

## A few local shining stars

By Kathy McCabe

Globe Staff / December 26, 2010

A special spirit of giving spread in 2010 across communities north of Boston. A small Haitian nonprofit in Somerville came to the aid of its homeland after a devastating earthquake struck. A Swampscott foundation, long a supporter of Jewish causes, stepped up to help build a new senior health center in Peabody. Winchester Girl Scouts got a lesson in philanthropy by granting a “Winter Wish” for special education students in Holyoke. A supper club in Salem now brings older members of the gay community together once a month in friendship. A gleaming Christmas tree stands atop Addison Gilbert Hospital in Gloucester as a beacon of quality cancer care. Each was a “bright light” in its own right, helping communities near and far away.

### **After Haiti quake, coalition aided local families**

When the devastating earthquake struck in Haiti, the shock reverberated all the way to a tiny nonprofit with an office in a Somerville housing complex.

The Haitian Coalition of Somerville long had advocated for the Haitian population in communities north of Boston, estimated at 25,000. But the earthquake last Jan. 12 tested its resources in new ways. Tens of thousands died; homes and businesses were destroyed.

Local Haitians turned to the coalition for help. They needed to speak to their families in Haiti, but couldn't get through. Others weren't sure if relatives were dead or alive. “People were coming to us, looking for answers,” said Lince Semerzier, 35, the nonprofit's board chairman. “Our first priority was to help them try to locate their loved ones.”

Volunteers also monitored news updates on cable television and the Web, sharing the information with people who didn't have cable or Internet access. “We did what we could to help people get the correct information,” said Semerzier, who is stepping down as board president next month.

But soon it was clear that people needed counseling to help them cope with human loss and ruins. Semerzier worked with mental health agencies to start a support group. “People needed help to assist them with their anxiety and fear,” he said. “Many were frustrated because they couldn't travel to provide any help.”

So the coalition started to collect medical supplies, tents, sheets, pillows, and other items. In April, a group of 20 volunteers, plus a doctor from the Dominican Republic, went on a two-week mission to Haiti. “It was a total team effort,” said Semerzier, clicking through online

photos of the trip. “It was heartbreaking to see how inhumane it all was. . . . Some of the people hadn’t seen a doctor in years.”

On Jan. 12, the coalition will hold an event to remember earthquake victims, from 5 to 7 p.m. at Somerville High School. Another trip to Haiti is also planned, probably for spring.

“We strongly believe in empowerment,” Semerzier said. “Our goal is to give everyone, teachers and kids, the skills they need to improve themselves. . . . There is still great need in Haiti.”

### **Lighting a tree for hospital’s cancer center**

In 2008, Sue Kyle of Gloucester was diagnosed with stage 4 colon cancer. Four days later, she had surgery to remove the tumor. A tough regimen of chemo treatments followed. Now cancer-free, Kyle (above, left) and her partner, Shawn Wilson, are shining a bright light on cancer care on Cape Ann.

They started Lights of Love, a holiday fund-raiser for the Gorton’s Special Cancer Care Center at Addison Gilbert Hospital in Gloucester. People are asked to give \$5 to light a bulb on the colorful tree that stands on top of the hospital’s main entrance. Strings of lights can also be donated, starting at \$250. “We wanted to say ‘thank you’ for the excellent care I got here,” said Kyle, 52.

The oncology staff is grateful for the support. “It’s always nice to be recognized for a job well done,” said Joanne Gibbs, a nurse who supervises the center’s seven-member nursing staff. “But really, their care is our top concern.”

Kyle wasn’t treated at the Gorton’s center, which opened in 2008. Instead, she received treatment in a no-frills room with six chairs where patients received chemo. “It still was a very good setup,” Kyle said. “From the very beginning, I felt a comfort level with everyone, from my wonderful Dr. [Sandy] McIntyre to the nurses. For me, that was huge. . . . I want people to know this center is here.”

The \$1.6 million facility was built largely with community donations, including a major gift from Gorton’s, the frozen fish company on Gloucester’s waterfront. “The Cape Ann community was very supportive,” said Cynthia Cafasso Donaldson, a hospital vice president. “Lights of Love is another example of this.”

In three years, Kyle and Wilson have helped to raise \$35,000 to pay for support services, such as Reiki healing sessions, at the center.

“Our big thing was to get a lot of people to give a little,” said Wilson, 46. Since then, a major sponsorship level has been added, ranging from \$250 to \$1,000, to encourage business donations. A \$50 raffle is held for a painting donated by Rockport artist Ken Knowles. Gift certificates from Gloucester businesses are also raffled off.

This year's tree-lighting drew about 200 people, including the Gloucester High choir and Santa Claus. "We'd love to see the amount we get go up each year," Wilson said.

Kyle and Wilson are partners in life, work, and cancer fund-raising. The couple, who live in Gloucester, own Viga Italian Eatery Cafe in Boston, which has four locations. At their cafes, they raise awareness of cancer research year round. Team Viga this year placed third in a fund-raising contest for Stand Up To Cancer, a national effort to find a cure. It finished behind a team sponsored by "Survivor," the CBS television show, and David Archuleta, the 2007 American Idol runner-up. Since 2008, Team Viga has raised \$41,834 by tapping vendors and customers.

Says Kyle: "We have a lot to be thankful for."

