

THE OPEN LINK



VOLUME 3, ISSUE 3

FALL 2018 NEWSLETTER

THE OPEN LINK

UPCOMING EVENTS:

- High School Equivalency testing will be held Dec. 1 at 9 a.m. at The Center. Winter 2019 HSE session begins Jan. 3. Call 215.679.4112 to register or for more info.
- The annual Thanksgiving food drive and Christmas toy drive are underway. Please call 215.679.4112 for more info.
- Holidays at Mount Hope bus trip with The Center, Dec. 5 at Mt. Hope Estate and Winery. Call 215.679.6550 for info.

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Sharing Our Blessings This Thanksgiving

Much like the proverbial Thanksgiving turkey, Amber said her life has felt like it's running away from her much of the time.

But she said this year she has a lot to be grateful for thanks, in part, to The Open Link.

While she didn't want to share a lot about her personal life, she gushed, as

any mom would, about her family — a 2-year-old daughter, a 3-year-old son and a 9-year-old daughter. They first came to the food pantry last week.

The East Greenville resident said she was really nervous but was immediately put at ease by everyone being so helpful and friendly. She said ordering food

through The Open Link's new SmartChoice digital inventory system was painless and she was "shocked at the great food selection."

"You guys really helped me and the kids! The kids were so excited about the food we got. They wanted to eat everything!"

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Counselor Laura Dzugan, left, and Nutrition Services Coordinator Brooke Harvey, at right, stand with a resident of the Upper Perkiomen Manor in Red Hill. Residents there can now order food remotely from the pantry and have it delivered to their door.



Message From the Executive Director



Stuart Bush, Ph.D.

We're Expanding our HSE Program!

At The Open Link we envision an Upper Perk-iomen community where everyone can flourish.

But it is difficult, if not impossible, to flourish without a good basic education. That is why The Open Link has long taught free High School Equivalency (HSE, aka GED) preparation to help adults get their diploma and get ahead.

And for the past two years, since The Open Link became the first High

School Equivalency Test (HiSET) center in the county, our students have prepared and tested at the same location. This has raised our student's test-taking success rate to nearly 100%! Last year 8 students completed their High School Equivalency Diploma and 4 more have finished since July 1. We are on track to surpass last year's success with ~20 students currently enrolled.

Further, we are excit-

ed to announce an expansion of our HSE program! Starting July 1, we have moved from three 8-week sessions to four 10-week sessions: a 67% increase in instruction time. We have hired a new part-time instructor, Ms. Joclyn Cacacio, to join our lead instructor, Dr. Eve Puhalla, in delivering this additional instruction time.

The Open Link endeavors to help your Upper

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6TH ANNUAL
HOLIDAY
PARTY

Thursday,
Dec. 13

1
P.M.

You're Invited for
*Complimentary Light
Refreshments,
Fellowship and a
Concert by the UPHS
Choir*

RSVP by Friday, Dec. 7

215.679.6550 or email

programmanager@theopenlink.org



517 Jefferson Street
East Greenville, PA



Super Sponsor Spotlight: St. Luke's Quakertown

If you've traveled in the Quakertown area any time over the past year, you'd be hard pressed to miss the new and exciting things coming up for St. Luke's Quakertown campus.

The bright orange cones, high-pitched drum of jackhammers and the tall framing erected for a large multi-story structure all signal the construction of a new hospital is well underway at the intersection of Route 663 and Portzer Road in Milford Township.

"Two thousand nineteen will be a very big year in the history of St. Luke's Quakertown," said President Dennis Pflieger. "The new campus will provide easier access to St. Luke's services to the Upper Perk community."

Pflieger said the campus, which takes the place of the current hospital at 1021 Park Avenue in the borough, will have all private rooms. They will provide a place for families and loved ones to visit. The hospital will also have the latest in technology from an equipment standpoint and will include 40 beds of acute medical services for the first phase, 16 emergency department bays

and four operating bays.

For St. Luke's, it's an investment. Since partnering with Quakertown Hospital in 1995,

Luke's, you become a part of the St. Luke's family and we will be here for you whenever you need us."



Dennis Pflieger, left, president of St. Luke's Hospital—Quakertown, is recognized as a gold sponsor of The Open Link at a recent Community Partnership Breakfast. Pictured at right is Gerry Fioriglio, TOL board member.

the company has put about \$100 million into the region, including developing services at the Upper Perkiomen Outpatient Center.

"St Luke's has been and continues to be committed to providing the best services to the patients in the Upper Perk community," Pflieger said. "With our investment in the new hospital campus, we are continuing to ensure easy access to out hospital services. Expanded services to the Upper Perk Outpatient Center keeps many services close to home for you. When you choose St.

And part of being there for the people in the community translates to supporting The Open Link, Pflieger noted. St. Luke's is a gold sponsor for this year and has increased its support to become a platinum sponsor for 2019.

