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In the News

September-October 2021.....Volume 9, Issue 5

And here's to you, Mrs. Robinson Deputy Director observes five decades at NECAC



By Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer
NECAC Deputy Director Janice Robinson works at her office in Bowling Green.

As she celebrated a half-century of working at NECAC, Janice Robinson recalled that a little fatherly advice and a desire to help people motivated her to carry on all those years.

Robinson is Deputy Director for Community Services Programs, and observed the 50th anniversary milestone on Sept. 28.

“Being at a workplace for 50 years to me is to be a visionary, looking outside the box and keeping your eye on the prize,” she said. “Being open to positive change impacts lives, so don’t give up on your hopes and dreams. A quote by Helen Keller has inspired me during my journey with NECAC. She said ‘Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much.’”

Robinson graduated from Bowling Green High School in spring 1971 and worked part-time that summer for a Bowling Green accounting firm.

The top song that year was “Joy to the World” by Three Dog Night, cigarette advertising was banned on radio and television, Southwest Airlines began operations, Intel introduced the microprocessor and the average price of a gallon of gas was 36 cents.

In Bowling Green, a location was chosen for a U.S. 54/U.S. 61 bypass, Ruth Jensen Village broke ground for two cottages, the former school on Locust Street was sold to a Kansas City firm for \$7,500, the crop outlook was described as the best in years and cust-

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Efforts keep woman and child from being homeless

A Pike County woman who was facing homelessness found help from NECAC.

The woman, who asked to remain anonymous, is part of a growing number of people without a permanent address that NECAC has assisted recently. In the last month, the agency has helped five families that were homeless or on the verge of it – up from one every 30 days previously. Clients have been from Pike County and beyond.

“It’s very concerning,” said NECAC Deputy Director for Community Services Programs Janice Robinson. “We’re doing everything we can to meet their needs – at least get them stabilized.”

Robinson cited rising inflation, the recent end of a federal eviction moratorium for renters with past-due bills and ongoing concerns over COVID as reasons for the uptick.

“A lot of people had to double up during the pandemic, but now they have to find a place on their own,” she said.

The Pike County woman works full-time and had been staying with family. She never thought she’d be in the position of not knowing for certain where she and her grade school-aged child could find shelter.

“There were days that I was really stressed out about every-

thing – that I was probably going to have to live in my car if I couldn’t find a place,” she said.

The woman called NECAC within a couple of days of realizing she had to act. NECAC signed the woman up for rent assistance and helped in paying the deposit for an apartment.

“I’m very thankful,” she said. “My goal is eventually working on buying a home so that (her child) has a place to call home.”

While she’s optimistic, the woman also realizes she came close to the precipice, and the experience has left her with a much more practical outlook.

“You’re not promised tomorrow,” she said. “You don’t know what’s going to happen anymore. You just take it day-by-day.”



By Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer
NECAC’s Janice Allan, right, meets with a woman who was facing homelessness.

Robinson reflects on changing lives for the better

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By Brent Engel/Bowling Green High School 1971 yearbook
At top, NECAC Deputy Director for Community Services Programs Janice Robinson was honored during the Sept. 28 Board of Directors meeting for her 50 years with the agency. President and Chief Executive Officer Don Patrick offers Robinson flowers and a certificate of appreciation. At left middle, Missouri 40th District State Rep. Chad Perkins presents Robinson with a House resolution recognizing her work. At right middle is Robinson's 1971 senior class photo. At bottom, Robinson delivers the keynote address at Missouri Community Action Legislative Day at the capitol in Jefferson City on March 1, 2017.

-omers of the Bowling Green Kroger store could buy five loaves of bread for \$1.

That same year, 44-year-old Charles Thomas took over as executive director of the Daniel Boone Community Action Agency, which NECAC was known by at the time. An aunt told Robinson about a clerk position opening.

Community Action had been formed just seven years earlier with the signing by President Lyndon Johnson of the Economic Opportunity Act. It paved the way for new programs in education, employment training, community progress and family development. Robinson started with a philosophy handed down by her dad, Ezra (Casey) Orf.

"My father always said 'Never think you're better than anyone else, but know that you're just as good as everyone else,'" Robinson said. "I hold that true in every one of our clients who comes through the door, because it's the right thing to do."

Over the years, Robinson worked as a receptionist, accounts payable employee and executive secretary. She was promoted to Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) director on Jan. 2, 2002, and to her current position on April 1, 2004. Coming to work has never been a challenge.

"I've seen the difference we make in people's lives every day," Robinson said. "What we do out there is a never-ending job."

