



MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Updates and information from the Atlantic County Office

Celebrating Vicki Phillips' 40th year at MHA

Honoring 'a Powerhouse' and 'Pioneer'

By Beth Wade

Stories and photos from dozens of coworkers and community collaborators poured in via email and videoconference call to honor the long legacy of MHAAC Executive Director, Vicki Phillips, as the agency commemorated her remarkable 40 years on the job. Staff surprised her with an event to honor the milestone.

Her work is not finished yet, but the agency did pause to observe and recognize her achievements on February 25. Vicki received proclamations from both New Jersey State Assemblyman Don Guardian and Atlantic County Commissioner Amy Gatto at the Galloway office where flowers, decorations, and brunch marked the occasion.

Speakers that day described her as someone who kept her finger on the pulse of the community.

"I'd see a need and start a program to fill the need," Vicki recalled. "Then I'd look for funding to keep it going."



Assemblyman Don Guardian presents a proclamation to Vicki Phillips, Executive Director.

That proved to be a winning formula for providing housing and mental health services. During her time with the agency, she partnered with Collaborative Support Programs to provide 50 units of housing. She also developed wellness- and recovery-based services, such as the ICE Wellness Center (one of the original six in New Jersey), which expanded options for consumers.

More recently, she said an opportunity to partner with local police through the Crisis Intervention Team is ensuring that residents facing a mental health challenge are diverted from the criminal justice system and connected to services and programs.

Continued on page 2

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

CANINE ZOOM "BOMBERS"

PAGE 4

COMMUNITY BULLETIN BOARD

PAGE 5

GIRL SCOUTS PUT HEART INTO RECENT HOLIDAY

PAGE 7

PHOTO TRIBUTE TO VICKI PHILLIPS

PAGES 9,10

Continued from page 1

Moving forward, she hopes her work has a lasting effect for consumers and ignites passion for social workers.

"It's important for the next generation to love what they do as much as I have," she said.

If she aimed to trail blaze and inspire others, few could disagree that she succeeded.

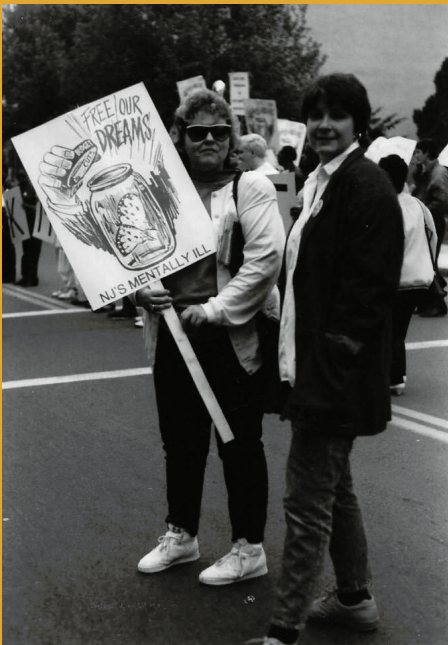
Carolyn Beauchamp, CEO of MHANJ, called Vicki a true "pioneer" who came on board without a manual at the time of change and transition, which some call the "deinstitutionalization" of mental health hospitals.

Vicki started with MHAAC in 1982 as the Director of Community Companions, which was a volunteer program. She recruited and trained volunteers to help and support people being discharged from Ancora Hospital.

Throughout her career, she encouraged consumers to advocate for changes, one of the first being to end the routine practice of fingerprinting individuals who were admitted to Ancora.

"I helped them with their speeches, drove them to Trenton," she recalled. "I'm not one of those people who needs to be out in front. I'm fine working on logistics behind the scenes."

Fighting for rights and social change came naturally to her as a person who grew up during the tumultuous 1960s and was raised by a hospital administrator and social worker whose values and work ethic helped mold her.



Vicki and Terri Becker of the NJ Self-Help Clearinghouse protesting in Trenton. Photo was taken in the mid 1980s.



Movements proved to be a theme throughout her four decades. Vicki was also part of the team behind the Peer Movement, which ultimately ensured that peers were included on treatment teams and valued as equals, not just employed as drivers or aids.

Another, now known as the Family Movement, is also part of her career story. Two local women reached out to her about facilitating a family support group, which ultimately evolved into Atlantic/Cape May NAMI and the Intensive Family Support Services program. These provide essential and critical support for families members of individuals living with severe mental illness.

One longtime coworker, Laverne Williams, described Vicki as a "powerhouse who comes along once in every 100 years."

MHANJ staff and coworkers from affiliate offices joined via videoconference call to celebrate the day with Vicki.



Amy Gatto, Atlantic County Commissioner, presents Vicki Phillips with a proclamation honoring her 40-year career at the Mental Health Association.

"I'm grateful for the work we've done," she said. "I've evolved in my job and continued to learn new skills while designing new programs that met the needs of the community. I wanted to make somebody's part of the world a little bit better through my work – that was always important to me."

