

# UBBC SERVES

## Columns: 2021-2023

*Compiled in honor of Gail Addison Guss  
on the occasion of completing her six-year tenure  
on UBBC's Board of Missions (aka Faith in Action Team)*

### 2021

March: <a href="#">Dale Roth by Gail Addison Guss</a>	2
April: <a href="#">Citizens Climate Lobby by Dick Jones</a>	3
May: <a href="#">Marie Hamilton by Shirley Fye</a>	5
June-July: <a href="#">Tyson Daniels by Gail Addison Guss</a>	8
August: <a href="#">Nate Dreyer by Gail Addison Guss</a>	9
September: <a href="#">UBBC Youth by Oli and Mark Kissling</a>	10
October: <a href="#">Jan Perison by Sophie Penney</a>	13
November: <a href="#">LION Bash by Gail Addison Guss</a>	14

### 2022

March: <a href="#">Sarah Malone by Gail Addison Guss</a>	15
April: <a href="#">Ken Kline Smeltzer by Mark Kissling</a>	16
May: <a href="#">John and Carolyn Bellanti by John Swisher</a>	19
June-July: <a href="#">Robin Lallement by Ann Jones</a>	20
August: <a href="#">John and Judy Vicary Swisher by Mark Kissling</a>	22
September: <a href="#">National Youth Conference by Gail Addison Guss</a>	24
October: <a href="#">Joe Loomis by Gail Addison Guss</a>	26
November: <a href="#">Tom Cook by Mark Kissling</a>	27

### 2023

February: <a href="#">Rebekah Carswell by Ralene Kreiser</a>	29
April: <a href="#">Nancy Harrison by Gail Addison Guss</a>	30
June: <a href="#">UBBC SERVES by Gail Addison Guss</a>	31
November: <a href="#">Mary Lou Bennett by John Swisher</a>	32

## **March 2021: Dale Roth**

*By Gail Addison Guss*

The Board of Missions is initiating a new column in the newsletter entitled “UBBC SERVES.” We will be highlighting members of our congregation and the ways they serve as a means of knowing one another and learning about service opportunities each of us may be interested in. As UBBC’s mission states, “Woven together in love, we seek like Jesus to serve God’s world justly, simply, compassionately.” We hope these columns will help you seek to serve God’s world with the many gifts you have been given. Please let us know if you would like to tell your story!

Dale Roth, longtime member of UBBC, has been serving his whole life. Early examples from his parents and other family members set him on this path even as a young man. He believes in the importance of giving our personal gifts of time, talents, and treasure for the benefit of others. He has done this through his work in the church as moderator, deacon, trustee, and member of the Middle Pennsylvania Church of the Brethren District Coordinating Council. Dale has assisted the United Way of Centre County for many years by participating in and leading allocation panels that assess organizations' use of and need for funding. He has also served on their board and more recently has been active in the United Way's Day of Caring.

Dale has focused much of his work on disaster response. He has worked closely with the Brethren Disaster Response team through the Middle Pennsylvania Church of the Brethren. Here he worked initially as a volunteer and traveled to New Orleans, Louisiana; Pensacola, Florida, Mississippi, and, West Virginia. Disaster work has often been repairing or rebuilding housing or cleaning up from flooding, fire, and tornadoes. Dale quickly became a project coordinator for these projects, which involved orientation of volunteers, assessment of tools and materials needed for a project, and on-site supervision. His organizational and people skills made him a perfect match for this job. Brethren Disaster Ministries accepts these projects if there is no other help in a community (like the Red Cross), the population is one that is underserved, there are enough homes to repair (50–80) to keep the project in the community for up to two years, and local leadership can identify clients who qualify for help. His commitment to this work is awe-inspiring.

Dale believes that “we all have been given much, and our life and passions call us to find those opportunities when we can freely give to help others.” Dale’s service surely exemplifies his philosophy, and we are grateful for his example in service to others.

## **April 2021: Citizens Climate Lobby**

*By Dick Jones*

The mission outreach of our church is not limited to monetary donations, impressive as those traditionally have been. UBBCers also offer their time, energy, and talents to improve our community and our world.

A significant number in this congregation have stepped up to tackle climate change, for example, most particularly by helping with Citizens' Climate Lobby. CCL is a non-profit, nonpartisan, grassroots advocacy organization focused on national policies to address climate change.

Sylvia Neely is co-leader of CCL's State College chapter and has been its leader since its inception in 2015. She has effectively and cheerfully shepherded the local group to the point where it is one of the most active and respected in the state, with a voice and influence that reaches well beyond Centre County.

Many in the community have helped her, including, from our church, Dick Jones, Marjie Nye, Bonnie Kline Smeltzer, Monica and Duke Gastiger, Shirley Fye, Tyson Daniels, Ann Jones, Mary Alice Burroughs, and Tom Cook. Some have been sustaining members of CCL. Other have lent a hand on an ad hoc basis. Still others have endorsed legislation backed by CCL. All are appreciated.

Dick Jones was an early recruit after Sylvia spoke about the work of CCL at a post-church forum one Sunday. He chairs the local chapter's media committee and writes frequent Op-eds for the Centre Daily Times. Shirley Fye has helped with outreach to the Altoona VA. Marjie Nye has designed and produced many brochures for the chapter's popular free education programs which drew sizable local crowds before the pandemic hit. Now Marjie is active with the endorsement committee which encourages businesses, religious organizations, local governments, prominent individuals, and non-profits, to support the federal legislation that the organization backs: the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act (EICDA).

Monica and Duke Gastiger have made sure that ReFarm Café is one of the businesses on record as endorsing the EICDA. Bonnie Kline Smeltzer has endorsed it also, as part of a national effort to get "grasstops" backing from community leaders. And UBBC itself has formally endorsed the Act, the first religious organization in this area to do so. (The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of State College recently followed suit). In addition, Pastor Bonnie in November 2018 made our church available for world-famous climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe to speak here—A CCL-sponsored event which drew a large community crowd on a snowy weekday afternoon. She also organized and hosted a lunch with Dr. Hayhoe for local pastors.

UBBC members have been generous when asked by CCL for help. Several people tabled during our outreach events and wrote letters to our members of Congress. Tyson Daniels has numerous times come to CCL's rescue with his sound equipment and expertise. Tom Cook jumped into the breach when Katharine Hayhoe needed an audio-visual presentation set up in the sanctuary. Ann Jones and Mary Alice Burroughs organized and hosted a soup dinner in Fellowship Hall for CCL's national director of legislative affairs, Danny Richter, when he came to town for a community talk. And Ann has helped with the endorsement effort, as well.

2021 is already a good year for anyone concerned about climate public policy. It's looking like Congress may be able to pass some major climate legislation at last. A carbon fee with the money raised going back to American families (carbon fee and dividend) may well be part of that solution. If it happens, UBBcers will have done their bit.

## **May 2021: Marie Hamilton**

*By Shirley Fye*

Grace Marie Fortney Hamilton attributes her passion for serving others to her upbringing by her loving Christian family; her childhood church, the Curryville Church of the Brethren; and her teachers, including her Sunday school teachers. When as a child she learned the song “Jesus loves all the little children - Red and yellow, black and white,” Marie had never known a person of color in her small hometown. But she knew if she ever did meet such people, she would love them.

After graduating from high school in 1956, Marie went on to volunteer with Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) and her project was at the Phoenix Indian School, a boarding school in Phoenix, AZ, for Native American children. These boarding schools, which were situated across the whole country, were controversial. Children were forcibly taken away from their families to go to school and were not allowed to speak their native languages.

There were missionaries from different religions, Protestant, Mormon, and Catholic, who would convert the children away from their native beliefs. Marie asked her BVS director why there was no Church of the Brethren denomination represented there where children could learn the principles of non-violence and peacemaking. She later wrote back to her BVS director that the children had beautiful religions of their own and perhaps the school should not be trying to change their religions at all - typical Marie style, trying to improve things or make changes for the better. That would have been a problem with the Federal Government.