"As a health care provider, St. Luke's is committed to helping reduce health disparities and our partnership with The Open Link allows us to do that in the Upper Perk community. TOL's commitment to providing support services for individuals in need of food assistance, counseling, support

"Giving back to the community is so important because you have the opportunity to touch another person's life... and that good will has ripple effects through the rest of the community."

~ Dennis Pflieger

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Valued Volunteer: Alexa Quinn

For Alexa Quinn, it's easy to remember the first time she stepped into The Open Link's main office. She was interviewing for a job there as an administrative assistant.

She was a tad nervous but was highly qualified after working for the city of York as an assistant to the business manager. She had recently moved to the Upper Perkiomen Valley. While the interview went well, the job eventually went to someone else. Quinn said she didn't hesitate, though, to agree to come back as a volunteer for the organization.

"I saw what you were doing and I was like, 'That's really neat!' To me, where I came from, this was a rural area. I was quite surprised with all the need there is here. I don't know why, but I was. And I still wanted to help."

The East Greenville resident has volunteered her time

and talents in several roles since 2014. She currently staffs the front desk on Thursday evenings during HSE (high school equivalency) classes. There she

being at the front desk is hectic, but you get through it and there's always someone on staff to help you out. It's a lot of fun."



Alexa Quinn helps with administrative duties at The Open Link's main office and senior center.

helps with administrative duties and also proctors HiSET testing, where people who didn't finish high school can receive their diplomas from the state Department of Education. She's also done everything from helping out in the food pantry to surveying clients, to making phone calls for the annual Penny Auction fundraiser to entering data into spreadsheets.

"Volunteering is rewarding," Quinn said. "Sometimes

Dr. Eve Puhalla, head instructor for the HSE program, had high praise for Quinn.

"Alexa is amazing. She is thoughtful and proactive. She intuitively knows what the next step will be when given a project and does what she can to take those next steps. Alexa is involved in every aspect of the HSE program from recruiting and

registration to graduation. She literally is my right-hand-woman, doing anything that needs done. I have no idea what I would do without her!"

Quinn said seeing the students succeed, many of whom have had challenging circumstances in their lives, is gratifying. She noted the Open Link graduation ceremony at Upper Perk High School last May was particularly emotional.

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And the results are in...

Thanks to everyone who donated and came out to our 2018 Penny Auction held on Nov. 2, we raised a whopping \$11,481! Our best yet! We couldn't have done it without you!

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"They were so happy and that made me happy. We were also given a Thanksgiving dinner with everything we'll need, including a gift card for a turkey. You guys have really helped me. It was huge."

Amber said she turned to The Open Link once before for utility assistance and help with filling out forms. Now, though, she has a new job and things are finally looking up.

Another local family, who didn't want to be identified, said they, too, were grateful to receive a Thanksgiving meal consisting of a gift card, sweet potatoes, canned vegetables, gravy, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, pumpkin, stuffing and muffin mixes.

Despite both parents working full-time jobs, they can't pay their bills each month. Their family consists of two children and an elderly parent who lives with them.

"Our pay isn't that much but we were raised to work for what you have. We're not somebody just waiting for something for free," explained the Pennsburg resident. "The food pantry helps supplement what we can afford food-wise."

Open Link counselor Laura

Dzugan, who oversees the food pantry, said this time of year can be difficult for families who struggle to routinely put food on the table.

"For those families, the thought of needing to find a way to have extra food for a Thanksgiving meal can be very stressful. If we can take even a small piece of the stress away that these families feel, we want to do that."

Darlene also benefitted from a holiday meal this year. Suffering from a host of medical problems, which has put her on disability, she said receiving her Thanksgiving bags have put a smile on her face.

And she will tell you that the smiles haven't come easily the past several months. She had oral surgery in September and a lot of her teeth were extracted. She also suffers from ulcerative colitis. The steroids that treat her condition have done a lot of damage to her body, she noted, including deteriorating her bones and messing up her thyroid.

"But you helped me get things that I could eat, like canned chicken and tuna," Darlene said. "And I'm thankful in general because The Open Link helps me get through each month."

This year, TOL is on tap to pro-

vide more than 150 Thanksgiving meals to local families. And we're able to do that thanks to the generosity of our community.

"In my opinion, we have one of the most generous communities there is. We rely solely on the donations that we get from the community to put together these bags," Dzugan said. "Whenever we have a need for something, the members of our community come through for us in a heartbeat. Without their support, we would not be able to provide this meal to our clients."

Along with many individuals and families, the Boy Scout troops of the Upper Perkiomen Valley, Tri-County Federal Credit Union, Lechner and Stauffer, Frontier Girls, Lam and Associates, St. Mary's School in Schwenksville and area churches have all collected food and necessities on behalf of The Open Link for Thanksgiving and beyond.

Thank you for helping feed people in our community!

Do you know someone who could benefit from a Thanksgiving meal or the food pantry at The Open Link? Please ask them to call 215.679.4112 or email Laura Dzugan at laurad@theopenlink.org.