### **Club offers social support for older gays, lesbians**

Once a month, gay and lesbian senior citizens meet at the Over the Rainbow Supper Club for good food and friendship. And Gary Gill, Peter LeBlanc, and Rose Tavano are happy to serve as the volunteer hosts.

"Come out and play!" said Tavano, a retired accountant from Swampscott. "We're here! We want you to join us."

The club meets on the second Tuesday of each month at the House of the Seven Gables in Salem. Since starting in September, the dinners have drawn as many as 60 people, ranging in age from their late 40s to their 70s. "There are some younger people who come," said LeBlanc, 67, of Salem. "It's important for people to have a place to socialize and network. It's a way for them to make new friends."

Tavano chose the colorful name. "Over the Rainbow implies fantasy," she said. "It says what we are. We're over the rainbow, without saying we're old."

The club is part of the Old & Bold Coalition, a program of North Shore Elder Services in Danvers that reaches out to the region's gay community. Often, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender persons do not feel supported in their older years. "It's hard for them," said LeBlanc, a retired geriatric nurse. "Some of them are so programmed to be in the closet. Some of them are thinking they might need home health services, but they fear they'll be mistreated."

The coalition has held special events, including a summer picnic at Salem Willows. A fundraiser in September was held at Beauport, a mansion on Eastern Point in Gloucester. A Christmas party in Danvers drew about 70 people. The supper club was organized to bring people together more frequently. A special holiday dinner included roast turkey and horseradish mashed potatoes.

“We want people to know that they don’t have to be alone,” said Gill, 50, of Salem. “If they ever are in a time of need, or grieving, or anything like that, you know you can count on people you met through the Over the Rainbow Supper Club.”

### **Girl Scouts help make wish-list come true**

Girl Scout Troop 77029 of Winchester made this a merry Christmas for students at the Experiment With Travel School in Holyoke, a special education program run by the Robert F. Kennedy Children’s Action Corps. The nonprofit RFK Corps each year creates a Winter Wish, a list of toys, clothes, school supplies, and other items needed by the students, who range in age from 10 to 21.

Art supplies, including pot-holder loops, puzzles, and paint-by-number kits, were on the list. And the Winchester Scouts made sure those kids in a school 100 miles away in Western Massachusetts got everything on their list. And more.

“We far exceeded what was on that list,” said Chloe Durant, the troop leader. “On the final collection day, parents were giving me money to get more.”

She also bought a laminator, along with CDs, blankets, gloves, and snow pants for the kids. Some Scouts also went shopping with their parents. Charley Miller, 11, and her mom, Denyse, an assistant Scout leader who runs an athletic apparel business, picked out sweatshirts from her stock. “They were black and blue,” Charley said. “I hope they like them.”

Helping others at Christmas isn’t entirely new to the Scouts. Some volunteered at Cradles to Crayons, a nonprofit that distributes clothes, toys, and other supplies to youngsters. “We sorted toys from this big bin. Legos and Barbies,” recalled Grace Durant, 10. “We dressed the dolls and brushed their hair.”

The 20 girls in the troop attend fifth grade at Lynch Elementary School. The troop meets once a month after school. The Scouts helped to pack up the gifts to send to Holyoke. Many have been proud Scouts for a long time, starting when they were in kindergarten.

And because they are Scouts, when they dressed teddy bears for the Salvation Army to give away this Christmas, they sent one off with a poncho and a sleeping bag.

### **Couple leave a legacy, exemplified in senior-care center**

In life, Morton and Lillian Waldfogel quietly supported Jewish organizations on the North Shore. In death, the couple’s charitable foundation continues their legacy of giving.

A \$1 million gift from the Morton and Lillian Waldfogel Charitable Foundation will be used to name a new senior care facility in Peabody after the late Swampscott couple. The Waldfogel Health Center will have 144 beds, offering assisted living, long-term care, short-

stay rehabilitation, and other geriatric services. There will also be a unit for residents who have Alzheimer's or other memory loss conditions.

Aviv Centers for Living will build the \$35 million facility behind its Woodbridge Assisted Living center on Lynnfield Street in Peabody. A groundbreaking is scheduled for spring. The facility will replace Aviv's Jewish Rehabilitation Center of the North Shore in Swampscott, which will close.

Morton Waldfogel lived his final years with Alzheimer's at the JRC. The quality of care he received prompted the foundation to support Aviv's expansion to Peabody, said his son, Peter Waldfogel of Swampscott.

"I went there every day and I got to know a lot of the people," said Peter, 58, who runs the foundation with his sister, Jane, a professor at Columbia University. "I know there is a need for such a facility. It's the perfect fit for our foundation."

The foundation focuses on education and health care. Morton Waldfogel ran an import plywood business in Boston. He and his wife were generous benefactors to area Jewish organizations, such as the Jewish Federation of the North Shore.

"Jewish life and culture were important to my parents," Waldfogel said. "They were very philanthropic-minded, so when my father died, a large portion of his estate was used to form the foundation."

Waldfogel and his sister are the trustees, and they decide how to honor their parents' legacy. A \$1 million donation helped to establish the Lillian Waldfogel Breast Imaging Center at Mass. General/North Shore Center for Outpatient Care in Danvers. A \$50,000 gift to Kaplan Family Hospice House in Danvers helped to build a new wing.

"My mother and father believed in helping others," Waldfogel said. "That's just how they were."■

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