

DIALOG



Man 'engineers' gifts to keep remembrance of aunts 'on track'



David Bower

DAVID BOWER REMEMBERS DRAWING A PICTURE OF THE TRAINS at 30th Street Station in Philadelphia when he was just 3½ years old.

Even at that young age, trains were an important part of his life. Not only were they a prominent means of travel at the time, but his father worked for the Tennessee Valley Authority as well.

After his father passed away, Bower traveled from his home state of Tennessee to spend summers with extended family in Pennsylvania. Those family members, especially aunts Elda and Laura, who lived in Allentown, Pa., played an enormous role in his life as he grew up. "They helped me along when I was growing up," he says today.

As an adult still living in Tennessee, Bower continued to keep in touch with his aunts, visiting them when he could. When Bower's wife had a stroke several years ago, his aunts provided support through frequent phone calls. During several of these conversations, Elda and Laura referenced the Putz displayed at The Lutheran Home at Topton at Christmas time.

A traditional miniature display that covers 560 square feet, the Putz is a collection of antique holiday items, including working trains. Mrs. Ida Henry, a former matron of The Lutheran Home at Topton when it was an orphanage, assembled the Putz between the years of 1909 and 1945. Among its scenes are the story of the Holy birth, a replica of Radio City Music Hall complete with an organ and an orchestra in the pit, a



Laura and Elda Bower

Our Mission

In response to God's love in Jesus Christ, Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries will demonstrate God's command to love the neighbor through acts of service.

Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries: Many Hands, guided by One Heart, transforming the lives of children, families, and older adults. With programs ranging from adoption, foster care and at-risk youth services to counseling and comprehensive senior living services, Diakon annually helps thousands of people of all faiths through compassionate service, gracious hospitality, and charitable care.

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The President's DIALOG



Mark T. Pile

ONE OF MY FAVORITE DAYS JUST OCCURRED. And while I thoroughly enjoyed the occasion, it was also a little bittersweet.

The event—taking place March 28—was Diakon's annual SERVICE and LEADERSHIP awards. As in years past, it was held near Grantville, Pa., a somewhat-central location for our geographically dispersed programs. That's important because staff members from nearly every location are recognized.

SERVICE and LEADERSHIP are capitalized because they're acronyms. SERVICE stands for Stewardship, Excellence, Respect, Vocation, Innovation, Competence and commitment, and Enthusiasm, while the letters in LEADERSHIP represent Loyalty, Excellence, Achievement, Dedication, Enthusiasm, Respect, Stewardship, Honesty, Innovation, and Perseverance.

Essentially, each family and children's program, senior living community, and ministry support unit nominates a person in the SERVICE category, with one of these finalists selected by committee to receive the overall award. LEADERSHIP nominations come from throughout the organization, with a senior-management committee (of individuals not eligible for the honor) naming the overall award recipient.

As I am quick to point out throughout the program, everyone is a winner because just to be nominated for this honor is high recognition—particularly at Diakon, where each day finds staff members throughout the organization representing through their service to people in need many, if not most, of the characteristics spelled out in those two acronyms. The stories one hears at this event are uplifting and often awe-inspiring.

And yet I want to focus now on just one aspect of those acronyms—the "V" in SERVICE. I am so proud that our staff members, as they tell their stories at this event or simply offer care daily, believe they are carrying out a vocation. In our definition, vocation means you are "called" to serve. In other words, it's not just a job.

Such feelings were apparent in various remarks made by staff members at the event: "This award really recognizes all those on my team." "What I do is not work, it's a calling." "Each day, I ask God how He would have me serve." "She is always an advocate for her staff and the residents they serve."

One person who has always emphasized the vocational aspects of our work is the Rev. Dr. John Richter. And he is the reason this year's event was somewhat bittersweet for me. John will retire late this spring, so this was his last SERVICE and LEADERSHIP event.

For that reason, I was proud to present him with the Diakon President's Award, an honor given only periodically. Certainly, John did not receive the award because he is retiring. Rather, he received it because, among other reasons, it was critical for me—and all of us—to recognize how John in so many ways is the personification of the church's concept of vocation.



The Rev. Dr. John Richter, right, and his wife, Pat, after having received the Diakon President's Award from Mark Pile.