More career highlights

- *Working in partnership with Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster, Cape Atlantic Caregiver Coalition, and American Red Cross to make an impact on our community*
- *Developed the "Hearing Voices" tapes used to train many professionals, including public health staff, state and local police, First Responders, Welfare Department staff, hospital employees, occupational therapy students, and others*
- *Active in the county's response to Hurricane Sandy 2012-2016*

Additional photos on pages 8, 9

**During National Social Workers month,
we recognize and honor these staff**



Vicki Phillips

Britt Huff

Mary Brown

Dena Tartaro

Linda Bastedo



Thank You!

*Social workers are listeners,
protectors, community organizers,
system navigators, helpers,
change agents, advocates, defenders,
counselors, voices, inspirers,
motivators, cheerleaders and coaches*

Online "awww..."

Pair of Pomeranians lighten and brighten groups on camera

By Beth Wade

This month we are featuring and saying a warm thank you to Debbie Weber and her popular Pomeranian pair that often pop up on camera during Zoom meetings.

"Autumn" is seen more often because she's the smaller of the two sisters and a lap dog. Her occasional tendency to turn around and show her tail and backside to the camera has brought a lot of levity and laughter to members of a few online groups, including Anxiety and Depression, Coffee and Conversation, and an After Lunch group.

A second dog, "Winter" also makes appearances from time to time, but Debbie has to point the camera to the floor to show her because she's a laid back, bigger dog and doesn't fit on the lap as well as her smaller sibling.

Both dogs are purveyors of pleasantries, but "Autumn" is clearly the camera hog.

"Regulars sometimes message me in the chat and ask how the dogs are doing," said Debbie. "Other times people who are new to the meetings have seen 'Autumn' said, 'I'm loving just watching her,' and ask her name," said Debbie.



Debbie Weber joined online support and wellness groups during COVID. Her dogs are welcomed "Zoom bombers" that sometimes dress up for their camera time.

At right: "Autumn" is the smaller sister who is most often on camera. Here she is pictured in her Halloween costume on Zoom back in the fall.



"Winter," the larger of the two dogs, gets camera time when Debbie points the camera to the floor. At 12 pounds, she is twice as big as her sister and less often on the lap.

Once in a while people have requested a "time-out," Debbie added, saying that people ask to pause the meeting to focus and enjoy whichever pup is on camera.

Pets, including dogs, have a way of lifting your spirits, she said.

An online highlight occurred near Halloween when Debbie and "Autumn" appeared in playful, devilish costumes. Sometimes "Autumn" wears special sweaters in the winter, too.

Debbie explained it would be practically impossible not to see "Autumn" on camera because her six-pound ball of fluff is somewhat of a fixture on her legs. When Debbie sits at her kitchen counter with the laptop, and group members start talking, "Autumn" naturally wants to be there, she says.

Debbie began attending groups during COVID after searching the Internet for online meetings. The meetings have created a social network of support and camaraderie that she treasures.

In addition to the Zoom meetings, "Autumn" and "Winter" enjoy riding in a basket on the front of an ATV that Debbie rides on trails near her home.

One more reason to smile!

Community Bulletin Board



South Jersey Players

Dinner Theater

Aroma Restaurant, Ventnor

Tuesday, March 22

Buffet and 5 short plays \$45

maymar47@aol.com

347-920-6399

Art Show

"Celebrate Atlantic Cape"

March 21-27

9am-7pm M-TH; 10am-3pm F-SAT

@ ACCC

William J. Spangler Library, D Building

See work by faculty, staff, & community members
in Cont Ed Workshops

Writing Salon

Northfield Library

Tuesdays 6 pm

Weekly writing group.

Different prompt each
week

Black Stories

Matter

Virtual Book Club

AC Library

Wed., March 30 4 pm

mmcgeary@acfpl.org

Bottle Mania

Discover the history of old bottles.

"Show and Tell" as well as learn
where to find and dig up your own.

EHC Library Thurs., March 24 @ 5:30 pm

Register egg HarborCityBranch@acsys.org

The Little

Mermaid

Absegami High

School

March 17-19



Watercolor Class

Sunday, March 20
Noyes Garage of
Stockton University
609 318-4676

**Acute Care Family
Program serves
families in crisis
7 days per week
Available 8 am to 8 pm
609 517-8614**

Support and assistance for families with a loved one in crisis and in need of linkage to treatment and other services.

Our team engages families who are often navigating the mental health system for the first time.

Staff educate families about mental illness and offer resources and referrals that can help their loved one

*Help is a phone
call away*



**Three online options for
movement, a boost of
energy, and eating better**

- **Healthy Habits
Wednesdays 12 pm**
- **Staying Active
Thursdays 11 am**
- **Eating Healthy and
Exercise
Thursdays 1 pm**

**United by Wellness
Online Wellness Center**

**Dozens of groups that can be
accessed by call-in or Zoom
All dimensions of wellness and recovery**

**Email unitedbywellness@mhanj.org
or call 609 652-3800**

**No cost
No insurance**

Putting extra HEART into a recent holiday

Local Girl Scouts prove they're even sweeter than their famous cookies

BY BETH WADE

Many Girl Scouts were busy selling cookies around Valentine's Day, but some made time to show community support through a sweet gesture to residents of boarding homes around the county.

