

NEWS & NOTES

Chief Executive Officer, **DONNA COLONNA**

JOIN US

as we honor and remember
the sacrifices of our veterans
at our annual

VETERANS DAY CELEBRATION

on the evening of

**THURSDAY,
NOVEMBER 1, 2007**

at

832-42 Knickerbocker Avenue
Brooklyn, NY

**“MANY VOICES,
ONE STORY”**

For more information, contact
Maela Jones at
mjones@susinc.org
or call 917.408.1620.

ABOUT SUS

SUS is a non-profit organization that provides housing, education and supportive services to New Yorkers with special needs to live with dignity in the community, direct their own lives and attain personal fulfillment. Founded in 1978, today SUS serves over 3,000 of the most vulnerable among us — individuals with special needs due to a developmental, mental or physical disability often compounded by poverty, homelessness, inadequate education, substance abuse or a history of institutionalization.

For more information, visit
www.susinc.org or contact us at
info@susinc.org or
212.633.6900.

ACCESS TO HOME

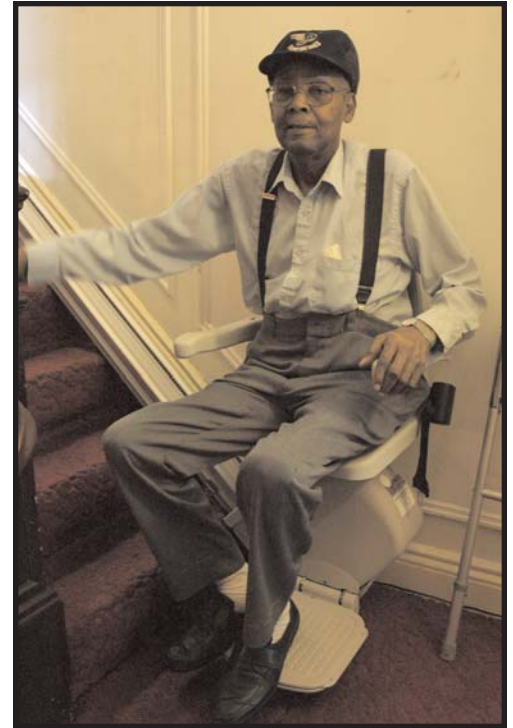
When John Pettaway's wife of 50 years died in June 2006, just four months after one of his sisters died, the grief took a severe toll on his physical health. "I couldn't do anything. I couldn't even walk," he says. Soon he was in Methodist Hospital in Brooklyn, where he spent the next three months, and then moved to a nursing home. When he returned in late fall to the Crown Heights house he and his wife had called home since 1970, he had a wheelchair and a walker to help him get around.

But one problem couldn't be gotten around: the stairs. His bedroom is on the second floor. John's grandson, who sometimes stays with him, and his son and daughter-in-law, who live across the street, looked after him, but after he hurt his hip in a fall, he was completely confined upstairs — truly homebound.

Devoutly religious, John mostly passed the time reading spiritual materials. "I'm a bible student. I do a lot of reading," says the 88-year-old WWII veteran. "That's what keeps me spiritually alive. I'm physically unable to do like I used to, but my mind is good."

In May, through SUS' Access to Home program, John got a chair lift that ferries him up or down the stairs in about a minute. It's opened up the entire house to him again, actually the whole world. "Now I don't feel as confined," he says. "I can go out on the porch. I can go out in the backyard. I can go grocery shopping."

Access to Home is a project funded by a grant from New York State Housing Trust Fund Corporation. The program provides funds for home modifications to frail seniors or individuals with disabilities to help them live more independently. The project started small, in Brooklyn neighborhoods from DUMBO to Crown Heights. Applicants must meet a few conditions. They have to be living at or below 50 percent of the HUD median income for NY



John Pettaway on his chair lift.

households (\$30,624 for a single household, according to the latest census). They must also have a doctor-certified medical condition that shows their need for home modifications.

Once their application is approved, environmental psychologist Dr. Richard Olsen and an occupational therapist visit each home to assess what modifications might be helpful. Examples include installing grab bars in a bathroom, lowering the cabinets in a kitchen, or widening a doorway to allow for a wheelchair to cross the threshold. So far, 10 home modifications have been completed. This year, the project is being expanded to select areas of the Bronx.