Of the thousands of NECAC clients Robinson has seen, one stands out. The woman and her two children moved to Missouri from California after emigrating from Vietnam. In Southeast Asia, she had been a doctor. But upon coming to America, she lost her credentials, had no job or housing and could barely speak English.

NECAC helped the family get a place to live and the mother found a job at a nursing home. The agency continued to work with her and eventually the woman enrolled in medical school. She's a physician again now.

"She still stays in touch with us and says how important we were when she was in a time of need," Robinson said. "That's why our work is so important. She did not give up, and we did not give up on her."

There's another milestone awaiting Robinson. She and her husband, Phil, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary in January 2022. They are the parents of a son, Jerad, and two daughters, Chelsea and Kristen, and have nine grandchildren.

Robinson isn't quite sure of her next step. She wants to retire, but can't put aside the eagerness to help others that still burns strongly after five decades.

"My future plans are to take some time for myself, travel and spend more time with my precious grandchildren," she said. "But I will always be ready to lend a helping hand to someone in need."

Self-Help Housing proves rewarding

John McElfresh has construction experience, so Self-Help Housing was perfect.

The retired Ralls County man is adding a laundry room to his house as part of the USDA Rural Development program, which is administered in seven Missouri counties by NECAC.

Though he already knows how to handle tools, McElfresh has a bad disc in his back that causes muscle spasms and sometimes limits what he can do. NECAC Self-Help Construction Supervisor Howard Sommer, who has more than 50 years of experience in the building trades and lumber sales, works with clients. Supplies are purchased

by the program.

"It helps people like me who can't do it all by themselves," said McElfresh, who heard about the program from a neighbor.

McElfresh looks forward to completion of the laundry room project, and says it will be a great addition to the home.

NECAC's participation in Self-Help Housing began in 1999, and involved construction of 48 homes in Shelby, Monroe, Randolph and Montgomery counties. In 2017, the program expanded to provide upgrades at homes in Lincoln, Marion, Montgomery, Pike, Ralls, Shelby and Warren counties.



By Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer
John McElfresh, left, and NECAC Self-Help Housing Supervisor Howard Sommer prepare to cut boards for McElfresh's new laundry room.

October observance puts focus on women's health

Stopping a killer could be as easy as making an appointment.

NECAC highlighted the Show Me Healthy Women and Family Planning programs as the nation observed National Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October.

Show Me Healthy Women offers free breast and cervical cancer screenings to women ages 35 to 64 who meet income and insurance guidelines. NECAC Family Planning offers a variety of affordable screenings and low-cost health examinations to all ages based upon household income.

"We encouraged women to make an appointment for one of these two vital programs," said NECAC Deputy Director for Community Health Programs Brenda Fuqua. "The short time it takes to get a checkup could mean the difference between life and death. It sounds dramatic, because it is."

Government statistics show breast cancer is second only to skin-related carcinomas among women. More than 281,000 will develop it this year and one in eight during their lifetimes. The disease will kill an estimated 43,500 women this year.

"One of the most troubling statistics is

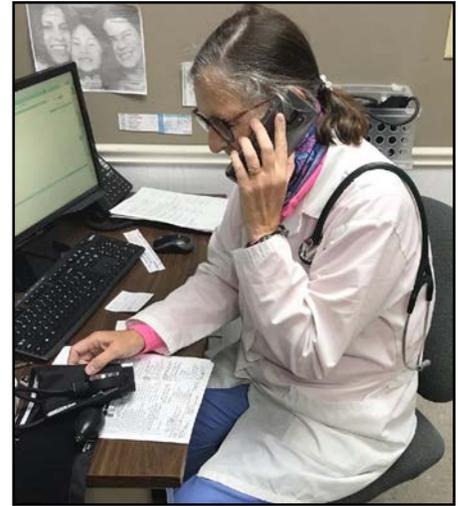
that 85 percent of all diagnoses have no family history," Fuqua said. "That underscores the need for early detection and regular exams. The risk nearly doubles if she has a close relative such as a mother, sister or daughter who has been diagnosed."

All women are at risk for cervical cancer, but those who have had three or more full-term pregnancies, had their first full-term pregnancy before age 17 or have a family history of the disease are the most vulnerable. Other risk factors include smoking and sexual history. Some strains of the human papillomavirus (HPV) can also be a cause.

While diagnosis rates have increased, there's been a steady drop in overall death rates since the 1990s. However, Fuqua warned that families must be vigilant.

"Breast and cervical cancer are diseases that can strike quickly," she said. "The best medicine is prevention, and one way to ensure that is to schedule a screening."