She worked with the director of religious education, the Rev. Dr. Lundgren, who became an important mentor. If a student did something wrong, the teacher or dorm parent would send the child to their office with a note describing some bad thing the child had done - to receive punishment. Dr. Lundgren would read the note and then put it in his pocket and never mention it to the student. Instead, he asked the students to tell him about their reservation, their family life and things important to them. He also told the children that they could come by his office anytime they wanted by just telling their teacher or dorm parent that they wanted to visit the office of religious education. He told the children that they could teach Marie how to speak their language and teach her about their tribe’s customs. Marie was always eager to learn about anything new or different and loved to talk to the children. This place became a sanctuary for the children - a place where they could feel safe and experience trust.

The teachers would tell Marie that she and Dr. Lundgren must have put the fear of God into the students because they listened when they went back to their class. Marie said that Dr. Lundgren never preached to them. She said that she and Dr. Lundgren just loved them by respecting them and listening to them.

Marie reflected as she looked back that this was another place where she had been groomed to do her prison work. As she explained, there were several parallels between the BVS and prison work: “Their mistakes were of no concern, and all I needed to do was to listen to them with love - that was the only way to succeed in setting up this type of program. You don’t need to talk to them about their transgressions, you just need to listen to them with love. Also, both Native Americans and prisoners were themselves victims; empathy was needed to understand the status of both.”

After Marie completed her volunteer service she got married and moved to her husband's hometown of State College. After making a home for her husband and two boys, she looked for a place to volunteer because Marie was always happiest when she was volunteering. The only volunteer agency in town was an agency on the Penn State campus where Ann Cook, another UBBC member, worked. Marie told Ann that there should be a separate volunteer program in the community for Centre County and Ann agreed, so they started the Voluntary Action Center (VAC) along with Rose Cologne from the Society of Friends and Nancy Desmond of UBBC. Their job was to interview people and find out their skills and match them with people in the community. "If a need was not met, we set up a program to meet the need." They established a huge volunteer bank.

During her service with the VAC, Marie met Larry Ruffner. He was an engineer who drove by the State Correctional Institution at Rockview every day on his way to work, and he told her that he always felt compelled to be doing something at the prison. So he stopped by the VAC and asked whether there were any volunteer positions at the prison. Marie had just recently met the prison superintendent and she said she would call him and find out if there was a need for prison volunteers. When Marie called the Superintendent, Dr. Mazurkiewicz, she got an abrupt answer: "NO." He said he did not need reporters, researchers, lonely women, or religious fanatics to volunteer at the prison, but he would give her a call if he was ever in need of a volunteer.

But sometime later, Dr. Mazurkiewicz called Marie and told her that the prison was starting a pre-release program and thought it would be good to have a few volunteers who could talk to the inmates about living on the outside. As he stated, "For example, discuss the current price of hamburger and how to talk "Street Talk." These discussions with volunteers eventually led to the prison volunteer program. Marie arranged for several volunteers, including women. The inclusion of women was a very difficult sell to the superintendent, but Marie was able to get authorization and she found herself becoming a prison volunteer. After some time, some of the volunteers wanted to change the system and they wanted to leave the prison program. Marie said that stopping the visitation would not change the system. "Corrections would not miss us, but the inmates would. We bring them hope." Marie was always walking a fine line - if anything upset the corrections authority or if the inmates became too independent, the volunteer program would end.

Thus, the barriers to Marie's prison work were almost insurmountable. She valued the listening ear of her UBBC pastor, Mike Scroggins, and later Glenn Mitchell. They provided spiritual guidance and helped her navigate difficult situations. While Marie's program continued, the Center for Alternatives in Community Justice, CACJ, was started. CACJ focused their work outside of the prison - with pre-trial interventions, bail programs, and mediation. The work inside the prison was continued via Marie's determination and included conflict-resolution training for inmates and staff of all state prisons, the annual Pennsylvania Prison Runathon, the Children's Christmas Cards for Inmates program, the Prison Prayer-Mate program, the Criminal Justice Advocacy and Support Directory, and family visitations. The work of both groups often blended. After several years, the prison program took up most of the time and budget of the VAC, and in 1995 it became an independent program under the name of CentrePeace - with Marie as its Executive Director. At CentrePeace, Marie implemented

another program, Project Restore, for Centre County inmates. Marie retired as director from CentrePeace in January 2007 but continued to be active in the organization.

Marie recently learned about a woman, Dr. Lauren Abramson, who in 1995 launched a program in Baltimore, Md., to do community conferencing, a form of restorative justice, rather than retributive justice, that brings offenders, victims, and members of the community together to resolve crimes and conflicts, address needs, and prevent recidivism. Marie watched one of Dr. Abramson's videos and immediately emailed CACJ and CentrePeace and wrote, "You've got to watch this – I think Centre County is ready for this!" As a result, during the pandemic back in March - via Zoom - the ball got rolling and the groundwork was laid to start Community Conferencing in Centre County. Dr. Abrahamson will be coming to State College to train volunteers as facilitators with the hope that conferencing can begin in May. The value of substituting restorative justice for retributive justice is a belief that Marie has held, taught, practiced, and dedicated her life to.

You can read more about Marie's work in the book *Grace Goes to Prison*, and she would be happy if you contacted her to ask questions. Her email is [gmfhamilton@gmail.com](mailto:gmfhamilton@gmail.com)

## **June-July 2021: Tyson Daniels**

*By Gail Addison Guss*

Most of us know Tyson as the “sound guy” who is ever present to provide amplification for voices that need to be heard. But there is so much more to learn about this charismatic young man. Coming from a home where his parents emphasized justice and fairness, Tyson is living a life of service. He joined the Boy Scouts at five, and spent much of his childhood and youth honing the skills that would one day help him achieve the rank of Eagle Scout. UBBC also played a central role informing the man he has become today; he grew up in the Church and participated in children’s activities from a young age. He still fondly recalls Sunday school teachers he interacted with during his formative years. Indeed, he was very involved with Camp Blue Diamond, attending annually from Tenderfoot to Youth Camp, and answering the call to be a counselor after his Junior year of High School.

Tyson’s time as an undergraduate at Juniata College followed his interest in criminal justice, and led to an opportunity to train to be an EMT. He took this path throughout college with ever-increasing levels of responsibility. During this period, he also became a gay rights activist and an advocate for minorities. He has repeatedly answered the call to serve in his work with the Juniata College EMS, the Twin Creeks Ambulance, and currently on the Penns Valley Ambulance. Following graduation and an unsuccessful career search, Tyson returned to Camp Blue Diamond to serve as Campground Director for four years. He then worked at Juniper Village and Houck Home Care, continued as an EMT, and served his community through his work on the past several Presidential and off-year elections.

Tyson continues to live out his passion to serve others in his work at the Huntingdon County Probation Office. He interacts with over a hundred clients to assist them in successfully re-entering civilian life after spending time in prison. He also donates blood, something he has been doing since college, and serves UBBC as a Sunday School teacher, and member of the choir and Board of Christian Education. He describes being a teacher as a tremendously fun experience, where he learns as much from the kids as they do from him.

Finally, Tyson feels UBBC has “continually broadened my circles of empathy,” enabling him to reach out to ever more diverse peoples. This background, combined with his family values and experiences in the Boy Scouts and Camp Blue Diamond, has helped make him into a thoughtful person of service. His is an inspirational story!



## **August 2021: Nate Dreyer**

*By Gail Addison Guss*

In March of 2020 just at the beginning of the pandemic, a group of college students connected by friendship but attending multiple different universities decided to put their now “free time” (with no extra-curricular activities) to good use. Penn State sophomore and UBBC member Nate Dreyer was one of those young people. A friend of a friend, from the University of Michigan, suggested to them that they work to supply PPE for the hard-hit area of New York City to improve conditions for first-line workers dealing with COVID-19. Together with other students from Yale University, the University of Michigan, Penn State, and others, they made a difference. What began as a group of 35 eventually grew to over one hundred students. According to their website [ppe4all.net](http://ppe4all.net), “When the majority of our team members were sent home from college in March, feeling helpless in the face of the growing pandemic seemed inevitable. The urgency of the need to protect health care and essential workers became a call to action during a time when we were all trapped in limbo, searching for a sense of direction and purpose.”

