

TRACK MINISTRY NEWS

Race Track Chaplaincy of America, Pennsylvania Division, Inc.
"Sharing God's Love at Philadelphia Park"

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Volunteers from Swarthmore United Methodist Church were Santa's helpers for wrapping gifts for the children.

Christmas Party 2008

It was our greatest Christmas Party. For starters, 165 children registered. Imagine getting them and their parents all into one big room to meet Santa, receive their gifts, do Christmas crafts, eat delicious food and go home with a goodie bag stuffed with more gifts, including a bi-lingual book with the story of Christmas.

The contributions to the Christmas events were very generous this year, too. Thanks to Reynolds Hay and Straw, Inc. and Ron's Backstretch Café everyone had plenty of pizza and hot dogs with all the trimmings. Mr. Mike Ballezzi and the Board of the Pennsylvania Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association always make it possible for the children and the dorm residents to receive gifts for a Merry Christmas. In addition, churches from all across the nation sent toys, cookies, toiletries, towels, and various clothing articles. Without the dedication of the American Baptist Women's Ministries through their "White Cross" annual project, our work would indeed suffer. We say a hearty "Thank You" to everyone for enabling the people of the racetrack to have a Merry Christmas.



Mom and children enjoying the meal

"Heroes of the Track" Recipients



RTCA-PA Board President, Rev. Linda Haughton (Center) Presented "Heroes" award to Dr. Lorna Michelson (Left) and Mrs. Sandy Blitzstein (Right)

On Monday, December 1, Board members and friends of the racetrack ministry gathered at Michael's Restaurant in Bensalem to honor the 2008 recipients of the "Heroes of the Track" award. This year the Board of the RTCA of Pennsylvania recognized two people who have shown unusual devotion to the ministry – Dr. Lorna Michelson, Executive Director, YWCA of Bucks County and Mrs. Sandy Blitzstein, Director of Family Services, YWCA of Bucks County.

Both Lorna and Sandy have enabled our work to move to another level through community contacts, providing Chapel 'n Chow meals, making it possible for a Social Worker (Carolyn Pachas) to come to the track, and many other ways of reaching out to the track employees. Their impact on the lives of those at the racetrack has been significant, indeed. We thank God for these two women.

New Support Staff for the Chaplain's Office

Carolyn Pachas is a welcome face at the Chaplain's Office. As a result of funding to the YWCA of Bucks County, Carolyn has been coming to the Rec Hall on Fridays to meet with those who need guidance concerning which local agencies can be of assistance to them with their various personal and/or financial needs.

Since beginning her work at the track, Carolyn has assisted many of the men and women. In the coming months, she also will be teaching people on the backstretch how to use the computer. Of special help is the fact that she is fluent in Spanish. We welcome Carolyn aboard and are thankful for all that she has already done for the folks at the racetrack.

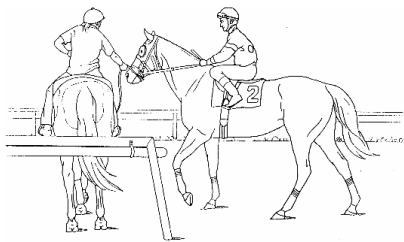


Carolyn Pachas, Family Center Coordinator, Bucks Landing Family Center

Chapel 'n Chow Nights

Throughout the year the employees are blessed to have people, churches and community organizations that bring or contribute funds to provide a nourishing meal following the Wednesday evening Chapel Hour.

On October 22, the **Board and staff of Bucks County YWCA** brought delicious food – more than enough for everyone. In November we enjoyed the loving care of **First Baptist Church of Levittown, PA**, when they brought baked ziti and meatballs with all the trimmings. Later in the month, members of **Harriman United Methodist Church** of Bristol, PA, brought a turkey dinner, which everyone fully appreciated. No one left hungry! On December 10 and 17 the people were treated to meals by the **Building a Better Bensalem Today Committee** and again by **Harriman United Methodist Church**. RTCA of PA Board member, Bobbie Enke, serves on the Bensalem Committee and is also a member of Harriman UM Church. Again, we thank everyone for their kindness.



Ethel's Corner

I had a curious encounter the other day. A friend I had not seen for some time was asking me about our work at the racetrack. Now, I've become accustomed to a bit of disbelief from people when they first hear about the backstretch ministry. Many tend to snicker and say, "What do you do, bless the horses? Pray for a winner?" But I've learned that, as I patiently explain about our work with immigrants, with those who come from far away or even locally who live at the track and often have no family, no other resource, no advocate for them when they are sick or in need, my audience begins to nod in approval of this unique ministry. So on this occasion I explained to my friend about the meals we provide, the trips to emergency room we make, the support we lend for prescriptions, referrals to treatment centers, and nursing home visits. I told her about the Christmas party and the number of children and families we serve. How we provide blankets and toiletries and even beds. I gave illustrations of help for people who need immigration information faxed to proper authorities and even calls made to foreign embassies for Visa support.

She listened patiently, and then she hit me with a question that broke my heart:

"Yes, but when do you 'do church?' You don't have services there, do you?"

It saddened me to think that this friend saw "church" as a place we go to once in a while. I took a deep breath as I realized that God had just opened a door for me to bring this friend into a whole new level of understanding of what it means to "do church." Yes, I said, we do have chapel services, but chapel services are simply a time to celebrate together the many ways God leads us to be in service to everyone we meet, every day. We don't "do" church. We are called to BE the church, every day, in every way we move on God's earth. After all, that's the example Jesus gave us by the way he lived.

So be it!

By Ethel Guy, Palmer Seminary Student Intern

God Things at the Track

◆◆ Just a few days before Christmas, "Bob" came to my office with a question about how to get some help. His wife had had major surgery, and they had no insurance. In the process of helping, we learned that he had two children who were going to have little for Christmas this year. Through the generosity of the churches and those who care, we were able to send gifts for his children. He was deeply appreciative for the care.

◆◆ "Bill" began a rehab program for his addiction. Just after Christmas we talked by phone. He told me that God has given him strength and that he is learning to pray for others' needs, not just his own. That's growth, for sure.

◆◆ "George" attended the Wednesday Chapel Hour while I was on vacation. He was new to the backstretch. Rey Roque spoke on the topic, "worry," and how we can learn to trust God in all things. "George" told me that the message was exactly for him, and that God used the message to give him new strength. In recent weeks he has shown that he was honest with me, because he is staying strong in the face of enormous challenges.

◆◆ After "Joan" left the racetrack last summer, she went into a rehab program. She returned for a visit a few weeks ago, and she was a totally different person! Her bright smile and direct look was a joy to behold. Life has turned around for her, and we thank God for wins.



Santa met a new friend at the Christmas party.

Board of Directors - RTCA, PA Division, Inc.



Seated (L to R): Mr. Rey Roque, Secretary; Mr. Donald Hogeland, Treasurer; Mr. Dan Sourwine and Rev. Tom Brooks, Vice-President

Standing (L to R): Mrs. Bobbie Enke; Rev. Linda Haughton, President; Rev. Nelson Krute; Rev. Christine Holcomb; Mrs. Hilda Garcia and Chaplain Jack Cordell

Board Members Emeritus

Rev. Dr. Nicholas Salios, Chaplain Emeritus
Mrs. Rose Salios, Chaplain's Assistant Emeritus