In John's case, his daughter-in-law Claudette saw to the application process. The chair lift, which he jokingly calls "my El train," was installed in about an hour. John's upstairs bathroom was also improved; specialists

continued on page 3

READY TO WORK

For jobseekers, Wall Street is a notoriously tough nut to crack. Financial companies are well known for demanding that applicants have the “right” credentials—the right school, the right connections. For the past five years, dozens of SUS consumers have penetrated this fierce job market, working for multinational financial companies such as JP Morgan Chase or Chase Manhattan Bank.

What’s even more remarkable is that all of them have been diagnosed with a mental illness.

The placements are in part the result of SUS’ relationship with Walsh Associates, a 57-year-old staffing agency that places talented jobseekers at a range of top-tier financial companies, Goldman Sachs, Citibank, and Bear Stearns among them. Walsh Associates relies on SUS “talents” every quarter to fill an urgent need for data entry and general administrative work.

It’s just a matter of getting the right person. That’s all any employer wants.”

June Weinstein, President of Walsh Associates, says “We use a lot of people for these projects, and SUS is very responsive to our needs. They’ve supplied us with some really good people.”

This relationship began in 2002, when Walsh Associates contacted SUS after reading an article about the organization. SUS promptly brought candidates to the staffing agency’s office, where they underwent the background checks, skills

testing, and fingerprinting required of all Walsh Associates “talent.” Since then, more than 50 SUS jobseekers have been placed, most of them on a quarterly basis at Chase Manhattan. Currently, 15 SUS-referred employees work with the banking giant.

“SUS is very selective in who they send us,” says June. “The employees know they have a job to do and they show up on time. They’re very reliable.”

SUS’ Employment Specialist, Kathleen Vaughan, and Walsh’s Andrea Jackson collaborate to match SUS talent with appropriate work assignments. “Katie does a wonderful job of targeting qualified talents,” says Andrea. Some of these employees gain crucial clerical skills such as data entry at Chase Manhattan and then go on to work with other companies.

Barbara Surita is just one example of successful “talent.” A 37-year-old Brooklyn resident diagnosed with

major depression which she manages through medication, Barbara began extracting mail in Chase Manhattan’s sales tax department in September 2005. By March of 2006, she had been promoted to coordinator, a role she holds today. Barbara supervises staff as they open, sort, and process mail documents. Many are fellow SUS referrals whom she recognizes from the SUS Brooklyn Clubhouse.

HOLIDAY STOCKING PROJECT

Share in the spirit of the holiday season by creating a stocking for a consumer with developmental disabilities or a child of a consumer who is living with HIV/AIDS, so that they may have a holiday filled with joy. Or, if you prefer, you can participate by making a donation to our Holiday Stocking Fund instead. Contact Maela Jones at mjones@susinc.org or call **917.408.1620** for more information.

Happy Holidays!

“I love working for Chase,” says Barbara. “It’s about working as a team. You help others, and it makes you feel important. Especially my bosses—they love me. I work well with others, and I’m quick and consistent. If I need anything, they work with me.”

Walsh Associates works with half a dozen social service agencies. Together, these employees make up 10–15 percent of Walsh’s workforce. SUS’ consumers are the second largest pool of “talent”, according to Andrea.

Overall, Walsh aims to put the best people in the job, regardless of their disabilities. “It’s just a matter of getting the right person,” says June. “That’s all any employer wants.” For their commitment to helping people with mental illness prove themselves eminently employable, Walsh Associates has received two awards from SUS: the Appreciation of Untiring Dedication and the 2006 Employer Recognition Award.

If you are interested in hiring individuals who are ready to prove themselves eminently employable and who have a variety of skills, please contact Angela King, Coordinator of Employment Services, at aking@susinc.org or call 718.403.9846. ❖

BUSINESS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

We are recruiting individuals to become members of our newly launched Business Leadership Council. We are seeking young professionals with the enthusiasm and energy to host and/or organize fun and creative initiatives to raise money for our programs, increase public awareness of our work and provide employment opportunities for our consumers.

The group will work closely with staff, have many opportunities for peer networking and will also work on some projects independently.

If you would like to join or learn more about SUS’ Business Leadership Council, contact Sarah Petrey at spetrey@susinc.org or call **917.408.1622**.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Twice a month, half a dozen volunteers from Saints of Jesus Christ Church, a socially active nondenominational congregation in the Bronx, cook and serve food at Davidson to nearly 50 people, dishing out eggs and grits, chicken and rice, ziti, spaghetti, and other simple but nutritious meals.