The most cost-effective product they could produce was a plastic face shield made from a 3-D printer. They delivered over 50,000 of these along with hand sanitizer, N-95 masks, and gloves. All of this was free as New York struggled with rising numbers of illness and death in April of 2020. By July, their non-profit had a name: “PPE4ALL.” They provided these kits by organizing their company to reflect needs for developing technology, production, delivery, fund-raising (Nate was in charge of this), and social media.

As time passed and the needs in New York City had been met, their presence on social media created a demand for their work. North Carolina, Puerto Rico, and California contacted their organization, and PPE4ALL began filling needs in other areas of the country.

As demand winds down for PPE, a small group from PPE4ALL is hoping to deliver consulting services to other groups who are hoping to help during a natural disaster. Nate explained that they had learned so much during this process, felt they had achieved their goals, and served a need. Nate will be stepping back from the non-profit as he begins his summer work at Camp Blue Diamond.

Once again, one of our young UBBC family members has shone a light on service. We are grateful to Nate and PPE4ALL for the commitment, energy, effort, and love that was directed at this work. From the website [ppe4all.net](http://ppe4all.net), “What started out as a handful of students with an idea has grown into a bustling, intricate network of individuals coming together to have a profound impact.”

I encourage you to learn more about Nate’s work by checking out their website: [ppe4all.net](http://ppe4all.net). It is a remarkable story!

## September 2021: UBBC Youth

By Oli and Mark Kissling

*“It sounded fun.”*

*“I figured that it would be good to help my society. My parents also thought it would get me out of the house.”*

*“My mom signed me up for it but I didn’t mind because it was cool.” “Such a great experience. Both workcamps I’ve gone to are unforgettable.”*

*“What we did will be memorable.”*

For a week in mid-July, eleven youth and three adults served our local community through extensive outdoor work (and some play) in a Church of the Brethren FaithX outing.

Youth participants included Sofia Cardenas-Miller, Leah Carswell, Naomi Carswell, Greg Dreyer, Ezra Gernand, Harper House, Tyler Lippincott, Ben Moser, Owen Perry, Jacob Will, and Nate Will. Adult participants included Alison Gernand, Karen Moser, and Ken Smeltzer. In early August, we Zoomed with five of the youth participants—Ben (14; 9<sup>th</sup> grade), Harper (14; 9<sup>th</sup>), Nate (13; 8<sup>th</sup>), Sofia (14; 9<sup>th</sup>), Tyler (12; 7<sup>th</sup>)—to learn more about their experiences during the week.

### The Weekdays

On Monday they worked at Rhoneymeade Arboretum and Sculpture Garden in Centre Hall. Among other things they potted and watered plants and did quite a bit of weeding. Of the work, Tyler reflected with a wry smile, “I wouldn’t say it was enjoyable but it wasn’t the worst day of my life.” A highlight for all was, later in the day, meeting some of the pigs that reside on the nearby farm.

Tuesday brought the group to Camp Blue Diamond, the Church of the Brethren Middle Pennsylvania District’s lovely camp on the other side of Tussey Ridge from State College. Some of the youth had been campers at CBD for a week earlier in the summer. The morning brought an assortment of jobs like mulching, painting, and removing invasive autumn olive plants. Considering the latter work, Harper said, “we got some cuts and scratches but it was almost fun.” Ben agreed, adding, “it wasn’t super easy but it was fun to see the progress that we made.”

With rain in the forecast, Wednesday’s work commenced closer to UBBC, at Millbrook Marsh. Like the day before, a goal was to extract an invasive species, this time watercress that was spreading through the marsh. Nate remembered the water being surprisingly cold, and intermittent rain (with one downpour) didn’t help, but he appreciated how “the group created a fireman’s line to pass along the watercress,” which made the process more efficient. Later work involved picking up trash that had been carelessly left by another species that is sometimes invasive: homo sapiens. Highlights from the day included when it wasn’t raining, visiting a pollinator garden, and playing ultimate frisbee, the latter of which sounded like one of the week’s favorite activities.

The FaithXers stepped back from work on Thursday to enjoy a day of recreation at Greenwood Furnace State Park near Belleville. The docket featured hiking, swimming, and a whole lot of fun.

On Friday it was once again over Tussey Ridge and into Rothrock State Forest, this time to Shaver's Creek Environmental Center, another place of deep significance for many of the youth. Aided by the expertise of Ken Kline Smeltzer, work included staining and sanding as well as taking chairs apart and putting them back together so that they were sturdier. In the afternoon, the group celebrated their labors from the day and week at nearby Whipple Dam State Park.

Each day included an evening meal during which the participants reflected back on the day's events. The group also found time to make joyful noise, on breaks from the work but also during it. Of the latter, Tyler shared, "The best part about the work is that I had my friends there and we talked while doing it. I didn't have to work in silence."

We'd be remiss not to note, too, the fact that participants spent almost no time on their phones. While phone-time was discouraged (or perhaps even not allowed), as Sofia remembered, "that wasn't a problem." Ben agreed, stating simply, "We didn't have a ton of time to be on our phones." The youth knew what they signed up for, which, in Tyler's words, amounted to "doing all the activities together, with friends, and having fun. Also playing ultimate frisbee!"

Looking back on the week, Karen Moser said, "Everyone worked hard and played hard!" Ken Kline Smeltzer shared, "It was a fun time for everyone and the kids were hard workers with little complaining and lots of enthusiasm."

### FaithX? Local?

FaithX outings this summer were different from prior years. For starters, the FaithX name was new. What were previously known as Workcamps are now known as Faith Outreach Expeditions, or FaithX for short. But the biggest change was due to the Covid-19 pandemic. UBBC youth planned to attend outings in 2020 in Roanoke, VA and Brooklyn, NY but those were canceled. With the pandemic raging on in 2021, the options for outings were either virtual or entirely local. As noted on the FaithX website, "our top priority is the health and safety of FaithX participants and the communities we serve, and we hope to offer options that reflect this priority while also providing a meaningful FaithX experience." Thus, the idea for this summer's State College area outing was born.

While this summer was Nate and Tyler's first FaithX/Workcamp experience, Ben, Harper, and Sofia had all participated previously, which involved traveling outside of Pennsylvania. But this year's change was appreciated. Sofia shared, "I liked serving the local community." She also noted her appreciation that it was possible for the outing to take place in 2021: "During the pandemic I haven't been able to be with my friends as much as I wanted so I looked forward to [FaithX] with friends." Adding to support of the local experience, Tyler said, "I kind of preferred that the camp was local. I liked being able to see my family each night and sleep in my own bed."

### Excited to Serve

It is important to acknowledge directly that FaithX outings are primarily organized around service work. That is, youth spend a week of their summer laboring for the benefit of others. While we might hope this for all youth during their deserved break from the school year—and a particularly arduous past school year at that—it is quite impressive what they have done. They've chosen to work as part of their vacation.

“It’s a weird concept going somewhere to do work,” said Harper, “but I don’t regret it at all and I would do it again.” Along similar lines, Tyler offered, “It’s not as bad as you think it’s going to be. You think it’s going to be horrible but that’s not the case. Even the work is fun.” This perspective of service as worthy of vacation days, even as fun, strikes us as a beautiful and much-needed lesson about why any of us serve: to continue to cultivate the beloved community. And our UBBC youth demonstrate that we can (and should?) enjoy our service.

### In the Future

Whether future FaithX outings are near or far, the youth look forward to attending again. If next year’s option remains local, Harper commented, “I’d love to have an even bigger community of people participating, maybe from other churches in the area.” Tyler suggested that the days might be spent at a new set of local places. But there is also excitement for the possibility of traveling once again away from Central Pennsylvania.