Young ladies from Mays Landing, Northfield, Somers Point, and Linwood made homemade Valentines and art for 170 individuals.

Staff reached out to ask if they would make cards, but they did more -- with a lot of heart.

"They came through by providing art, candy, and flowers as well," said Britt Huff, Director of Wellness and Recovery Support Services. "A huge shout out and thank you to our local girl scout troops for going above and beyond to bring love and joy to members of community boarding homes."

MHA office staff picked up balloons and baked goods -- individually wrapped cheesecakes and chocolate chip cookies. Together, we covered this year's Valentine's Day with all the best traditions.

The troops who partnered with us for the Valentine's Day project were Troop #10128, #10137, #11068, #11057, and #11140. Special thanks to the leaders and Girl Scouts.



Members of Daisy Troop #10137 work on heart-themed art for residents of boarding homes.



Top left: Interns Ashleigh Zappala, Yvonne Tran, and MHAAC's Britt Huff get ready to deliver to a boarding home. Top right: Girl Scout troop #11140 make cards.



Bottom left: Member of Brownies #11057 works on "stained glass" window art.



March is Women's History Month

Check out our Facebook page to read more about the inspirational women who made a difference in mental health

Thank you to our interns Ashleigh and Yvonne for putting together this important project!



*A note from Bern on the
Modern Self-Love series*

*thank
you*

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the online campaign! I know you poured your hearts into your submissions.

I'm grateful for all the authors who read their self-love stories and reflected on the writing process at our March 1 "Evening of Self-Love." Many submitters shared that writing their self-love story was cathartic and opened up insights they would have not reached otherwise.

Also wanted to appreciate the audience for their encouragement & praise for the readers. The vulnerability of our members was inspiring, as it reflected the heart of this campaign, which is to bring us together and closer to ourselves.

For a free virtual copy of the
2022 Modern SELF-Love submissions, email
Bern at btrendler@mhanj.org

Vicki Phillips
40 Years in Photos



Bob Kley,
current COO of
MHANJ, with
Vicki at
Candlelight
Vigil 1998



MHANJ staff retreat Cape May NJ
1985



MHA-Atlantic Holiday staff appreciation 1996



Joe Cinko, Peer Support Team,
with Vicki



SJ Aids Alliance Tree Decorating
Contest at Caesars AC 1999
"It Takes a Village"



MHA staff 1998

More photos...



Vicki honored the Red Cross in 1998 during the Evening of Wellness



Brigantine Mayor Phil Guenther and Assemblyman Frank LoBiondo are pictured with NJ Hope and Healing workers following Hurricane Sandy.



Thanksgiving dinner prepared by MHA staff. Best day of the year!



Brig Strong, our partners during Superstorm Sandy recovery work



ICE Wellness Center picnic 2013

The person is a success who has lived well and loved much; who has gained the respect of peers and the love of the community; who has filled their niche and accomplished the task; who leaves the world better than they found; who looked for the best in others and gave the best they had.

Adapted from Robert Stevenson

Congratulations, Vicki! -Your staff

A STATEWIDE VIRTUAL WELLNESS CENTER



**United by
Wellness**

a virtual wellness center

CREATED BY: MHANJ'S
INDIVIDUALS CONCERNED IN
EFFORT (ICE), JOURNEY TO
WELLNESS (JTW) & ESPERANZA
WELLNESS CENTERS

**UNITED BY WELLNESS (UBW) OFFERS PEER-LED
SUPPORT GROUPS FOR ANYONE & EVERYONE!**

**UBW CREATES A SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN A VIRTUAL
ATMOSPHERE AS WELL AS CREATES A UNIQUE WAY TO
FIND SUPPORT.**

**80+ FREE Peer-led Support Groups
7 days a week**

**Group topics covering all dimensions
of wellness & recovery principles**

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW TO REGISTER PLEASE CONTACT UBW:

WWW.MHAAC.INFO/UBW **✉ UNITEDBYWELLNESS@MHANJ.ORG** **☎ 609-652-3800**

Community
Advocates/POST
One-to-one supportive
service designed to
help individuals with
their self-identified
goals for linkage to
health and mental
health services, apply
for entitlement
programs, and/or
discover support and
socialization activities.

We welcome
participants who use
the program to help
support their emotional
well-being while
searching for and
securing clinical mental
health appointments.

Call Britt Huff
609-652-3800 ext. 308

**Mental health screening is a helpful tool and
a quick way to "check in" with yourself**

***Depression screening, anxiety, PTSD, youth screening
A dozen types available online***

www.mhaac.info/screening
Quick, anonymous, no cost