Please turn to Page 5

Support from local foundations helps turn young lives around

“KEVIN” HAS NEVER HEARD OF DONALD AND DOROTHY STABLER, nor the foundation that bears their names, but the young man from Mechanicsburg, Pa., and the philanthropic organization headquartered in Harrisburg, Pa., have a unique connection.

The Donald B. and Dorothy L. Stabler Foundation has been a donor to the Diakon Wilderness Center’s Flight Program over the last four years. As a participant in Flight, Kevin benefits from their donations. And, in many respects, his goals reflect those of the foundation in funding Flight—to turn his troubled past into a better future.

The Flight Program was designed specifically to help at-risk young men, ages 17 to 24, who have aged out of county-funded juvenile justice or children and youth systems but still need help to keep their lives on the right track. Flight’s focus is to guide and mentor participants, previously served by youth programs and now voluntarily opting for Flight, to become contributing members of their community.

The youths set goals and work toward meeting them, leaning on Flight leaders and their peers in the program for support.

“They understand me,” Kevin says of Flight staff and other youths in the program. “I was a real bad kid. Being in this program helps me get away from everything I’ve been through. Without

this, I would probably be in jail now.”

With a small staff and one volunteer, Flight delivers a big impact. Matt Reichard, program manager, explains how.

“A lot of the guys come from broken homes, live in rough neighborhoods, have drug and alcohol problems,” he says. “We give them a peer group of people who have gone through that lifestyle and are trying to move on. We become their family. They set goals for one another and help keep one another accountable.”

Every other weekend, Flight participants and staff get together as a group. They eat together on Friday evenings, followed by an hours-long “Fire Circle,” during which they share what has been going on since they last met. The rest of the weekend is devoted to community service. Beneficiaries of their community work have included the Appalachian Trail, a neighborhood in the Bronx, and a Pittsburgh soup kitchen. During the week, Flight staff touches base with each participant by phone every day.

Reichard says that funding from foundations and other donors is crucial to the work of Flight. Donations cover virtually all program costs.

“We are small enough to be sustainable and are very, very invested in these guys,” he says. “We have successes and sometimes failures, but we have a saying, ‘We don’t shoot our wounded.’ Every experience is a chance to learn.”

“Jim” of Carlisle, Pa., another Flight participant, describes the impact Flight has had on him: “I’m treated as an equal person, not just someone who has been in trouble,” he says. “They help me see I’m not a bad person. They know I can do better.”

Like all Flight participants, the two young men have goals of higher education and finding employment in their chosen fields. It’s likely neither would have such plans nor even believe they were possible—without Flight.

The program, says Jim, “changed my life.”



INVESTING IN YOUTHS’ FUTURE

Flight is grateful to the following foundations for their generous support:

DONALD B. AND DOROTHY L. STABLER FOUNDATION

Harrisburg, Pa.

Grants totaling \$100,000 since 2011

THE GEORGE B. STUART CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

Carlisle, Pa.

Grants totaling \$35,000 since 2012

JULIUS AND KATHRYN HOMMER FOUNDATION

Brodheadsville, Pa.

Grants totaling \$75,000 since 2010

Read other stories about grants supporting our ministries on Page DR11 of the 2013 Donor Report.

Diakon Youth Scholarships

Positive mindset enhances career potential



IN HIGH SCHOOL, TREY FAUST

struggled with family issues and acted out. But thanks to the efforts of a Diakon Youth Services case manager who worked with him for several years, Faust is a well-adjusted college junior with a clear picture of where his life is headed.

“Ever since Diakon came into my life, I’ve been motivated to graduate with an education and get my degree at Albright College,” says Faust, who is studying digital media. “My goal is to be a game designer, working for a company and helping to create video games.”

Faust’s dreams are possible thanks to a scholarship from the Diakon Youth Scholarship Fund.

“I’ve gotten a scholarship from Diakon every year since applying to school,” he says. This will be my third year. It helps tremendously.”

Reared by a single mother, Faust is determined to finish his education and start a career that will allow him to ease the burden for his mother.

“My mom has provided for my little brothers and me since the day we were born. I want to see her stop struggling,” he says. “I’m doing everything I’m supposed to do—getting good grades and an education.”

Faust admits this is something that would have been hard to imagine when he was a freshman in high school.

“As I progressed to become more of a man, Diakon helped me through the process,” he says. “My mindset changed to a positive one.”