Regardless of where future outings take place, the youth with whom we spoke strongly encourage younger youth to participate when they have met the requirement of completing 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Nate spoke of the experience creating a great feeling of “being able to do something different.” Sofia echoed this, saying, “It’s really neat to be a part of a big accomplishment, helping the community and working with friends.”

Whether participating in a future-year FaithX outing is of interest or not, we encourage all to attend the Adult Forum on Sunday, September 19 to learn more about this past summer’s outing and the powerful experiences of the youth and adult participants.

## **October 2021: Jan Perison**

*By Sophie Penney*

Most evenings you would find Jan Perison reading. Jan loves books and always told herself that when she retired, she would volunteer at the library. And volunteer she does. Once a week or as needed Jan can be found at the Schlow Region Library in State College scanning books that people have asked to have set aside for their reading pleasure.

Speaking of reading pleasure, Jan loves a good mystery. That said she also has an extensive collection, by her estimate almost 1000 books, many of which are how to” or other nonfiction works. Jan shares her love of reading with a group of women who trade books. Some purchase the books new then pass them along after reading and some pass on previously loved tomes. All of the books eventually find the potential for an extended life as they are donated to the AAUW Book Sale. Speaking about her experiences you can hear the joy in Jan’s voice. As she says, she loves books, but she also loves the librarians and the people who visit the library. She exemplifies the hymn lyric “I’ve got the joy, joy, joy down in my heart.” Thanks Jan, for all that you do for our community and UBBC.

## **November 2021: LION Bash**

*By Gail Addison Guss*

LION Bash, Living in One Neighborhood is a collaboration between the University and State College Borough. The intention is to provide students and community members with an opportunity to see what is available in the community as we come together in “one neighborhood.” On September 9, 2021, UBBC welcomed students and community members to our table and display on S. Allen St. as one of two faith communities represented. Board of Missions members Tom Cook, Sophie Penney, and Art Leach and the Christian Education Board’s Tyson Daniels, Pastor Bonnie, and Jesse Smeltzer interacted with undergraduates, graduates, families with young children, and a mother with a high school daughter who was exploring LGBTQ and was shunned by her church. Interesting conversations ensued around our two posted questions: “I would like to see a church that. . .” and “How will you stand up for peace and justice?” We thought you’d like to see some of the responses:

“I would like to see a church that...” supports different lifestyles; no judgements; supports the LGBTQ+ community; provides plant-based meals; accepts all; teaches about love; people get along; has great music; has diversity; personal opinions; includes everyone; involved with youth; looks like a taste of heaven; sponsors refugees; welcomes all.

“How will you stand for peace and justice?”: passion for social justice and repairing the world; standing at the Allen St. gates; LGBTQ+rights; stand up for Black people; be friends with others who need them, no matter what others say; always speak truth in whole life; go to marches; on Department’s Equity and Inclusion Committee; work with organizers for climate action; be accepting towards all and speak up when I need to; stand up for people; speak truth to power; equal pay for women, BIPOC, and LGBTQ+ people; be kind to my brother; support diverse populations; women’s freedom of health; staying informed and active in the community; by being aware; compassion for everyone; write letters to senators, congress people, and president.

The responses speak for themselves. These posters will be displayed at church soon.

## March 2022: Sarah Malone

By Gail Addison Guss

Sarah and I spent an hour in Webster's talking about her life over a cup of tea. This short article only touches some of the highlights of our conversation.

Sarah's childhood in Connecticut included three siblings and her parents. She began her college career at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts. Not finding fulfillment there, she dropped out after her sophomore year and spent the summer with a good friend traveling in Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island, camping on the beach and enjoying life. The trip home was a turning point in her life. She was grievously injured, suffering damage to her brain stem and cerebrum, in a horrific auto accident. She had just turned twenty. She was in a coma for weeks, and her rehabilitation included learning to walk and speak again. As she recovered in a Canadian hospital for nine weeks with her mother by her side, Sarah experienced a profound depression and sense of emptiness and devastation. As she emerged from her brain fog, she experienced a deep sense of gratitude for all who had helped and encouraged her on her road to recovery. Additionally, Sarah deeply felt love from all around her and sensed this love surrounding everyone. When she returned home, Sarah read *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*, a book that described all kinds of religious traditions, and she could identify with many of the author's experiences of trauma followed by a great opening to love, delight, and a new world.

Sarah returned to college at the University of Massachusetts, where she completed her undergraduate work and met her husband, Rick. Eventually, they settled in State College. He became a professor of Physics at Penn State and Sarah did graduate work in gerontology and taught several courses at the University. Over the years, she became part of several Quaker communities, which culminated in her participation in the State College Quaker Meeting. As her passion for peace and justice grew, Sarah then moved to UBBC. She completed her graduate studies at Penn State and was counseled to consider attending seminary by Glenn Mitchell. She completed this work at the Northern Baptist Seminary in Chicago.

Sarah has pastored at several small congregations and been Moderator of the Middle PA District Church of the Brethren, served on the Centre Peace Board, taught classes at Rockview, and most recently, created the Interfaith Initiative Centre County. This group has worked to welcome all peoples to Centre County, in particular the Muslim community after 9/11. Sarah has been drawn to work involving racial justice, conflict resolution, and peacemaking. She is a member of the Sisters in Spirit group that supported Pastor Donna King and her congregation through her cancer treatment and death. In an all-Black group, Sarah once again found herself as the old, white lady who sees learning about her Black brethren as a mission that is constantly unfolding. She is currently working with others to develop a creative ministry in the Filmore Church and may become the Pastor for this faith community in the spring.

Sarah honored me by sharing so much of her life's story; I can hardly do it justice in this small article. Her conversion following her accident evolved as she began to understand that each of us is truly loved and we must work for justice and equality for all of God's children.

## **April 2022: Ken Kline Smeltzer**

*By Mark Kissling*

I have had the privilege of sitting down with Ken Kline Smeltzer several times for extended conversations. Once he shared several folk songs I didn't know. Another time he showed me copies of the newspaper that he and friends penned during their high school years. This past January, on the long weekend when our country honored the work and legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., I asked him some questions about service—and some of his service—and delighted in the dialogue that ensued.

### Service Roots

“Well, I grew up in a serving family.” Ken's parents were supreme servants, Christian citizens with a strong social-justice-activist bent. When the United States, under the order of Franklin Roosevelt, began rounding up people of Japanese descent, including U.S. citizens, and forcing them to internment camps during World War II, Ken's folks quit their teaching jobs and went to work in the camps. Later they got the denomination and seminary of the Church of the Brethren to sponsor a hostel in Chicago for relocating people of Japanese descent who were allowed to leave the internment camps as long as they moved eastward. They did similar work in Brooklyn. This was all prior to Ken's birth but it was the familial context into which he was born. Being a member of his family meant service to others.

Ken's father trained in the ministry but he wasn't a pastor. He worked denominationally, for the Church of the Brethren, doing peace and social justice work. Whatever the pressing social issues were of the day—and there were many—his parents seemed to be involved. Civil rights for Black and Indigenous peoples. Better working conditions for farm workers. “At an early age [my sisters and I] were involved in all of those things. We traveled a lot. I can remember visiting Native tribes in the Western U.S.”

In Elgin, Illinois, where the denomination's headquarters were and are, Ken's parents did race-relations and poverty-eradication work. His mom was active in progressive politics. Before he was even double-digit years old, he was out walking the neighborhoods with her, distributing flyers and pamphlets before the election. On a couple of occasions his parents bought homes in the local community and then rented them to Black families until those families could buy them outright. Some local white people bristled at this service.

In junior high, Ken, alongside family and church members, went on open housing marches in Chicago and Cicero, Illinois. While he found inspiration in national leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr. and a local high school teacher who was a poet, free thinker, and Sunday School teacher, he needn't look farther than his parents for his service heroes. “Shouldn't your whole life be service, to your community, to your family, to the world? That's how I was taught by my folks.”

