



## Branch Newsletter

# December 2022

By the  
Communication, Press & Publicity Committee

### **NEXT MEMBERSHIP MEETING: DATE CHANGE!**

We usually meet on the fourth Thursday of every month 7 p.m. at the Ricketts Center, 658 Beech Street. However, due to the Christmas holiday, the Ricketts Center will be closed on Dec. 22. Our membership meeting will be held instead on Thursday, Dec. 29, at 7 p.m. at the Ricketts Center. Officers will be sworn in at this meeting. For those who can't make it, we'll also have a Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84995648174?pwd=QlAyaHZkWIJXZWk1T3FWcHNFVnJOQT09>

Meeting ID: 849 9564 8174    Passcode: 937480

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*Efforts to help people who are experiencing homelessness wound up being a theme for this month's newsletter. There's a lot happening. Read on...*

### **Branch shows support for warming center**

NAACP members were among the more than 100 people who crowded into Pottstown Borough Council chambers on Dec. 12, most to show their support for the warming center operated by Beacon of Hope at St. Paul's United Church of Christ. The borough had issued a cease-and-desist order, as the Mercury reported. [Click here](#) to see the story. Council did not discuss the matter, but announced that during the sub-freezing weather, they would not enforce the order.

During the public comment period, President Johnny Corson read a statement supporting efforts to help the homeless, saying that Beacon of hope “is solving a problem, not causing a problem.” He praised the work of the group as “a living example of a community fulfilling its duty to love one’s neighbor.”

He noted that the NAACP’s mission includes “advocating for the disenfranchised, the marginalized, the underserved. The Pottstown branch has supported efforts to help the homeless here for years, both with cash and work.”

That would include the WIN committee’s help in providing showers and laundry service to people living on the street; helping Ministries on Main Street move from church to church every month when it provided homeless shelter before the pandemic; cooking and serving meals at Mission First; participating in Winter Essentials Warming Drives at Mission First; and more.

[Click here](#) for Evan Brandt’s coverage of the meeting. Stay tuned.

### **Not your typical camping trip**



It was mid-November, somewhere around 30 degrees. Alana Hook, assistant secretary of the branch, was one of the advocates sleeping outside at the Montgomery County Courthouse that night, organized by the Hospitality Center, to draw attention to the lack of funding and housing for the homeless.

“Right now, in Montgomery County, more than 400 individuals that we know of are unhoused, with no clear trajectory of how we’re going to fix this,” she said. “Beds are scarce as it is. We have people who are medically fragile. People with mental health concerns who might not be able to navigate a complex situation.”

Although Alana got little sleep, she gained a deeper appreciation for what those who sleep outside endure. “Every time I started to nod off, I’d hear a noise. Norristown is a busy place, even at 2 a.m. There are sirens. Kids are outside. You hear everything.” That, “or

I’d move and the cold would cut through my sleeping bag.”

In the morning, as she emerged from her tent, she passed sheriff’s deputies that, in the course of her job with the Public Defender’s Office, she sees every day. They didn’t recognize her. Or maybe they didn’t even look at her. So many people, unsure about what to do or what to think or what to feel, look the other way. That’s one of the reasons Alana was out there. And she plans to come back next year, “hopefully with more people.”

The camp-in soon became poignant. The next night, which was even colder, one of the regulars at the Hospitality Center was found dead outdoors.

### **NAACP members at Wings of Victory fundraiser**

On Dec. 3, President Johnny Corson, life member Ted Josey and Religious Affairs Committee member Pastor Darrell Brown attended a fundraising event for Wings of Victory Outreach Corporation, a Pottstown organization that seeks to aid those experiencing homelessness. It was held at Bethel Baptist Church in Phoenixville.



The group gave Josey an award for his continued support of Wings of Victory. “I feel strongly that the homeless population needs as much assistance as they can get,” he later said. “Both Wings of Victory and the NAACP are concerned about the welfare of the homeless.”

Pastor Brown, pastor of Rhema Ministries International, spoke at the event. Using Mr. Rogers as a touchstone, he challenged the audience to “be a good neighbor.

“Who is your neighbor? Anyone who is in need. Those who God put in your path that day. We do what we can, one person at a time, one family at a time, one community at a time.”