Diakon Youth Scholarship makes dream possible

CRYSTAL GILBERT WANTS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE in the lives of children.

“I like to learn and want to help them learn at an early age,” says the sophomore at Bay Path College, Mass., who is completing a degree in elementary education with a minor in psychology.

A former client of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, Gilbert is the recipient of a scholarship from the Diakon Youth Scholarship Fund.

“It is helping me to achieve my dream of becoming a teacher,” she says. “It is helping me to have a better future.”

That future started years ago for Gilbert and her brother and sister when Diakon reunited them in foster care.

“We were all adopted by the same family, which I am so grateful for,” she says. “I realize my life would be so different if I didn’t have them.”

Gilbert believes her foster-care experience will prove helpful when working with at-risk children.

“Being in foster care, I realize the struggles kids go through. Some kids act out and there is a reason for that,” she says. “I think I can connect with them more and be more compassionate since I have a better understanding” of what they are going through.

For now, Gilbert is focused on her studies and enjoys the opportunity to observe local teachers in action.

“I love watching them teach. It is something I am so passionate about,” she says. “I’ve come from nothing, and I’m making something of myself. I want to give these kids a chance, too.”



Diakon scholarship eases family’s college financial burden



AS A CHILD, KAITLYN FREDO

suffered from obsessive-compulsive disorder but didn’t understand her need to repeat certain behaviors. It wasn’t until her senior year of high school that a therapist with Diakon Family Life Services taught her coping mechanisms and prescribed medication to help.

“Everything worked out well, and I was really thankful for her giving me those tools,” says the college senior at the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg.

Interested in how the brain works, Fredo entered college with the hopes of learning to diagnose and treat children with learning disorders. A psychology major and education minor, she admits her personal experiences had an impact on her career choice.

“I definitely became more aware and more interested in that type of career path [after working with a Diakon therapist],” she says. “I’m actually taking a course right now on students with exceptionalities.”

One of three children from her family in college at the same time, Fredo counts herself lucky to be the recipient of a scholarship from the Diakon Youth Scholarship Fund.

“Diakon definitely helped me with not being stressed financially,” she says. “I graduate next December and then it is on to graduate school. With the scholarship, I can be focused on school and a huge financial burden is lifted.”

transform young lives

Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries offers academic scholarships to current and former participants of any Diakon Child, Family & Community Ministries programs including youth services, adoption and foster care, and family life counseling services.

Funds disbursed are identified as provided through either the Charles Merritt Singer or Emma Myers Duttera memorial scholarships, combined in 2009 into the overarching youth services fund.

The Charles Merritt Singer Memorial Scholarship Fund was originally given as a bequest to the Tressler Lutheran Home for Children—whose heritage Diakon continues—by Vinnie B. Singer in memory of her late son, Charles Merritt Singer, to support scholarships to schools of higher learning for children served by the home. Similarly, Emma Myers Duttera created a charitable trust in her 1957 will, with income payable to the Tressler home to be used to assist students in obtaining educational advantages.

The current youth scholarship program thus maintains both charitable intent and the organization's nearly 150-year-old ministry to children and youths.



Man 'engineers' gifts *continued from Page 1*

circus, Toonerville trolley, and a large church complete with tiny hymnals, baptismal fonts, and a pipe organ.

The name comes from the German verb "putzen," which means to brighten or display. The Putz, housed in Old Main on The Lutheran Home at Topton campus, can be viewed by arrangement at various times throughout the year, but is traditionally open to the public at Christmas.

Eventually, Bower and his wife returned to Pennsylvania to visit his aunts—and to see the Putz. Bower was so impressed at how well it was maintained and how much joy it brought to others that he decided to purchase and donate a model GG-1 engine for the display.

After his aunts passed away in 2000, Bower made a second donation, giving to the Putz two railroad cars engraved with his aunts' names, "Elda" and "Laura," as well as a train engraved with the word "Topton."

Bower recently made his third donation to the Putz—of a Strasburg Railroad car.

Bower, who immensely enjoys donating something of significance to Diakon, believes that the trains remind residents of the "Lutheran Home"

of their childhoods. "The trains," he says, "bring back memories of when they were children. They bring them back to a special time."