### Habitat for Humanity

Ken does a host of service work and I'd probably need the length of a book to write about all of it. One of his long-time service commitments has been working for Habitat for Humanity. He first got involved with Habitat when pastoring in Modesto,



California. A new Habitat chapter was being started in the community and he, as a local pastor, was recruited into the effort. Right across from the church there was a large tract of land slated for housing development. Habitat bought the land and worked to see the growth of a neighborhood, with around ten of the houses becoming 'Habitat houses' that served people and families without adequate housing. As is a theme with much service work, not all local community members appreciated Habitat's efforts. There was a large community meeting held at the church at which some registered their complaints, but the housing effort continued.

When Ken and his family moved to Central Pennsylvania, he did not immediately get involved with the local chapter of Habitat. About eight years ago, spurred by the invitation of Jill Redman, who was then leading the local chapter, Ken joined the board and began working in myriad ways.

My limited experience with Habitat has been at a construction site, volunteering with whatever tasks were needed done that also fell within my very-limited skill set, somewhere in the middle of the large and long process of building or renovating a house. In talking with Ken, though, I gained much more perspective about Habitat. "There are all kinds of things that Habitat does that don't even touch families directly," Ken said. "It's not all hammering on the house." In California he did site selection work, seeking out new lots to develop. Here in Centre County, he has chaired Habitat's Family Service committee, which has required having difficult conversations with some families and even having to foreclose on a family as an act of service. For some time, he has also worked weekly at Habitat's ReStore in Bellefonte pricing items, running the cash register, and interacting with customers.

### Service Advice

I've long thought that Ken would be a terrific public middle school teacher. Mindful of that, I asked him what advice he has for youth and young adults about service. He offered:

- "The more organic service is to what you're doing, the better. It's something you do because of who you are, what you believe in."
- "If service isn't a part of your ordinary life, you might ask yourself, what is my faith calling me to do? I grew up with an assumption that your faith—God, your community—would be asking something of you. If you're not doing something, you're not listening. That's the Christian faith that I was taught. It's incumbent on us to be involved."
- "Sustaining service is hard. Sometimes you see results and sometimes you don't; sometimes you're disappointed; sometimes you need a break."
- "If you're not involved politically, you're not doing half the service you need to be doing."
- "Service is not just work; it's personally rewarding and stimulating to get to know other people and other cultures."

### One More Thing!

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention another long-term service commitment of Ken's: Song & Story Fest. Last summer when the annual summer week of joyful noise (as well as many other things joyful) took place at nearby Camp Blue Diamond, I happily

participated in the festivities. As the founder and director of the Fest, Ken is and has been central to its proceedings over the past 25 years.

I asked Ken if he thought about his Song & Story Fest work as service. “Yeah, I suppose; it’s unpaid and it’s somewhat hard to keep up. But I love it. I love leading it and I get a lot of accolades. I love to do things, have fun, bring people together. I’m a community-oriented person. It’s my calling, probably one of things I’ll be remembered for, helping to lead progressive organizations.”

This summer’s Song & Story Fest is planned for Camp Pine Lake in Eldora, Iowa from July 3-9. The theme is “Into the HEARTland: *Healing What Divides Us.*” For more information, ask Ken about it!

## **May 2022: John and Carolyn Bellanti**

*By John Swisher*

John and Carolyn Bellanti have led parallel lives of service.

John Bellanti had a career providing help to others through counseling and a personal life in service in many categories. John's personal service began when a group of youth had left the Catholic Church and met to gripe. At one meeting they decided to do something other than griping to help others. This led to helping immigrants move to the States. Since that meeting, he has taken the initiative to develop the means for immigrants to escape turmoil at home and find peace here. Early in their marriage John and Carolyn took in a Vietnam college student who couldn't return home.

Carolyn Bellanti followed a career in speech pathology and a concern for others. At six years of age and because she was an avid reader her mother suggested she read to kids in the neighborhood. She became an English major in college and began her career as an English teacher. When they moved to Pennsylvania, she couldn't become certified as an English teacher because she didn't have a required course in Pennsylvania history. This rejection then led to a life-long career of service as a speech pathologist.

Carolyn, a former Quaker, and John, a former Catholic, were attracted to the University Baptist and Brethren Church by the concern and action of the members in service to others. At one point in their UBBC history they helped the Church become more inclusive. This was accomplished in part by a change in the Church's mission statement and several small group discussions involving individuals with stories about sexual preferences and race. One group included a biracial marriage between a Jew and Catholic who were both transgenders.

Later in their Church history they became members of the Board of Missions. With their expressed concern the Board initiated several water projects in a foreign country. These projects solved a water shortage due to water run off by digging wells under a filter of sand that captured a supply of water. They are now part of the UBBC team that very recently welcomed a family from Afghanistan. They have met with the family and provided transportation to health services.

## June-July 2022: Robin Lallement

By Ann Jones

### Service and Advocacy

Robin Lallement's life of public service began with her childhood in Scranton. "I've always wanted to help people," she says. "As a kid I would do errands for my nana, my mom and the neighbors."

Born Robin Wormuth in Patterson, NJ and raised in Scranton, Robin credits "my parents and maternal grandparents" for setting examples of service that have shaped her into the person she has become. "They were good role models to be community members. They held religious beliefs that weren't always alike. In later years, my mom's religious beliefs were a positive influence on my move away from the Catholic church to find something else." She adds that her mother, Nettie, remained a life-long Roman Catholic while disagreeing with some aspects of religious doctrine. "I always respected her commitment," Robin says. She describes her mother's influence on her as "hugely positive."

After she graduated from Scranton Central High School Robin moved on to Penn State where she focused, appropriately, on public service--an emphasis within the political science major. And it was there that she met Pierre, a mathematician and native of France, who later became her husband.

After graduation in 1985 she worked with Allied Services, a northeastern PA-based company that offers rehabilitation, personal care and community services to adults and children. She married Pierre about a year after graduation and they moved to Maryland where he enrolled in graduate school at the University of Maryland—College Park. They lived in Maryland for 14 years and Robin continued her public service, working for two non-profits, supporting adults on the autism spectrum and adults with general disabilities. Her last position in Maryland was as vocational director for a non-profit called Hope Center. Around that time, changes related to de-institutionalization of people with disabilities in Maryland caused upheaval in the system. This helped her decide on a career change. Robin had always harbored a desire to be a schoolteacher and, made time to earn a master's degree and teaching certificate from Bowie State University, graduating in 1999.

Her two sons, Paul and Luc, were born during the family's Maryland years. And Pierre worked as an acoustic sonar software engineer for various government contractors. Robin and Pierre began thinking of moving back to Pennsylvania. They did so in 2000 and he went to work with Penn State's Applied Research Lab while she became a special education teacher in the State College Area School District. Robin feels that her career choices—first as a front-line worker and administrator in the non-profit care sector and next as a special education teacher—have positively impacted her life. "I have a better understanding of behaviors and how they impact students, and their families and friends."

When Pastor Bonnie and her family landed in Boalsburg in 2002 they found themselves living next door to the Lallements and became friends. But it wasn't until a few years after that when Robin decided to start attending UBBC. "Pierre was agnostic but a very moral person. I couldn't not have a religion," she explains. "I wanted one." At the time they were not attending any church. UBBC, she says, has been a positive

element in her life and the lives of her sons. “When Paul went to New Orleans to help with hurricane disaster relief as part of a work camp, he said it was one of the best experiences of his life.”

Widowed since 2011 when Pierre died suddenly and unexpectedly, Robin continues her life of service and advocacy. In whatever activity or role she finds herself, Robin views it as her duty to be an advocate. She sees advocacy as an extension of a life of service. With State College schools, she became active in the teacher’s union. With her children’s youth sports activities, she was an enthusiastic organizer. And at UBBC she has pitched in to help in many ways, the most prominent being as a member of the Board of Deacons and for many years co-chair of that board, a position she holds today.