These formerly homeless people living with AIDS receive emergency housing at SUS' Davidson residence where SUS supports them as they gain some stability in their lives, providing case management, housing readiness counseling and placement assistance, support groups, substance abuse counseling, mental health services and entitlements assistance.

To engage the Davidson residents with the services available in their neighborhood and the city at large, SUS staff work with several other community based organizations. Ethel Moran, Director of Mission Services at Saints of Jesus Christ, first visited Davidson as a volunteer for a community health clinic that provides medical services to Davidson consumers.

Ethel knew her church was looking to become more socially active in its South Bronx community, where poverty, drug use, ill health, and crime are rampant. "I

presented them with the idea that there was this local HIV housing program where we could provide spiritual services as well as nutritious meals," she recalls. In 2001, the volunteer group started visiting Davidson.

They began by serving a traditional Thanksgiving meal volunteers had prepared at home. Soon they began cooking directly in Davidson's basement with a retired caterer acting as head chef.

Six years later, they're still a regular presence at Davidson, serving breakfast and lunch every other Saturday, as well as on Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Mother's Day, and Father's Day. On the holidays, they bring gifts of toiletries and sometimes clothing.

Emotionally, the work is difficult but rewarding for the volunteers. Ethel has a social services background but for many of her fellow volunteers, the experience they bring to Davidson is purely personal. Many share similar life stories with Davidson consumers. Some are former drug users. Others were formerly homeless. Some were disowned by their families because of substance abuse or mental illness. Volunteers and consumers can often relate to each other.

"We see the same faces week to week, and they remember us," Ethel says. "Sometimes we run into someone on the street, and they thank us for helping them. I ran into someone four or five months ago

who told me that because we came to Davidson, it inspired him to become a peer advocate. Others say that because of our church, they stopped using drugs or started doing something constructive with their life. And that's always good."

"We're not here to put them down but to uplift them," Ethel says. "When they leave, they are smiling. That's the most rewarding part—to see their smiles."

SUS welcomes individuals or groups to create projects that enrich the lives of our consumers (with or without the catered meals that the Saints of Jesus Christ church provides). Volunteers have participated in a variety of projects, including painting murals and gardening. If you are interested in becoming involved with SUS, please contact Sarah Petrey at 917.408.1623 or spetrey@susinc.org. ❖

APPLY FOR SERVICES

Do you know a senior citizen or individual with a disability needing modifications to their house or apartment so they can continue to live independently at home?

To qualify, they must live in the Brooklyn Heights, Boerum Hill, Fort Greene, Crown Heights, Bushwick, Bedford-Stuyvesant or Brownsville neighborhoods of **Brooklyn** or the University Heights, Morris Heights, Fordham or Bedford Park neighborhoods of the **Bronx**.

For more information and to obtain an application, please call **718.403.9846**.

ACCESS TO HOME

continued from page 1

replaced the vintage bathtub with a modern shower stall that has a fold-out bench and glass doors, making it much safer.

Two months after these improvements, John is feeling much more independent. He still misses his wife terribly—"sometimes it's almost unbearable," he says—but takes great solace in his faith and community. He holds weekly Bible study meetings in his home with his fellow congregants. Most are elderly, and they've noticed the chair lift. "Many people comment on the chair," he says. "They haven't needed to use it because I have a bathroom downstairs, but some of them have ridden it up."

Overall, he says, "The chair has helped me to get some of my independence back. It's just what the doctor ordered." ❖

305 Seventh Avenue, 10th Floor
New York, New York 10001
www.susinc.org

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SCHOOLS ARE OPEN!

There was a flurry of activity during the summer months in preparation for the 2007-2008 school year. This fall, our Preschool and Charter School (CDCH) began operating as a unified school on the Stephen Hands Path Campus in Wainscott, NY, where the Charter School has been located since 2001.

The first sign of fall is the dropping off of children at school. Some of the parents of the 146 children were teary eyed on the first day of school, September 5th. Meanwhile, the children eagerly ran in to see their friends, teachers and new classrooms.

The Charter School is the only inclusionary Charter School in New York State, where general education and special education students learn side by side. Both the Preschool and Charter School maintain small classes, providing individualized learning for all students. Additional support is provided to accommodate the learning needs of all the students and to provide successful experiences in achieving the New York State standards in all areas of the curriculum.

To learn more, visit www.cdch.org ❖

