

Sharing and Growing (cont.)

One vibe for certain at a K.Y.D.S. (Konscious Youth Development & Service) night is inclusion. Everyone is respected. All are welcome.

Among many participants at July's session, Melissa C. Williams sang her terrific song *Red Dress* and Brookdale Community College student Ahmir De Los Santos read his poem focused on *It's Time to Put Down the Guns*.

West Side Citizens United President Frank Syphax told the young people how Springwood Avenue once was a bedrock of community and family life in Asbury Park. Syphax commended the young people's talent and spoke of Interfaith Neighbors' Junior Entrepreneur Training Program for middle school students and the new Kula Urban Farm.

Open Mic Night at the Kula Cafe came about because three local professionals, all 27 and 28 years old, began working together to create meaningful social and learning opportunities for young people in Asbury Park and neighboring communities.

Mychal Mills, who earned both his bachelor's and master's degrees in business at Monmouth University, is a food sourcing supervisor at FoodBank of Monmouth and Ocean counties. He started the Big Brothers Big Sisters program while at Monmouth and got to know Interfaith Neighbors volunteering as a mentor the past year in the successful after-school Junior Entrepreneur Program for middle school students.

Mychal also became friends with Rodney Salomon, youth development specialist at Asbury Park High School's after-school SPOT program. Rodney graduated from Monmouth University with a degree in social work.

The third partner in the venture is Jean-Paul Saintil, a childhood friend of Mills when they went to St. Rose grammar school together. Jean-Paul graduated from St. Peter's University and recently began operating the Shore Club Shave Parlor & Salon on Third Avenue in Asbury Park

Mychal said his commitment is focused on being a part of the positive change in Asbury Park so that "young people are becoming elevated in their lives."



"I've been blessed with opportunities in my life and I want to make sure they have them as well," Mychal said.

"The beauty of all this is to express ourselves," said Rodney. "We try to share information relevant to our community and make young people see things from different perspectives."

During the May Saturday night gathering, Rodney moved away for a moment from the mic where he was introducing different participants and returned with a bouquet of flowers. He got down on one knee and proposed to his surprised but elated girlfriend of two and a half years, Krista DeSouza, 26, who works in marketing for Wynchham Worldwide Corp. Young people watched the marriage proposal with high interest, then stood and cheered. It's believed to be a Kula first.

"We are so pleased to be able to host the K.Y.D.S. Open Mic Nights at the Kula Cafe," said Interfaith Neighbors Associate Director Paul McEvily. "This initiative fits perfectly with Interfaith's desire to have the cafe function as a community gathering place, offering opportunities for positive engagement and interaction among all ages."

"What Mychal and Rodney and Jean-Paul are doing with these open mic nights is encouraging on so many levels. We applaud their efforts and hope the initiative continues to grow and expand in the months and years to come."

Open Mic Night is usually held the third Saturday of the month starting at 5:45 p.m.

**Direct from the Director**

Twenty-seven years is a long time, and even longer if it becomes a second career! That is how long I have been here. It was never intended to be this way. It was to be something nice to do and a way of saying, "Thank you, God."

My life was as good as it gets. I married my high school sweetheart (we are now fifty-eight years married). We raised six wonderful kids who had the good sense to marry six even better spouses, who produced (now fourteen) grandchildren.

My work in New York City real estate was over, and it was time for me to enjoy the fruits of my labor. I planned to open a small real estate office, work at my leisure and have no more commuting to the "Big Apple."

The Lord, however, saw it in a different way. He said, "Look around, not everybody has been given what was given to you! So many people are struggling to support their families, just trying to provide the basic necessities of life." I followed that calling and soon learned that life is not always fair. We are not all dealt an equal hand in life, and those holding the better hand have to reach out and help.

Another lesson I soon learned was that happiness is not measured in dollars as I once thought. Happiness is receiving letters that say, "Each day of my life is blessed because of you," or "With your help our family is now back on track and we are staying together as one." Happiness is also when we are able to tell a single mother that we will alleviate her fears of becoming homeless by paying her overdue rent, and she asks, with tears streaming down her face, "Is it okay to hug you?"

Please join us in sharing our happiness by supporting our work with a thoughtful and compassionate contribution. Please know that you are welcome to visit us. You will be amazed at what you see. That's what visitors tell us!

*Joe Mammola, Executive Director*

**Interfaith Neighbors, Inc.**

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**Growing the Kula Urban Farm**



Interfaith Neighbors' Kula Urban Farm is about to officially open and is fast becoming an intriguing focal point of activity on Atkins Avenue just off Springwood Avenue.

The grand opening of the commercial greenhouse is set for noon to 4 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 2. High quality produce will be grown using hydroponic and aeroponic techniques. The plants will grow from mineral nutrients in water rather than soil.

All are welcome to visit the farm under general manager Nick Silverman. Kula Urban Farm is the latest social enterprise conceived by Interfaith Neighbors with the intention of further bolstering the economy on Asbury Park's west side by growing fresh produce for area restaurants and providing workforce development, educational opportunities and fresh vegetables for the local community.