Churches need resolute workers and strong advocates. In Robin Lallement, UBBC is extremely fortunate to have both!

## **August 2022: John and Judy Vicary Swisher**

*By Mark Kissling*

I first encountered John and Judy when they presented several years ago at a UBBC adult forum about their volunteer work in local jails and prisons through the Pennsylvania Prison Society. Now I'm privileged to serve with them on UBBC's Faith in Action Team, our working name for what is known as the Board of Missions. The Swishers joined the Team in January, a half century after their service collaborating began.

"We met in the context of service," John reflected, in Harrisburg, in 1972, where there was a new effort to create a statewide board that would oversee drug and alcohol prevention and treatment in Pennsylvania. Judy, who was living in Erie at the time where she founded a social services agency, was asked to serve on the board. John, who was a Penn State professor in counselor education, was invited to serve as a consultant to the board. In the ensuing years, the Swishers have undertaken many service projects, including, as John noted, through their teaching at Penn State, as teaching is, fundamentally, in service to others. Judy even required 'service learning' in all of her courses, which positioned students to learn through and from community service activities related to their courses' curricula.

In recent years, including during the pandemic, Judy has volunteered at Rockview and Benner prisons and the Centre County Correctional Facility. Speaking about this work, she cautioned, "prisons and jails are horrible places in general and going and visiting is very challenging because you want to help but you're very limited in what you can do." Nonetheless, Judy sees so many ways to serve. Around the winter holidays, for example, she has videorecorded incarcerated fathers reading books to their children and then shared the videos with grateful family members.

John has also been active through the Pennsylvania Prison Society. When he first came to the local chapter of the group, he was particularly interested in efforts that supported family members of locally-incarcerated citizens who lived elsewhere to travel to visit their loved ones. He happily learned of the Society's practice of chartering buses from Philadelphia and Pittsburgh to Centre County and he has become an enthusiastic endorser of continuing these critically important trips. John has also enjoyed meeting and corresponding with incarcerated citizens and seen that his letters are often received with tremendous appreciation, perhaps antidotes to harrowing isolation and loneliness.

Another highlight for both was, prior to the pandemic, supporting incarcerated citizens as they made holiday cards for their loved ones. Entering the CCCF with seemingly endless paper scraps and glue (as scissors, staples, and other materials were not permitted), they worked alongside eager card makers looking to send love and holiday cheer to family members. (Ask John to tell a story about a card that had a bird on its front, a 'jail bird'...)

So the Swishers serve in our local correctional institutions in all kinds of ways—meeting with incarcerated individuals in person and via Zoom; corresponding through letters; communicating with family members; supporting efforts for incarcerated citizens to remain in touch with loved ones; advocating for better treatment; making a point of showing kindness and respect for the correctional officers who work with incarcerated citizens—but they are and have been very active in many other domains as well. Judy,

for example, started “Jeans for Teens” in conjunction with the Youth Services Bureau many years ago. The idea was, around the winter holidays, to see to it that youth in need received clothing through shopping help from PSU students and donations from others in the community. In addition to providing clothing, the program facilitated positive, educational relationships among all participants. Many years later, the program continues through the Youth Service Bureau. For Judy, it was “so gratifying to see PSU students working with and learning about the needs of local youth and having a way to show care.”

John is an active member of Citizens’ Climate Lobby. About a decade ago, John was walking around Arts Fest and came across a CCL table. One of the features of CCL that immediately hooked him was the organization’s explicit bipartisanship as, John offered, “bipartisanship is a great way we can get anything done.” Since joining CCL, John has penned a number of Op Ed pieces and letters to the editor about climate action as he seeks to help our community understand the climate crisis and take steps to mitigate it. He, with other volunteers, even went to DC to meet with members of Congress, articulating the issues and potential actions. He has also lobbied Representative Thompson’s office locally.

Mindful that many of us are inspired to serve by others, I asked the Swishers about their service role models. They quickly named the late Barbara and Jim Palmer, who Judy called their “service mentors.” John excitedly showed me an overview for the new Palmer Museum of Art currently under construction by the PSU Arboretum and Judy spoke of how she was a longtime member, now emerita, of the Palmer Museum’s Advisory Board. Judy also spoke of being deeply impacted by the culture of service—“a spirit of giving”—that she found when she went to college at Mount Holyoke. And John recalled his high school football coach, who ingrained in him and his teammates to “be the best version of you that you can be.”

As I talked further with John and Judy, I was struck by how their service to others spans different scales of action, from global to local. Residents of The Village at Penn State Retirement Community since late 2018, they’re quite active with and among their neighbors. Both are members of the community’s Garden Club, which has them sharing plants with neighbors, disseminating some of their flora wisdom, and even advocating to management to do a better job of tending the exterior gardens surrounding the homes of elderly residents. With a big smile, Judy asserted, “gardening is sharing!” John also volunteers with the community’s Recycling Committee.

I ended our interview by asking for service advice for those of us who are early on in our lives of service or looking to deepen our service. “There is so much needed and there is so much you can do,” Judy began. “Find your passion, identify needs, and figure out how you can help others through it.” John echoed Judy’s sentiment, stressing the importance of moving beyond worshipping Jesus to following Jesus’ lead in serving others. He wrote similarly in an Advent devotional that he penned last December, “What does Jesus want from us? For us to use every opportunity we have to do good for others and to serve them. He tells us that if we do something good to the least of the people, it’s as though we have done it for Him personally (Matthew 25:40).”

## **September 2022: National Youth Conference**

*By Gail Addison Guss*

This column was written after attending the Adult Forum on August 21 when Ben Cook, Ben Moser, Levi Loomis-Adams, Harper House, Sofia Cardenas-Miller, Naomi Carswell, Jacob Will, Leigh Ann Cook, Karen Moser, and Tyson Daniels (Kayla Gonzales could not be there) presented photos and discussion of their experience at National Youth Conference in Fort Collins, Colorado. With Duck Donuts as an incentive, they were kind enough to talk with me after their presentation to answer some additional questions. I wish I could convey everything they shared with me. What an extraordinary group of young people! The gift of these three adult leaders for our youth was obvious. The theme of the conference was “Love is foundational.”

On July 23, eight youths and three leaders rose early (or never went to bed) to begin their experience at National Youth Conference in Fort Collins, Colorado. Greeted by a party bus donated by Fullington and driven by our very own Charlene and David Miller, 3:00 a.m. looked more inviting than they had imagined! This bus drove them to the Pittsburgh airport, where they boarded an early flight to Denver, spirits high and ready for a nap. They arrived in Denver and boarded a bus for the Colorado State University, where they worked, played, and slept (a reoccurring theme) for the next five days.

Days were filled with two worship services, small groups, workshops, recreation time or hiking, a service project, and time for naps (yes, really). Discussion of the worship service showcased awesome, high- energy, motivating speakers, live music (Ben C. participated as a bass player), and songs in Spanish. One of the speakers, highly energetic himself, introduced the concept of “leveling up,” which both Jacob and Ben C. described as being meaningful and motivating (“leveling up” being a video game analogy reflecting how players can increase their heros’ powers by giving them new tools to rise higher, do more, and become the best version of themselves). Ben M. and Levi shared the story of another speaker, a blind pianist who was able to improvise on the piano given a story line by a participant. Again, he was described as high energy and impressive. Small groups met daily for forty-five minutes and were a way to get to know others from around the county. They proved valuable only if members of the group were willing to share at a deeper level; each person seemed to have a different feeling about their group. Sofia talked about the workshops in which they participated: knitting and climate change. Both were fun and meaningful. Hiking was divided by levels of difficulty with some choosing a more challenging hike than others. The service project was making diapers for Haiti. One afternoon was spent in Fort Collins (napping was another option), and ultimate frisbee was the game of choice. They played with the Elizabethtown group. Ben M. will see several members again for rugby in the spring. Friendships were renewed from work camps around the country and new friends made. One friend from Virginia has committed to coming to CBD next summer!

