**Collecting Holiday Gift Bags!**

The holidays are coming and we are collecting gift bags for our members! The gift bags will contain a $25 gift card to a store (i.e. Target, Walmart or others), hats, gloves, and a handwritten holiday card.

We would ask for the gifts by December 15, 2018. If you can help, please drop off these gifts at our front desk or call 518-449-7119 to coordinate a pickup!

---

**Director’s Message**

On November 1, 2018 the Albany Damien Center celebrated one year in our new home at 728 Madison Ave! It seems like just yesterday when the contractors were taking their tools and equipment out of the building, while our new residents who were homeless up until that morning, passed them on their way in to their new fully furnished apartments.

The first few months here were difficult. Having 22 persons who were homeless and not accessing medical and support services move in at the same time created many challenges. Plus, we had our over 400 members from the community struggling with HIV/AIDS who came to our drop-in living room for services starting at 8 AM until 6:30 PM.

Trust is something not given easily by the people we serve, but something that is earned over time. But true to our Damien Center history, mission and vision, we have created a loving sanctuary space in all areas of our new building purposely designed to be warm, friendly and loving.

One year later, the magic of the Damien Center is working hard. The tenants and members now share in a community they contribute to with respect, trust, and a love for helping each other.

But even under the best of circumstances, the holidays can be hard for so many of our people who are just beginning to rebuild trust and their lives. It is a journey we help them with and your support of the Damien Center is critical to helping us do our work.

We appreciate your on-going support - and I ask each of us to think of how fortunate many of us are this holiday season and commit to share that good fortune and love with others in need.

Sincerely,

Perry Junjulas, Executive Director & Person with AIDS

---

**Apartment Facts**

- All tenants have HIV and were homeless prior to moving in. Most have other chronic health conditions that complicate their daily living.
- Tenants were not accessing medical care or taking their medications prior to moving in.
- Tenants pay 30% of their income toward rent.
- Each apartment is fully furnished, complete with a comfy bed, dressers, stove, fridge, and all the household items (bedding, plates, silverware, etc...) that make each apartment a home thanks to your support!
- Tenants join other Damien Center members for meals each week—a hot breakfast, lunch and dinner made from scratch in our kitchen by our Chef’s Claire & Trevor.
- Kitchen—each apartment also has its own kitchen area, complete with stove, fridge, and cooking items.
- Design is warm & cozy – just like home!
Why PAWS is so Important to Me

When I first moved into my apartment, someone in the building left and abandoned this cat, who was a stray but also tamed. We went down to clean and found her. She was so small and beautiful, like she already knew who I was and wanted to be mine. I named her Cinnamon. I don’t have a family and kids, with my illness and everything I never really had the chance. When this cat kept coming back to my apartment I ended up adopting her. While I had Cinnamon, the Damien Center on South Lake burned down, but because of Diane [the PAWS Program Coordinator] I never lost touch with PAWS during their whole move and the rebuilding and all that.

PAWS helped me a lot - I live on a pretty limited income; the pet food, vet vouchers, and free clinic are so important because I wouldn’t be able to afford them by myself. Not only that, but Diane and Jessie’s [the PAWS Assistant Coordinators] pet wellness information and presentations taught me a lot, too. I know about how, since I’m HIV+, that I have to look out for a lot of issues that could end up hurting me, like a scratch or bite. I also know how to take good care of my cats. I know how to cut their nails, how to protect the cats from heat stroke in the summer. Every time I had an issue I would call Diane and learned the rest from her.

Everybody in town knew Cinnamon, she had such a personality on her. She even kept me in check. When I was doing something wrong or making a bad decision she would just give me a look. Then one day Cinnamon got sick all of a sudden. She was about 15 years old. I was able to go to the free PAWS clinics with Dr. [David] Chico. He found out that she had a lung issue and a bum side that was causing her pain.

After a few more weeks, I called Diane because I knew it was time. I was so glad that the vet was able to make her relax. I don’t like to show love on the outside, but I loved Cinnamon. She adopted me. Diane, with the help of PAWS support, paid for the ashes. I spread her ashes because I know she wants to be free.