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**Kula Urban Farm** (from front)

Raised beds outside the greenhouse flourished during the summer and now boast a variety of eggplant, okra, cucumber, and tomatoes. The farm has seen the first sales to local restaurants as well as donations of produce to the farm's neighbors.



Construction has been completed on a small building known as the “barn” on the west side of the greenhouse. That building is being used for storage, washing, and packing vegetables.

The farm will also serve as an extension of Interfaith’s hospitality training program in the adjacent Kula Café which opened in April 2013.

Young people will get a new work experience that enhances their understanding of food production and urban agriculture techniques. That training can lead to job placement opportunities at garden centers, nurseries and other businesses related to horticulture.

“Growing food is one wonderful way to build community—better health too,” said Roger Boyce, director of Interfaith’s Business Development Center, as the greenhouse was under construction.

In August, for example, Asbury Park High School football team members converged on the farm—under the guidance of Head Coach Tim Fosque and with the encouragement of School Superintendent Dr. Lamont Repollet—to weed out the farm’s orchard and other areas around the adjacent Springwood Center.

Tom Pivinski, chairman of the Asbury Park Environmental Shade Tree Commission and an

Interfaith Neighbors Board of Trustees member, helped oversee the student athletes’ community service project.

Boyce said many community participants have contributed to the farm becoming a reality. They include Interfaith Neighbors’ Youth Corps members who helped get the farm built.

Boyce also cited valuable contributions by NJ Master Gardeners and the work of hired Asbury Park contractor Duane Small who with his crew of local workers has carried out such projects as the initial site preparation and installation of a new fence.

**Welcome To Our Newest Board Members!**



*Mary Ann Christopher*



*Walter “Chip” Craig*

**Someone’s in the Kitchen**

Mary Anthopoulos was just seven years old when she became entranced with cooking and kitchens while helping out in her relatives’ Greek restaurant in the Morgan section of Sayreville.

As she grew up, she learned to be a very good cook from her grandmother, her aunt, and her mother.

Today, Mary is still in the kitchen. This full-time pharmacist, who works from 3 to 11 p.m. at a pharmacy in Edison, volunteers every morning from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Interfaith Neighbors’ nutrition site in the Middletown Township Senior Center in Leonardo.

And she’s been volunteering for 15 years assisting site manager Grace Yanick with running the Meals on Wheels program for their section of Monmouth County.

**Neighbors Helping Neighbors  
Golf Outing**

**Monday, September 21, 2015**

Deal Golf and Country Club  
1 Golf Lane, Deal, NJ 07723

Choice of  
7:30 AM or 12:30 PM Shotgun Start  
11:30 AM Lunch

Cocktail Hour & Reception  
to follow.

Sponsorship Opportunities Available

Contact Joseph Marmora  
for more information:  
732-775-0525

It started in 2000 when Mary stopped in to see if there was a program for her aunt and uncle in Port Monmouth where Mary also lives.

“People were delivering and cooking here, and I thought, I have some time,” she remembers.

“Mary came in to get information and never left,” says Grace, who herself has worked at the center for 23 years.



*Mary Anthopoulos*

The Middletown Senior Center averages about 40 meals each day that are delivered to homes, and between 8 and 10 people who come for their noonday meal at the center, with 20 to 25 attending special meals.

“We make a difference—we really do,” said Mary. “We deliver a lot of meals and there are a lot of people who depend on it.”

“What is really gratifying,” she said, “is when we get a phone call and the person says: ‘Thank God for you. I don’t know what I’d do.’ Sometimes we’re the only one they see during the day.”

**Join us for  
Interfaith Neighbors’  
27<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting  
Thursday, October 15**

6:30 PM  
Cedar Village Clubhouse  
14 Sequoia Pkwy.,  
Ocean Township, NJ 07712  
Refreshments provided by Kula Café.

Each morning, Mary helps make sure there are no overnight changes on the volunteer driving routes and helps prepare the individual meals to be delivered after the cooked food arrives from Interfaith Neighbors’ main kitchen in Asbury Park “I love helping people,” she said.

Mary and Grace said the Middletown center always welcomes new volunteers who could give one hour a week to deliver meals. Call Interfaith Neighbors volunteer coordinator Diane Madsen at 732-775-0525.

**A Time to Share,  
A Place to Grow**

One Saturday each month, young people in their teens and twenties are joined by community members of all ages to share their poems, favorite writers, music and moments of life that matter at K.Y.D.S. Open Mic Night in the Kula Café.

Some bring instruments. Others read or sing. You may hear the poetry of Langston Hughes, the lyrics of Otis Redding or a woman thanking her community that helped rebuild a life after her house burned down.

“It’s positive vibes—just coming to hear other people’s writings and see their talents,” said Teasia Ruffin, 19, one of Interfaith Neighbor’s Kula Café training graduates. “Some people sing; some people rap. It’s good for people to see this happening. It brings curiosity to the café.”