



Letter from the Assistant Director

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."
-- Eleanor Roosevelt

Some years ago, I had an idea that I thought could change our whole approach to making New Year's resolutions. My idea was that, instead of making resolutions for ourselves, we should get our friends and family members to make them for us. The beauty of the plan, or so I thought, was that the people closest to you would be in the best position to point out areas in which you could improve. And of course, there would be built-in checks and balances since they would be watching to see if you kept the resolution. As it turns out, one of the main faults of the plan was that it is easy to find someone to let you know what you should change, but not so easy to find

someone who wants to hear the same thing from you.

More recently, I've come to look at New Year's resolutions differently. Instead of thinking about the things I need to do to fix my life, I've started to think about resolutions as a chance to take care of myself and treat myself well. Treating myself well does mean exercising and watching what I eat, but it also means recognizing what is important in my life and what brings me joy. I think the New Year is a great time to reflect on how we can treat ourselves well and to commit to finding ways to make it happen.



Stacey C. Cunningham, MS
Assistant Director

A Night to Honor Nurses



On November 13, 2008, the Mary Amelia Center hosted the 7th Annual Jane Wilson Smith (JWS) Lecture and Dinner, at the Windsor Court Hotel. The JWS Lectureship series is made possible by an endowment from Joe Smith, Jr., in memory of his late wife, and focuses on women's mental and emotional health. This year's the Lecture honored nurses in the greater New Orleans

area. The featured speaker, Dr. Maga Jackson-Triche, a psychiatrist at UC Davis and former Director of Mental Health at the New Orleans VA hospital, spoke about the tendency of women to focus on the needs of others, often overlooking their own care. In her talk, "Managing Stress in Difficult Times," she reminded the audience that focusing on others can lead to stress and burnout, with physical and emotional consequences. Rather than trying to overcome these symptoms by working harder, Dr. Jackson-Triche suggested that women take care of themselves by doing things like finding quiet or spending time on a hobby. When we care for ourselves, everyone else will be better cared for, too.

Winter 2008

Women Making a Difference: Diana Meyers

Diana Meyers, RN, was a parishioner of St. Anna's Episcopal Church all of her life, but she saw a great opportunity to increase her involvement by taking on the position of Disaster Relief Coordinator in 2006. Diana and her husband live in La Place close to other family members, but the daily community doesn't dim her love for her work helping people in the St. Anna's community.

One of her first tasks was to secure a mobile medical unit. Diana jumped into uncharted waters with research, policies, and permits, and within a few weeks St. Anna's had its Mobile Medical Van. These days, the van treats 250 individuals a month.

Diana has seen the church grow and thrive in other ways, too, since Hurricane Katrina. St. Anna's activities now include a "Drum Circle" Therapy Group, and programs for Victims of Violence, Mothers of Murdered Children, Horns for Guns. As the work of the medical mission grows, Diana, embraces challenges, addresses each new idea with optimism, and has a tenacious quality that many would envy.

Diana's advice to other women is, "if somebody sees that they can possibly do something, start talking, the more you talk the more you'll find there are others out there with the same problem. Start small, be consistent. It's uplifting. Women can help each other a great deal."

To contact St. Anna's about these and other activities visit their website: www.stannanola.org or call them at (504) 947-2121.



Health Observances: Breast Health

In the U.S. October is "Go pink" and Breast Cancer Awareness month. It focuses on the importance of early detection of breast cancer as we know 97% of the women will be alive after five years if treated early. October is not the only time women should be aware of the risk of breast cancer. This type of cancer is the most frequent cancer occurring in women, but it can be prevented. More than 2 million women currently living in the U.S. have successfully been treated for breast cancer. Breast cancer is less likely to affect groups of women who are physically active, have a normal weight, do not smoke and drink less than one alcoholic drink a day and of course eat fruit and vegetables daily. Childbirth and breastfeeding also protects women. For the most protection women must have their children before age 35. Groups of women who have used oral contraceptives or hormone replacements and have a close female relative with breast cancer have increased risk for developing cancer.



Making sure your breasts are healthy is a lifelong practice. **One in 9** women will develop breast cancer at some time in their life, so women over 30 should have their breasts examined regularly. The annual health visit every woman needs is a perfect time to have a breast health nurse or physician perform a clinical breast exam. Seventy-five percent of women with breast cancer are diagnosed after age 50. After the age of fifty, women need to get mammograms on a regular basis and for the rest of their lives. Prevention is better than cure, so check out page 3 for tips on breast health.