The final two days of their trip were spent at Copper Mountain in an Airbnb hosted by former members, Greg Wright and Ron Gebhardtsbauer. Fantastic hiking, great pizza, riding on a ski lift, eating Jacob’s pancakes, amazing views, and LOTS OF NAPS were all mentioned as highlights of this part of their trip. Oreo shenanigans were



also reported (ask anyone in the group, perhaps especially Tyson). All in all, they were so grateful to Ron and Greg for this extension of their Colorado experience. When they returned to Pittsburgh, the party bus with special drivers was there to deliver them to State College. When asked what they might tell a younger brother or sister, the message was “GO!” I thought I didn’t really want to go, but now I wish I could go every year.” (Jacob). All agreed with this message.

#### Fast Facts from the National Youth Conference

- 580 youth
- 224 adult advisors
- 97 NYC staff, including denominational staff and volunteers
- 154 congregations represented
- 4 countries represented, including: United States, Canada, Dominican Republic, and Spain
- 25 states and the District of Columbia represented, including: Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin
- \$2,521.75 collected for Church World Service School kits
- \$1,949.56 collected for the NYC Scholarship Fund
- \$3,060 collected to offset hiking costs
- 444 diapers assembled for Diapers for Haiti
- 3,102 Church World Service School kits assembled

## **October 2022: Joe Loomis**

*By Gail Addison Guss*

A pair of overalls and a straw hat, perhaps with a heifer or a flock of chickens as company— guess who?? Our very own Joe Loomis, original participant and overall best fundraiser at the Alternative Christmas Fair for all forty years for his beloved Heifer International non-profit! Joe's service and passion for Heifer was born when he joined Brethren Volunteer Service after changing his draft status to conscientious objector midway through college. Joe worked in the project's office in Maryland initially and then had the opportunity to go to Ghana for a year. There he taught others to use a machine that pressed earth into bricks to build homes and other structures. It was there he also saw the work of Heifer International in real time. This furthered his passion for the organization as he saw the way a flock of animals or just a single animal could change a family's life—and sometimes, a whole village as animals were shared. His responsibilities with Brethren Volunteer Service also included training staff.

Through the years, he and Lucy continued serving their brothers and sisters through work camps in both Nigeria and Honduras. Again, his experiences in these countries gave him more opportunities to observe the important work that Heifer was doing there. He loves to share these stories!

Closer to home, Joe and Lucy became involved in the resettlement of refugees beginning with immigrants from Vietnam. Joe told me he stood up in church to ask who might be interested in helping with this and instantly had a large committee of talented folks ready to help. Through the years, this group also helped settle refugees from Romania, Burma, and Russia through Brethren Volunteer Services, Lutheran World Relief, and American Baptists. This work occurred over a five year period and was a success for all involved.

Joe continues his service in the church through his work with "the boys," a group of men who meet every Wednesday at the church to identify and find solutions for various physical plant problems. He has spent many (many) hours bettering our worship and play space.

Joe's generous spirit and love of life are a gift to all who know him. We are grateful for Joe and his example of service in our community and beyond.

## **November 2022: Tom Cook**

*By Mark Kissling*

Some years ago, Tom Cook and his young family were living in Buffalo, NY, when a neighbor needed a place for her elementary- aged son to go for 30 minutes before getting on the school bus in the morning. Without blinking, Tom told her he'd be happy to have the child come over to his house; it was no inconvenience at all. Afterward, the grateful neighbor expressed her desire to reciprocate the favor. Tom appreciated the sentiment but told her there was no need, it's what neighbors do for each other. After telling me this story, Tom offered, "this is what service is about." He was reflecting on how "we're supposed to be making heaven on Earth."

I had the pleasure of meeting up with Tom a couple weeks ago at Sowers Harvest Café in downtown State College to talk about his longtime, dedicated, and varied service. As I reflect on our conversation, one of the big ideas that Tom taught me is that service need not be seismic, grand, or flashy. As he's "constantly looking for opportunities to give to the world," service opportunities can come in all kinds of ways and they can be mutually beneficial.

A commitment to serving others was instilled in Tom from an early age. He grew up in a household in which helping out was simply what you do, perhaps exemplified best by his father's support of his mother, who had a physical handicap that limited her activities. After graduating from high school, Tom went to Penn State as an undergraduate student and there he met Lee Ann. They both had strong impulses to serve others. Tom quipped, "Lee Ann, through social work, wanted to save people; I, through environmental science, wanted to save the Earth."

During their time at PSU, Lee Ann and Tom did not set foot in UBBC. After they graduated, they moved to the Philly suburbs but, when they sought to get married, they wanted to have the ceremony in State College. Through Lee Ann's mother Carol Wasson, they learned of Glenn Mitchell, then UBBC's pastor, and reached out to him, which led to their marriage at the church in October of 1994.

After living in New York State for years, the Cooks moved back to State College in 2006. Tom, perhaps possessing a healthy skepticism about organized religion (i.e., "my feeling of church is community, my belief in God is community"), wasn't immediately sold on attending UBBC. However, that changed after he encountered Ed Bala, a UBBC regular. Tom had organized and was hosting a political phone banking event where he saw Ed. In talking with Ed, Tom saw a person putting their faith into political action. If Ed attended UBBC, Tom thought, maybe that was a place where service was central to the church.

Fast forward to the present and Tom is involved in, and has been involved in, a host of different UBBC service activities. He's a longtime member of the Board of Missions, what has been informally renamed as the Faith in Action team. (As a fellow member of the team, I recall that when Tom's second three-year term ended last year, which is customarily when members rotate off, Tom, knowing that the team's membership was low, eagerly said he'd keep going.) Among many Faith in Action undertakings, one notable doing of Tom's is annually staffing the UBBC table at LION Bash ("Living in one neighborhood"), an event that seeks to welcome PSU students into the broader State College community.

Tangential to his service on the Faith in Action team, Tom has been a member of the church's Adult Forum committee, planning out and organizing programming for adult learning each Sunday through the school year. He also served on the board of the Third Way Collective, a peace, justice, and faith campus ministry created by University Mennonite Church that UBBC enthusiastically supported.

Other service work that Tom came to through UBBC includes Weatherization First, an offshoot of Pennsylvania Power and Light that Tom called "concrete climate action," which sought to improve home energy efficiency, particularly for homes whose owners could not otherwise afford to carry out the work. Additionally, with his oldest daughter, Casey, Tom participated in Christian Citizenship Seminar in 2016, which took place at the United Nations in New York City and on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. Tom has also supported Generation to Generation Outings (G2O; formerly known as Campfire Kids) to New York for rock climbing and Pine Creek Gorge for bicycling. And, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that Tom is one of the resident technology gurus of the church, always ready to solve a new tech challenge that comes with our age of increasingly digital living.

We didn't just talk UBBC, though. In our conversation, I appreciated how Tom invited me into his service life before and beyond UBBC. He's been politically active for a long time, including working with the group Move On during the 2000 U.S. presidential election. Four years later, he drove people to the polls in the swing state of Ohio. A member of a PSU fraternity as an undergrad, later he volunteered for his fraternity as an assistant advisor and alumni board president for many years. In his professional work creating computer models designed to aid in cleaning up contaminated soil and groundwater, Tom mentors junior users of the software, seeing it as both a benefit to those colleagues and himself but also to the communities that inhabit contaminated places. Not surprisingly, even in his leisure, like while hiking, Tom insists on picking up any trash he encounters. He also volunteers for climbing area cleanup days, a form of "largescale picking up trash while hiking." Not a stranger to PSU research studies, he even participates in "giv[ing] my body to science!"