The NECAC Family Planning program is directed by Nurse Practitioner Claudia Timbrook under the medical supervision of local volunteer OB/GYN physicians. The program receives Title



By Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer
NECAC Family Planning and WIC Director
Claudia Timbrook talks with a patient via telephone.

X funding from the Missouri Family Health Council, but is not affiliated with any national organization. NECAC is not an abortion provider.

NECAC operates health clinics in Hannibal, Bowling Green, Warrenton and O'Fallon. For more information, or to make an appointment, call (573) 221-3404.



Home repairs grant awarded

NECAC has been awarded \$149,445 to repair homes in nine counties.

The USDA Housing Preservation Grant will pay for repairs at owner-occupied homes in Lewis, Macon, Marion, Monroe, Montgomery, Pike, Ralls, Randolph and Shelby counties. Work includes roof repairs and replacement, disabled accessibility, siding, minor plumbing, electrical and heating system work.

"NECAC is a proven leader in home ownership and rehabilitation, and we welcome these additional dollars for home repairs in our region," said NECAC President and Chief Executive Officer Don Patrick.

UnitedHealthcare aids Healthy Homes

NECAC has been awarded a \$75,000 grant by UnitedHealthcare for its Healthy Homes initiative.

The grant was part of \$500,000 in funding UnitedHealthcare awarded to 10 community-based organizations in Missouri to expand access to care, support maternal and child health, and address social detriments to health for people and underserved communities.

"We're honored to be supporting local organizations that offer essential resources to address social and economic factors that have a profound impact on people's health," said Jamie Bruce, chief executive officer of UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of Missouri. "These organizations play a vital role in providing greater access to care and essential services in high-risk and high-need communities throughout Missouri."

"This is a wonderful partnership between people who do renovation work and healthcare," said NECAC President and Chief Executive Officer Don Patrick. "There's a natural link between housing and health, and this grant will help NECAC's Healthy Homes initiative provide more services that will improve the well-being of many people."

Healthy Homes began in 2015 and has been nationally-recognized by NeighborWorks America, a Congressionally-chartered organization that supports com-



By Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer
NECAC Weatherization's Eric Benn, left, and Ardie Ellsworth install a door at a Hannibal home.

munity development through grants and technical assistance.

Homes are weatherized by NECAC crews. The idea is to create healthier living conditions by upgrading ventilation systems while removing environmental hazards and contaminants such as mold and lead paint.

"Our homes can make us sick if we're not careful," said NECAC Deputy Director for Housing Development Programs Carla Potts. "This grant will help to make homes safer and healthier for families."

The grants are part of several initiatives that UnitedHealthcare, along with its parent company UnitedHealth Group, have launched to address health equity and maternal health outcomes throughout the United States.



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Mike Bridgins,
Chairman of the Board



Don Patrick,
President & CEO



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NECAC Facebook page CSBG Assistant Kayla Wasson is featured in a video about the start of winter utility assistance. Look for other presentations on the NECAC Facebook page.

Facebook page now features videos

The NECAC Facebook page has a new, visual element.

Short videos featuring agency services and upcoming programs are periodically being placed on the site. The goal is to further reach social media-conscious clients and engage the public with items they may not have known about.

So far, the videos have focused upon utility assistance and free or reduced-cost breast exams.

In addition to the agency page, NECAC County Coordinators have their own Facebook sites that are overseen by County Services Programs Director Linda Fritz.



At left, NECAC teamed with Boy Scouts Troop 156 of Louisiana to install a Feed Your Neighbors Food Box. Pictured putting in the concrete foundation are, from left, are Brennen Starman, Michael Chidster and Will Chidster. The free, 24-hour service is available to those who want to pick up food and hygiene products or drop them off. NECAC operates food boxes in seven other counties, with the goal of placing them in all 12. At right, NECAC Marion County Service Coordinator Gwen Koch talks with a visitor to Project Community Connect, an effort to offer services to disadvantaged people.



First State Community Bank of Warrenton donated \$1,000 of items to NECAC to help the homeless in Warren County. Pictured, from left, are NECAC Warren County Service Coordinator Desiree Antoniou and bank representatives Brad Schuster, Sabrina English, Penny McClain and Emily Wagster. The donations included 50 tents, 40 coolers, 90 sleeping bags, 14 pillows, 20 hand-warming kits and nine quilts.

NECAC is contractually required to publish the following: "This program is funded 100% at \$100 with federal funds received from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as provided by the Missouri Department of Social Services, Family Support Division."