Want to Help Your Neighbors in Need?

The holidays are fast approaching and that means it's time for The Open Link's annual Thanksgiving Dinner, Adopt-A-Family and Christmas Room programs.

Make giving a tradition in your home!

For more information, visit
www.theopenlink.org or call Counselor
Laura Dzigan at 215.679.4112 or email
laurad@theopenlink.org.

Thanks for making a difference in our
community!



Three siblings pose with their new backpacks and school supplies thanks to the Back-to-School drive which wrapped up in September.

*Thank you to
everyone who helped
area children get
ready for school by
donating supplies.
We were able to
serve 160 kids this
year!*

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"I had tears. Graduation was so neat. There was a woman, maybe my age or older, and she had her own cheering section! She worked hard and she did it. I saw her again at Community Day and she was still, the glow...It was such an amazing accomplishment for all of our grads."

For Quinn, a proud grandmother of two grandsons, 3 months and 3 years old, the love for the mission is what keeps her coming back. She said it was difficult to narrow down, but would have to say the food pantry is her favorite program.

"It benefits so many people! We have a big elderly population, and I know, because I know what my social security is, that I couldn't survive off of it. So I can imagine these poor people, when they lose a spouse or whatever, the food pantry is a great thing. The High School Equivalency program too; I guess those two are tied. Because it's free! I mean they come, they have these tutors who are incredible, so knowledgeable. They spend one-on-one time with these people, if they need one-on-one, they get one-on-one. Where else are you going to get something like

that? It's incredible."

Thank you, Alexa, for your willingness to help people in need in our community. We couldn't do our work without volunteers like you!

For more information on volunteering at The Open Link, email Volunteer Coordinator Lynn Brearey at volunteers@theopenlink.org or call 215.679.4112.

Food Pantry Top Needs Thanksgiving 2018

- \$10 gift card to Weis/Redners for turkey or ham

- Canned Corn
- Canned Green Beans
- Stuffing
- Cranberry Sauce
- Canned Fruit
- Mashed Potatoes
- Canned Pumpkin
- Corn Muffin Mix
- Gravy
- Canned Yams/Sweet Potatoes

*Suggested deadline for Thanksgiving items:
Monday, November 12th.*

*Please make sure all donated items are
within a good expiration date. Thank you!*



Donations can be dropped off at The Open Link Main Office, 452 Penn Street in Pennsburg, during regular office hours: Monday-Friday, 8:00 am to 4:00 pm, and Tuesdays 8:00 am to 7:00 pm. For additional information, please call The Open Link at 215.679.4112 or visit us at www.theopenlink.org.

Thank you
donors!



Non-Profit
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Permit #10045

Main Office

452 Penn St.
Pennsburg, PA. 18073
Phone: 215-679-4112
Fax: 833-358-9301
Email: info@theopenlink.org

The Center

517 Jefferson St.
East Greenville, PA. 18041
Phone: 215-679-4112

www.theopenlink.org

“Opening Doors, Linking Communities, Helping Neighbors Flourish.”

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Perk neighbors attain their HSE diploma positioning them for better jobs and higher education: a world of possibility!

Something new! The Open Link has initiated a collaboration with the Upper Perk Library, RSVP, the Upper Perk School District and others to bring Family Literacy programming to our area.

“Reading to our children is the

number one thing we can do to prepare our children for academic success,” says Dr. Eve Puhalla. “Children who are read to from an early age outperform their non-read-to-peers in all areas of academics.”

We are planning a Family Literacy program kickoff event for early 2019: **Spring Family Fun Night**. The goal is to provide parent encouragement and training that supports family-wide reading in a proven, yet fun, manner.

And we need your help! Each family participating will receive at least 10 books. If we have 100 families participating, we will need 1,000 books! So, The Open Link is now accepting donations of new or gently used books for children, pre-K to young adult. Please drop off any donations at The Center at The Open Link, 517 Jefferson Street in East Greenville.

Thank you for your support!

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and education is so needed. By supporting these programs we believe we’re assisting in caring for the whole person.”

After reviewing the non-profit’s programs, hearing stories from partners in the area and seeing the effect it has on its clients, Pfleiger said St. Luke’s wanted to make sure TOL had additional financial resources to continue to impact the community.

While many things resonate with Pfleiger and St. Luke’s, he said TOL’s support for senior citizens and youth are so valuable. Meals on Wheels, Community Lunch, the food pantry and the Summer Lunch program all help ensure that local residents have access to nutritious food, he said.

“Giving back to the community is so important,” Pfleiger said, “because you have the opportunity to touch another person’s life. Whether it’s providing financially, offering your

time in volunteer service, or just lending a helping hand. You make a difference in a person’s life and that good will has ripple effects through the rest of the community.”

Thank you, St. Luke’s Quakertown Campus, for your investment in TOL and our community!

For more information on St. Luke’s visit their website, www.slhn.org, their Facebook page or call 215-538-4500.