

Mission expands programs in 2007

Written by Anne Kozak



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The Maine Sea Coast Mission's Sunbeam V breaks ice in Northeast Harbor.—FILE PHOTO

BAR HARBOR — In 2007, the Maine Sea Coast Mission expanded not only its health services for residents of offshore islands, but also its outreach to youngsters Down East with the EdGE afterschool and mentoring programs. In addition, the mission increased funding for emergency financial and fuel assistance and the number of scholarships. It also inched closer to reaching its \$12 million capital campaign goal and developed a three-year strategic plan.

Health services

The new health center on Swans Island recently was equipped and furnished thanks to money raised by the mission and residents of the island. Residents raised \$27,000 of the total cost of \$54,000 and the mission contributed the rest. Furniture and equipment were ordered through Mount Desert Island Hospital (MDIH). The center, which opened on Nov. 15, will allow more services to be offered to islanders and provide easier access, particularly for those who found getting on and off the Sunbeam V challenging. At last year's town meeting, Swans Island residents voted to allocate \$200,000 to refurbish the main floor of an existing building into a modern health clinic.

On opening day, Sunbeam V nurse Sharon Daley and the clinic's volunteer phlebotomist, Donna Wiegler, administered flu shots and conducted a screening clinic. Drs. Julian Kuffler and Michael Heiniser, both of MDIH's Community Health Center in Southwest Harbor, were on hand as well. In addition to providing support for the development of island health centers, mission staff members are working with Maine EMS to create a new level of training – Island EMS Certification. This designation requires 50 additional hours of training that is provided through a combination of distance learning and hospital-based sessions. The center will use telemedicine technology to connect island patients to land-based clinics and hospitals so they can receive specialized medical diagnosis and treatment.

The Sunbeam V will continue to visit Frenchboro, Isle au Haut, Matinicus and Swans every two weeks throughout the year. This program has been very successful, said Gary DeLong, executive director of the mission, largely because of the combination of up-to-date technological innovation and the personal touch of the Sunbeam nurse.

Another mission accomplishment in 2007 was to establish priorities for island health care with the active involvement of island residents. With support from two planning grants, representatives of the 10 islands the mission serves have met for retreats with Ms. Daley and Rev. DeLong to ensure that year-round residents have access to more affordable and higher quality health care.

Educational Outreach

The late Ed Greaves for whom the EdGE program is named, envisioned a program that would improve academic performance, increase confidence and build character for students in Washington County, one of the poorest areas in Maine.

In the past year, the program, which began in 2002, expanded to include fourth-graders in six Washington County schools and to enhance the peer-to-peer mentoring program for EdGE participants in ninth grade. The mentoring program has been so successful that John Sawyer, the principal of Narraguagus High School wants to expand the program in Fall 2008 to include all entering freshmen.

Mentors, many of whom are former EdGE participants, discuss activities at school and talk about how they approach homework and longer assignments. The program aims to help a greater number of students finish high school, said Steve Richards, development director of the mission.

In 2007, Charlie Harrington, the director of the EdGE program, began to visit the high school one day a week at lunch time.

Another feature of the program for high school students involves taking them on visits to major cities. This year the group went to Washington, D.C., where they met with White House fellows and with Maine's Sen. Susan Collins.

The meeting with White House fellows was arranged by Fred Benson, a former White House fellow and the father of Robert Benson, pastor to the outer islands. "They were particularly inspiring for the students because they had achieved success in large part due to their aspirations, drive and ambition," Mr. Richards said.

Also last year, mission staff members reorganized the way they group students. They work with students in grades four to six at their schools, and with seventh and eighth-graders at the EdGE building on the Weald Bethel campus in Cherryfield. The mission staffers worked with consultants and a former elementary school principal to develop criteria that ensure the afterschool activities are designed to improve academic performance and reinforce what the students learn in school.

An offshoot of the mission's afterschool program is the summer program that provides young people with an opportunity to camp, bike, hike and kayak, and on rainy days to explore some of Mount Desert Island's tourist attractions.

In 2007, the mission awarded 90 scholarships to students in Hancock and Washington counties. "One of the reasons we were able to reach this all-time high is that we have already raised a portion of the \$1.7 million for an endowment for scholarships, said Mr. Richards. The mission also stays in regular contact with the recipients to provide a support mechanism to help them cope with the academic and social aspects of college life. New in 2007 was the creation of a blog by which mission scholars can communicate with and support each other.

Emergency assistance

While the mission for many years has dedicated funds to help with emergency needs of those along the Down East coast or on the outer islands, this year the high cost of fuel and the early onset of winter have dramatically increased the number of calls, said Mr. Richards. And along with an increase in calls came an increase in the last two months of 2007 of donations specifically designated for fuel assistance. As a result, the mission has been able to significantly increase its response to the communities it serves. But the funds it provides are really a bridge until those in need can get assistance from the state. If a person calls now, said Mr. Richards, he or she is unlikely to get an interview before February.

Wendy Harrington, who has long been associated with the EdGE program, is now the coordinator for all emergency assistance, and she is authorized to make immediate decisions about assistance.

Fund-raising

In 2007 the \$12 million centennial capital campaign, first announced in 2005, passed the \$10 million mark and should be completed by December 2008, said Mr. Richards. The campaign includes a total of \$7.7 million for youth development – funding that will allow the EdGE program to expand, provide for EdGE's multipurpose building and establish two endowments: \$5 million for EdGE operations and \$1.7 million for scholarships. In 2007, the mission received a \$450,000 challenge grant toward the \$5 million endowment goal for EdGE, and to date has received \$125,000 toward the challenge.

The \$12 million campaign also includes \$4.3 million for strengthening island communities: a \$1 million endowment to increase Sunbeam availability by 50 percent, \$2.5 million endowment for Sunbeam Island Health Services and additional funding for health services, planning assistance for four island churches and funding for five years for the bridge to sustainable fisheries. The latter is the work Rev. Ted Hoskins who has been instrumental in bringing together local fishermen, scientists and regulators to encourage community-based resource management.

The mission also launched a major new planned giving initiative in 2007, with comprehensive information on the mission's Web site. At the Sunbeam awards gala, the mission honored the late Nick Harris, a philanthropist from Philadelphia and Northeast Harbor, and Father Jim Gower from Bar Harbor, a founder of College of the Atlantic and a pastor for many island churches.

Once again in 2007, the investment performance for the mission's assets significantly exceeded benchmarks, said Mr. Richards, and for the third successive year, the mission received a four-star rating from Charity Navigators, the nation's most highly respected evaluator of charities. The mission not only met or exceeded its financial targets for 2007, but also ended the year in the black, according to Mr. Richards.

Planning

Led by vice-chairman and treasurer Lee Judd, the mission's board in August approved a three-year strategic plan that includes five

major objectives and implementation strategies for each objective. The five objectives include three dealing with program areas and two dealing with governance and financial stability.

"We're not adding new programs, but rather developing indicators to measure and track our success," said Rev. DeLong. "Programs are only as successful as the staff who implement the programs, and determining success is closely tied to conversations with our constituents: Do these programs and services have the impact that we want them to have and that our constituents need?"

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