SCJ**, cites as his number one pleasure in living and working at Magnificat Houses, where he is chaplain. He likes that his modest quarters are situated steps away from the prison ministry at **Rosary House** and the Clubhouse program at St. Joseph House. He never turns away a drop-in visitor.

Fr. Frank came to Magnificat five years ago—and almost didn’t find us. He intended only to say Mass for the feast of the Sacred Heart (he’s a priest of the Sacred Heart), but had forgotten the chapel address back in Cypress, Texas, where he was retiring as pastor of Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish. After being routed through the soup kitchen he finally made it—late, but things ended well: “I saw what a terrific place Magnificat was,” he said, “and accepted the offer to teach religion classes and say regular Mass.”

Two years ago, Fr. Frank moved on-campus, where he can pursue his “intentional ministry of presence” full time. Here, he is especially involved with the Jobs Program, teaching resume and interview skills and interfacing with outside job counselors on behalf of his flock.



Six months ago, he put his considerable energy behind rehabbing and opening **Anawim Thrift Store** to serve a needy neighborhood. (See related article.) And he looks forward to leading another of his marriage encounters.

A native of Chicago, Fr. Frank experienced an early calling to enter SCJ candidacy while still in high school. An only child, he longed for the experience of having brothers, suddenly finding himself with 120 brothers overnight in the seminary. “I have that here, all over again,” Fr. Frank beams.

In seminary school he discovered then pursued his love of teaching, ultimately educating young seminarians in theology school and managing his order’s training program for the whole U.S. From 1978-1998, Fr. Frank served as a U.S. Army Military Chaplain in active duty, National Guard, and the reserves—including Desert Storm activities in Iraq and Kuwait, and tours in Honduras, Panama and Germany.

Fr. Frank enjoys all life has to offer: bicycling, hiking, photograph, reading, and he just signed up for a correspondence course in sketching. But he’s happy to be interrupted by the residents he came here to serve!

Special thanks to volunteer groups who make our work possible!



Volunteers make the scope of our work possible! Pictured are just two of the groups offering recent services.

(Left) Caritas Day brought families from Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral to help upgrade Dona Marie Clubhouse grounds.

(Right) Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation presented backpacks containing blankets, socks and gloves to Loaves & Fishes guests.



Can you support our work on behalf of the homeless, the helpless, the hungry, the mentally ill?

Your check payable to **Magnificat Houses Inc.** will be used carefully, where it will do the most good.

\$25 \$50 \$100 \$250 \$500 \$1000 \$5000 \$ _____

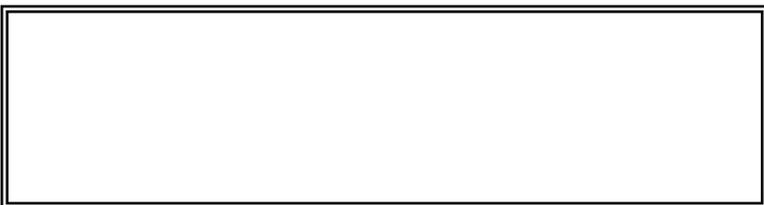
To donate online: kindly go to **www.MagnificatHousesInc.org** and click DONATE.

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Thank you!

Magnificat Houses Inc

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