Bower wants to continue to support the Putz to ensure it endures. He and his wife plan to visit it again to keep their memories of it alive and to acknowledge the volunteers who have staffed the display for so many years.

"I'd like to meet the people who operate the Putz each year," he says, "shake their hands and thank them for their volunteer work."



President's DIALOG *continued from Page 2*

To understand that, you need only to listen briefly, for example, to how John weaves board of directors discussions into an end-of-meeting reflection on the challenges of care in an ever-changing world. To understand that, you need only gain his wise counsel, as I have many times. To understand that, you need only talk to a regional church leader, who most likely will recount the affinity that exists today with Diakon—something that was not necessarily the case in 2005, when John joined us. Recent organizational changes had fractured some congregational relationships.

But perhaps the most important way John Richter typifies vocation is his very understanding of vocation—something he emphasized in his remarks upon receiving the award.

"I have always believed that my title—vice president of church relations—is an inaccurate one," he said. "We must understand that, as Diakon, we don't relate to the church, we are the church. We may not have the aspects of a worship service or stained-glass windows, but the service to the neighbor that occurs every day throughout our many programs and communities is very much a ministry of the church."

Mark T. Pile

Mark T. Pile, MSHA, MSW
President/CEO

Board member finds *countless rewards* in service

SOME QUESTIONS HAVE ONLY ONE POSSIBLE ANSWER, says Susan Schellenberg.

In 2001, she was asked by the then-bishop of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Lutheran Church to complete a term on the board of directors of Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries.

“You don’t say no to your bishop,” she jokes.

Today, Schellenberg considers her response to the bishop’s request a turning point that led to many rewarding years of service. In addition to having been a member of the Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries board, the retired Lehigh County court administrator now also serves on the overarching Diakon board as vice-chair.

“Every bit of it was time well-spent,” she says, reflecting on how much she has gained from the experience. “I have gotten back more than I’ve given.”

One of the first things Schellenberg learned when she became a board member was how much there was to learn.

“...the experience
fills my heart
with joy.”

“I probably knew only about one percent of everything Diakon does,” she says. “One of the wonderful things about being part of the board was getting to learn more. I could see there was a very dedicated and knowledgeable leadership team and staff.”

Her board service began shortly after the affiliation (and later merger) between Lutheran Services Northeast and Tressler Lutheran Services that created Diakon. She recalls some challenging times.

“Staff changes and reorganization were necessary at several points to help the organization continue to remain viable,” she says, noting that such changes often accompany the birth of a new organization.

Years later, upon the impending retirement of the Rev. Dr. Daun McKee, Diakon’s initial president/CEO, Schellenberg chaired the board search committee that ultimately recommended current President/CEO Mark T. Pile. “I think we met the challenges and responsibilities of that assignment well,” she says.

Schellenberg’s years of service have spanned challenging economic times, which forced some tough decisions, she says. “Some programs were no longer viable,” she says, though adds that the organization focused heavily on finding other organizations to assume the programs’ operations, thus making certain people continued to be served.

By making such changes, she says, “funds could be reallocated to have a positive impact in other service areas. The environment changes. Our job [as the board] is to make sure we see the changes, make the best decisions we can, and make sure we have an organization that remains viable.”

Changes within and from outside factors will always affect mission-driven organizations such as Diakon, she says. Remaining focused on what you do best makes the difference—and that’s something Schellenberg believes Diakon does well.



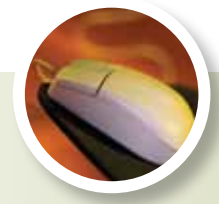
“And we celebrate the things we do well,” she adds. “We are blessed to have great staff members who make it possible for the organization to carry on its mission.”

Like many board members, Schellenberg typically refers to Diakon as “we,” a sign of the pride board members have in the organization’s mission and accomplishments.

“We are helping those who are vulnerable, the elderly, young people, children and families,” she says. “As a court administrator, I worked with children and youths and Diakon’s efforts with adoption is something of which I am particularly proud. Diakon does a wonderful job finding forever families for these kids. And the work of Diakon Youth Services and its wilderness center with troubled youths—that is not an easy task, but so important.”

Schellenberg believes donors and volunteers are drawn to Diakon because it is a well-managed organization with an excellent reputation, providing vital services.

“The day I said ‘yes’ to being on the board, I wondered if I had anything to contribute,” she says. “I wouldn’t change anything about it—the experience fills my heart with joy.”