While perhaps he shared about research study participation in jest, I greatly appreciate his knack for constructing service broadly. He offers that we can serve in so many ways, big and small, across the places of our lives. When asked for what advice he has for others about serving, Tom shared several things:

- "align what you can do with what will have impact for others"
- "always try to be on the lookout for that little thing you can do that will have a big impact on others, especially in an area where you have expertise"
- "seek service that builds capacity of the community"

I want to offer one more piece of advice from Tom, though he shared (and shares) it with me through action, not talking explicitly about it: parents can and should engage their children in service—for the betterment of themselves, their families, and their communities. It has been a privilege for me (and a learning experience, as a new parent) to have seen Tom—and Lee Ann—raise service-minded youth who, like their oldest, Casey, go on to do things like teach 7<sup>th</sup> grade civics in a Virginia public school. The service line in the Cook family continues its generational journey!

## **February 2023: Rebekah Carswell**

*By Ralene Kreiser*

Teacher, administrator, BVS volunteer, banjo player, mediator, mom, camp counselor, wife, play director, board member, Rosetta Stone employee, anthropology major...

Rebekah Carswell is/has been all of these except for one!

Rebekah was born and raised in PA in the Brethren Church. Hailing from Altoona she remembers her church community as warm and enriching. While perhaps not as progressive as UBBC it provided her a sense of community that she cherished.

She attended Juniata college majoring in peace conflict resolution studies and anthropology though early childhood education was always right below the surface. Upon graduating she felt a calling to serve and for two years was a volunteer in Nigeria through BVS as a teacher. As a continuation of her service, she returned to her conflict resolution expertise at a mediation center in Harrisonburg, VA where she acted as a court mediator. It was here she met her husband, Paul.

Paul and Rebekah were married and started their family (Naomi and Leah) in Roanoke, VA where Rebekah worked part-time for Rosetta stone and was able to work from home with a flexible schedule she could structure around their young kids.

They moved to State college in 2011 to be closer to their families and, with having ties to UBBC members through Camp Blue Diamond and other church affiliations, joined UBBC. Rebekah remembers the welcome of the church helping their family transition from the move.

In a few years she happily took a teaching position with OCC in the toddler room. She had the opportunity to return to her love of teaching early education. After nine years as teacher she has recently become Principal/head teacher and has enjoyed this new challenge.

She has devoted her time and energies to the church through many facets including serving on the board of education, directing Christmas plays, teaching for the OWL program and acting as UBBC representative for Camp Blue Diamond.

Rebekah does not play the banjo – but I am sure if she wanted to, she could strum up a storm.

My mission was to learn more about Rebekah's call to serve – but I left our coffee hour with the notion of committing to serving more myself. So, I would add to the long list above – Rebekah is also inspiring.

## **April 2023: Nancy Harrison**

*By Gail Addison Guss*

When Nancy was asked to be our UBBC SERVES person of the month, she commented that she was sure there were others who were far more worthy and inspirational than she. I invite you to answer this question for yourself after you have read her profile!

Nancy was raised in a Quaker household and developed a heart for service early. In her late teens, she worked in a mental hospital with the American Friends Service and later did social work with two communities of color in upper New York state. She taught preschool and soon received a second Bachelor's Degree in Art Education with a Master's several years later. She substituted for twenty years in K through 12th grades.

Nancy and her husband Paul met at a square dance at UBBC in 1946 and were married at the beginning of their senior year at Penn State. They left the area for Paul to go to divinity school and then to Yale for his doctorate followed by time at Princeton where he taught. After they returned to State College in 1963, they returned to the church and were long standing members of UBBC. She volunteered in nearly every part of church life serving on Deacons (3 terms) and the Board of Missions. She assisted with the Alternative Christmas Fair and worked in the nursery and taught Sunday School. Following the passing of her only sister in 1998, she focused on volunteer visiting with Brookline Hospice and received ongoing training with this group. Nancy was also active with a healing group with an interest in alternative medicine. Later, she joined a small group of church members to study A Course of Miracles followed by A Course of Love. Nancy was also active in securing household items and furniture for refugees the church welcomed from Vietnam and Russia.

Nancy expressed her deep gratitude for the adoption of their daughter Cindy and son John. Grandsons John and Michael have added much love and richness to her life! She has been truly blessed and has blessed us with her love, friendship, commitment to the UBBC community, wisdom, and humility throughout her life's journey. Nancy Harrison is indeed an inspiration to us all!

## June 2023: UBBC SERVES

By Gail Addison Guss, member, Board of Missions (aka Faith in Action Team)

“Alarm, anger, defend, exam, reflect, transformation, renewal.” If you are short on time, that phrase captures the emotions of my last year as a member of the Missions board.

Here is the longer story. As we approached 2023, it became obvious that a large budget deficit was looming, and I knew that our budget was vulnerable to cuts just not available in other areas of the church budget. *Cue alarm and anger.* As chair, I felt it was my responsibility to protect our \$43,000 projected budget with all I had.

*Cue defend.* The Coordinating Council asked that we reduce our giving by 10%. We did this, and I felt relieved but still viewed this as “all we could do.” As early spring unfolded, we were asked to cut our budget further to help claw back more of the deficit. The board spent hours working through each organization’s profile, understanding our connection to them, the overlap in giving, and the relative percentage of dollars going to denominational, global, and local groups. We focused on a fresh look at who we were serving with our donations.

*Exam and reflect.* \$28,000, a 34% reduction. Our conversation turned to the importance of supporting the faith community right here so that we might better serve those beyond our walls, perhaps even giving up more of our budget to do so. We agreed to hold all payments to our partners until we are certain of our financial stability as UBBC. During this time, Pastor Tom provided a new way to frame our thinking, given how our desire to be a “mission church” had expanded to become a “missional church.” Many of you have now heard Pastor Tom discuss this. Although we had recognized that our giving goes far beyond the dollars—to include individual work, rental properties, among others—the wider view he provided has helped me lean into the work we can do toward generating service and dollars without counting on our budget. Examples spring to mind: rental properties, Alternative Christmas Fair, Special Offerings, the Deacon’s Fund, and so on.

*Cue transformation and renewal.* Now I am moving forward with hope and enthusiasm about how we might grow these current projects and with your help, initiate new ways to serve individually, as a board, and as a congregation.

This is not to say I do not look forward to once again serving our partners financially. I do, but I am now driven by a new sense of purpose, a transformation of my work in the months to come, and a wider hope that each of us can continue to serve God through our love and service, now and in the future.

## **November 2023: Mary Lou Bennett**

*By John Swisher*

You probably know Mary Lou Bennett who is often an usher at UBBC and occasionally a Liturgist.

Around 1966 Mary Lou was one of the founders of Diakonia which was a Presbyterian Church in State College. She and several other Presbyterian members, instead of planning a second church in the suburbs of State College, started a church without walls. They wanted their money to go to help people in need and service agencies in the community and 80% of their budget did. They rented various facilities, had a part-time pastor, and spent many Sundays in the State College Woman's Club space.

While a member of Diakonia she represented her church and along with three other congregations that founded the Christian Mission. This organization started Park Forest Preschool. Mary Lou cooked breakfast for the kids for many years.

When the Unitarian Church wanted to join Christian Mission, she supported it becoming Interfaith Human Services which it remains today. Thirty-one churches have now joined Interfaith Human Services which helps many people and agencies in need.

When Diakonia folded in 2003, Mary Lou and several friends found The University Baptist and Brethren Church to be a welcoming home. She was an Elder in Diakonia that provided an emergency fund for people in the community. Now at UBBC Mary Lou is doing the same thing as a Deacon in UBBC.

Through Habitat for Humanity, she helped build a unique house with only women builders. Mary Lou also worked on many other houses. She has lovely gardens around her apartment but still finds time to be a docent at the Arboretum. Mary Lou served on the board of the Penn State Renaissance Fund that provides scholarships for outstanding freshmen. She established a Renaissance student scholarship in her name. She also gave generously to the new Palmer Art Museum, and she gives to several charities.

As a realtor Mary Lou was one of a group of six partners who bought REMAX Realty, and it too now generously supports community projects like the State Theatre.

Mary Lou has been involved in the evolution of several significant community organizations and churches that provide support to many agencies and people in our community.