A New Man, A New Health Plan

On January 20, we will swear in a new president, and a historic one at that. Now that the campaigns are over, we can take some time to have another look at how President-elect Obama plans to address the health of American women. The major portion of Barack Obama's health plan addresses the health care system and trying to ensure that all citizens have access to affordable care. As president we will see if Obama continues his support for the National Centers of Excellence in Women's Health and increased medical coverage for treatment of breast and cervical cancer screening. His plan also addresses public health by including coverage for preventive care and disaster preparedness. His team has also proposed plans specifically dealing with cancer and HIV/AIDS.

Will these plans work? It seems the voters thought they would. However, in our system of government, all the branches of government must work together to enact new policies. As we start the New Year with a new president, let's hope that the health of all Americans remains a top priority.



Breast Health Tips

Here are some tips on keeping you and your breasts healthy:

- Get a clinical breast exam at least once a year
- Stay physically active
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Don't smoke
- Reduce your alcohol intake to no more than one drink per day
- If you are over age 50, get regular mammograms

Remember, prevention is better than cure! So make breast health a priority.

Check out Health Observances on page 2 to find more about breast health.

A Lasting Partnership



Everyone has a personal history; stories of what they've done and friends they have made. The Mary Amelia Center is proud of the shared history

we have with our friends at Mercy Endeavors Senior Activity Center. With a partnership spanning seven years, MAC has joined Mercy Endeavors on several projects. Providing health education has been the longest running project we have worked on together. A special diabetes package was developed to comprehensively cover this disorder that is prevalent in older adults in New Orleans. After Hurricane Katrina a project focusing on mental health engaged the seniors on a photographic portrayal of their neighborhoods. Recently

Mercy Endeavors and MAC worked together to create a computer-based health education tool called Healthy TV that provides information on nutrition, exercise and diabetes in a fun and entertaining way.

Learning about ways to stay healthy is not all that happens at Mercy Endeavors. Each day close to thirty seniors from all around New Orleans come to the center on St. Andrew Street in the Lower Garden District to participate in scheduled activities, special outings and to visit with friends. Some of the exciting things they do include going to the movie theater, taking a computer class, shopping at the new Macy's, studying the bible or picnicking in the park. This group of active seniors ranges in age from 55 to over 90 years old. The Mary Amelia Center is honored to have a long standing partnership with Mercy Endeavors and looks forward to what the future may hold for old friends.



Student Highlight: Rebecca Quillin

This summer and fall, I worked at the Center on the Creating Community Connections project. I am a MPH candidate in Maternal and Child Health and Epidemiology at the Tulane University SPHTM. Originally from Burkburnett, Texas, I received my undergraduate degree in microbiology from Texas State University.



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To request copies or learn more about what you have read, contact the editor, Melissa Lovell, at 504-988-4636 or mlovell@tulane.edu.

While working on the project I was given the opportunity to learn a great deal about New Orleans culture and values. With that knowledge came understanding and the ability to relate to community members. Through conversation with community leaders and other citizens I was able to share the mission of the Center and the goals of the project in manner that hopefully instilled trust and fostered participation. Getting to know the Center staff and my teammates was a pleasure and I look forward to using the skills I've learned while working on the project.

In my free time, I love to try new restaurants in attempt to broaden my knowledge of New Orleans cuisine as well as spending time with my two dogs, Winston and Nola Bella. After graduating, I plan to eventually become a midwife and work to make women's birthing experiences positive and empowering.

"The culture of New Orleans is like nothing I've ever experienced. The people share a common goal of rebuilding and keeping their communities healthy and safe."

Cooking for Good Health: A Holiday Tradition

Sweet Potato Casserole

From *Cooking Light* magazine, November 2007

Yields: 16 servings

Ingredients:

2 1/2 lbs sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1 inch cubes

3/4 cup packed brown sugar

1/4 cup butter, softened

1 1/2 teaspoons salt

1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

1/2 cup finely chopped pecans, divided

Cooking spray

2 cups miniature marshmallows

Preparation: Preheat oven to 375°. Place the sweet potatoes in a large pot and cover with water. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 15 minutes or until very tender. Drain; cool slightly. Place potatoes in a large bowl. Add sugar, butter, salt and vanilla. Mash the mixture with a potato masher. Fold in 1/4 cup pecans.

Scrape potato mixture into an even layer in an 11 x 7-inch baking dish coated with cooking spray. Sprinkle with the remaining pecans and top with marshmallows. Bake at 375° for 25 minutes or until golden brown.

Sweet potatoes are really good for you. They are chock full of fiber, complex carbohydrates, vitamin A and C, iron and potassium. Studies suggests that some of these nutrients have anti-inflammatory qualities and can also help regulate blood sugar. Make this recipe part of your healthy holiday tradition. It's a sure crowd pleaser!

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