Lots more is online ... join us there!

It was the day after Christmas 2013 and a cold front was moving through Allentown, Pa., bringing snow squalls to the area. Kermit Roth watched from his window as the ground quickly became blanketed in white.



“Within minutes, there was a quarter-inch of snow on the ground, then it quickly stopped,” remembers the resident of Luther Crest, a Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community in Allentown. “All of a sudden I see this blue balloon sauntering to the ground. My wife was getting ready for lunch, so I went and retrieved it.”

Imprinted on the balloon were the words: “Jason Ellis, #139, Merry Christmas in Heaven Ellis ...”

To read more, visit www.diakon.org and click the sidebar link [eDiakonnnect](#) and select April 2014.



As a visitor surveyed the nine framed photographs adorning the living-room wall of David and Allison Bryce’s Allentown, Pa., home, she couldn’t help but say: “You would never imagine those smiling faces came from such dire circumstances.”

“Well,” responded Allison, “our kids are amazing examples of nature versus nurture. They are sweet, happy, and well-adjusted kids.” The situation, she added, “begs for more siblings for them!”

More?

To read more, visit www.diakon.org and click the sidebar link [eDiakonnnect](#) and select April 2014.

“Dogs are a natural bridge with kids ... and they have come to be an accepted—celebrated, really—aspect of my work in the school district. Whether we are helping kids who are struggling with intense anxiety or depression, grief, abuse, social pressures, lack of social skills, parental divorce, death, incarceration or other absence, the dogs are there offering that ever-loving, always-accepting presence,” writes Patricia Peltier Russell, outreach counselor for Diakon Family Life Services – Upper Susquehanna and owner of “Elli” about her pet-therapy work.

To read more about the impact Elli is having on school children, visit [Diakon’s Many Voices. One Heart.](#) blog found at <http://blog.diakon.org>.



Flight students give to, learn from Haitian children

EARLY THIS YEAR, participants of Diakon Youth Services’ Flight Program really took flight—to Haiti.

There, they visited orphanages that Flight Program Manager Matt Reichard and his wife operate as part of a non-profit ministry, serving 85 orphans and dozens of families—and learning a lot about life and themselves in the process.

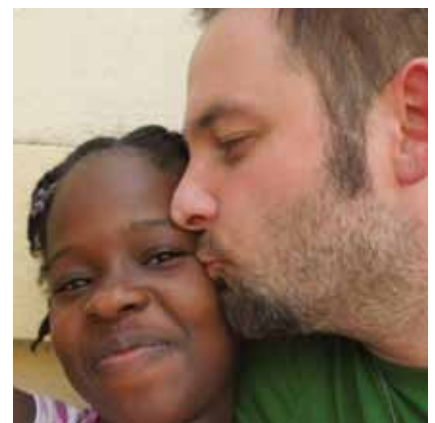
Flight is a mentoring-focused, voluntary program that assists young men who have aged out of other county-funded youth programs but who need assistance to keep their lives on the right track. As one former participant-turned-leader notes, “Flight is not just a program; it’s a family.”

In Haiti, says Reichard, “we had Christmas with the children. The guys from Flight played and did crafts with the children, while the nurses did annual physicals and check-ups and the builders did projects around the homes.”

He adds that there is a special connection between the Flight participants and the Haitian youngsters. “Our kids in Haiti have been through their share of struggles. We have kids who come from abuse, kids who lost their parents in the tragic earthquake, kids who were abandoned and kids who were child slaves. In Flight, we have young men who have had their own struggles and their own tough times in life. They have lost loved ones, they

have been homeless, and they have been hungry. They know, in a small way, what our Haitian kids are dealing with. They can feel how they feel.”

A Flight participant reflects that sentiment: “I learned a lot from the kids in the orphanages on this trip. I was able to see that, though the kids don’t have a lot of physical things, they are very willing to share what little they do have. They shared with each other and they shared with all of us.” In particular, the boy misses one child who helped him get over an initial bout of homesickness: “The way she cared about me even though she had never met me before taught me a lot about how people should treat each other. She has changed my life.”



Matt Reichard, Flight Program manager, with Fritzerline at Freedom House Grace Girls’ Home in Jacmel.



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Remembrance of aunts 'on track'



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