The Albany Damien Center is full of good people. They listen, they care, they even helped me with the grief of losing Cinnamon. I know that doctors and vets all leave, but Diane and Jessie and Perry have been here this whole time. They keep me coming back to the Damien Center. I feel comfortable here. I’m a pretty proud individual, and it’s tough for me to open up to my primary care doctor. Here, the staff work with me and help me to talk about it.

I used to stay in bed for most of the day, now I come to the nutrition classes, I come in on Thursdays for the pantry bag pick-up, I make sure to take my pills, get my exercise, and my cats Spanky and Cisco (Cinnamon’s kittens!) keep me pretty active too.

Something about getting up and getting moving makes me feel good and happy to be here.

- Pasqual, PAWS Member and Monthly Donor to the PAWS Program

To donate to help PAWS, please contact Jonathan Richardson at JonathanR@AlbanyDamienCenter.org or 518-449-7119

Thank you to the volunteers who attended our Volunteer Cruise!

We leverage our funding and our community’s love by having volunteers assist in all areas of running the Damien Center. Thank you to all our volunteers who continue to give of their time, talents and treasures!!!

Remembering Mike Losinger

The first Damien Center was housed in a former Sunday School room at Grace & Holy Innocents Episcopal Church in Albany in 1988, functioning as a drop in-living room for those infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. It offered hospitality, socialization, support, and information, and was staffed by volunteers from local faith communities and social worker Peg Stucky. Mike Losinger was one of the initial organizers and the founding board president.

When Mike and a few others decided to start it, my friend Gail Dieter and I were on the original board. I believe the idea crystallized in Mike’s mind when attending one of the first National Episcopal AIDS Coalition conferences. The stigma at that time was exponentially higher than now; a safe place with others in the same situation, hospitality from volunteer parent/family “substitutes” and gratis counseling was a critical need.

Following Mike’s passing in 2013, family and friends worked together to create a tribute for a man who touched our lives in so many ways, as their spouse, friend, family member, coach, instigator, boss, mentor and colleague. In our efforts, we dedicated this living room to create a lasting memorial to Mike. The original center was just the living room and the focus was hospitality -- one of Mike’s and my high philosophical/ethical/theological values.

We created a fundraising page, mailed a letter to family and friends and organized a reception in the living room to raise funds towards our $20,000 goal. Personally, it was great rediscovering and reconnecting with a lot of people; having a tangible and useful way to memorialize Mike.

-Bob Englert, Mike’s Husband

If you are interested in holding a fundraiser to name a room after a loved one at our new building - we can help!

Please contact Jonathan Richardson at JonathanR@AlbanyDamienCenter.org 518-449-7119, EXT. 213

AIDS Walk & Festival

Saturday, April 13, 2019
Washington Park Lakehouse

World AIDS Day is observed each year on December 1 and is an opportunity for people worldwide to unite in the fight against HIV, show their support for people living with HIV, and remember those who have died. Started in 1988, World AIDS Day was the first ever global health day. At the Albany Damien Center, we are also celebrating a year in our new building and 30 years of serving our local community.

Join us on December 1 from 3-7 PM for our Open House and Candlelight Vigil event. The event will include:

- Open house and tours from 3 to 5 PM & 6 - 7 PM
- Candlelight Vigil at 5 pm
- Light refreshments and snacks

This event is free to attend but RSVP is encouraged. RSVP online at www.albanydamiencenter.org/special-events

Save the date for the AIDS Walk & Festival event! This revamped event will have an expanded community wellness fair, complete with food, entertainment, and amazing local resources! Our new Community Engagement Intern and UAlbany MSW student Nick Cramer will be leading the event, and looks forward to establishing an authentic local experience that will help connect and serve the Capital Region community.

For more information or to find out how you can help, please contact Nick Cramer at NickC@AlbanyDamienCenter.org or call 518-449-7119, Ext. 212