*(Pictured are, from left, Johnny Corson, Ted Josey, Wings Operations Director Marlene Woods, Wings Executive Director Gina Phillips and Pastor Darrell Brown.)*

### **Winter Essentials Drive – bring your coats!**

The WIN Committee, headed by Annette Kobb, is partnering with Mission First for a Winter Essentials Drive, collecting new or gently-used coats, hats, scarves, gloves and anything else that might help a person in need of warmth this winter, especially a person who has no home to go to.

The drive lasts through Dec. 31. Drop-off hours are 9 a.m. to noon Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 414 High St., Pottstown.

Meanwhile, in recognition of increased costs, WIN is increasing its monthly donation to the Salvation Army – to help women and children – from \$50 to \$75.

### **An important day for Abolition Hall**

On Dec. 6, President Johnny Corson was one of the community leaders who spoke at an event to celebrate the preservation of Abolition Hall in Plymouth Meeting. The historic stone meetinghouse, a station on the underground railroad, had been targeted for redevelopment. Butler Pike was going to be rerouted through the property. Advocates stepped in.



In November, the 10.45-acre Corson tract – note the name -- was acquired by Whitemarsh Township and the Whitemarsh Art Center for \$3.95 million, aided by a \$2 million grant from the Karabots Foundation and other financial aid from the township's open space earned income tax.

Yes, Johnny Corson is a descendant of George Corson, who built Abolition Hall. So the celebration was particularly personal and meaningful for him. "Back in 1856, George Corson and others here in Plymouth Meeting realized that Black lives matter," Johnny Corson said. "They opened their homes to Black lives. They fed Black lives. They were not afraid to stand up for Black lives. They put their lives on the line by doing that."

"It mattered then. It mattered now," Corson said, drawing a link to the work he does now as NAACP branch president. "It's work the abolitionists started."

*(Pictured are, from left, Johnny Corson, State Sen. Vincent Hughes, and Montgomery County Commissioner Ken Lawrence.)*

### **Supporting holiday fun for kids**

The Executive Committee voted to donate money for a children's holiday party hosted by the Montgomery Lodge Elks #1271 and Mary Esther Temple #917 at the Carousel at Pottstown. It will be held from noon to 3 p.m. this Saturday, Dec. 17.

### **MLK Jr. celebration on Jan. 16**

The Religious Affairs Committee, headed by Pastor Garrison Lockley of Bethel AME Church, has been hard at work planning the branch's day celebrating the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. It will be held Jan. 16 starting at 7 p.m. at Mt. Olive Baptist Church, 240 Mintzer Street, hosted by the Rev. Dr. William H. Ball III. The Lincoln University Concert Choir will perform, and the guest preacher will be the Rev. Dr. Bruce Alick of Zion Baptist Church in Reading.

### **Out and about for Thanksgiving**

As usual, our members are a presence at many events in and around the borough. On Thanksgiving, Johnny Corson and his son, Matt, helped out at a dinner for the homeless that was organized by pretty much of a who's who of Pottstown advocates. It started when Melinda Hoagey, of Honey's Homebrewed Café, known for her soups and sticky buns, had a conversation with Pottstown Hospital's Dr. Lawton Delisser, who also does street medicine for the homeless. Enter the YWCA, which had recently purchased First Baptist Church, and that became the dinner site. Vans from Tom Niarhos' Beacon of Hope were deployed to pick people up. Connection Church provided additional funds. State Rep. Joe Ciresi and his wife, Pam, showed up to help serve and brought turkey hats for everyone. Chefs Melinda Hoagey, her daughter Kristen Hoagey, sister Melanie McKnight, and friends Maureen Barber and Margo Boekhoudt loaded the serving plates with turkey, ham, sweet potatoes, corn, potato filling,

green beans, cranberry relish and banana pudding. In the end, they had enough left over to take meals to residents at the Jefferson School apartments.

Not far away, Kwane Haywood and his wife, Akiai Worthington filled their Caribbean-influenced restaurant, Welcome to the Avenue, as they hosted a dinner for those in need. Johnny and Matt were there, too, schmoozing and offering support.

Haywood and Worthington had sent out a list of ingredients they needed for the dinner, and Bob and Sandy Bauers donated five pounds of butter, two #10 cans of peaches, two pounds of salt and five pounds of garlic on behalf of the NAACP.

## **HAPPY HOLIDAYS!**

Whatever winter holiday you and your loved ones celebrate, we hope that it is meaningful and that it brings joy, peace and good health. We also wish you a happy, happy new year!