Annual Message from the Board President

It is with fondness and great appreciation that I address our donors and supporters as the Board president of the West Haven Community House for the last time in this 2013 Annual Report. This board and our West Haven community have truly been blessed for more than seven decades by the programs offered by the Community House. For this, I recognize our dedicated staff and management team, fellow board members, city and state officials, the local school administration and Board of Education, parents, clients and you, our faithful donors and supporters.

I have been aided during my three-year presidency by a tremendous effort and team approach of everyone cited above - because when it comes to the health and welfare of those in our community, and those who need a hand, I believe we are all in this together in West Haven.

In my June 2013 fiscal year ending message, I noted my sense of pride in what has been accomplished through the years since the agency was founded in 1941, when the organizers including our founder Pauline Lang “stood together” for the good of West Haven.

Today, we are helping at-risk pre-school children get ready for kindergarten.

Today, we are helping make lives better for adults with developmental disabilities.

And together we are helping families cope with child care issues in the critical hours before and after school.

A full 72 years later, we are all still standing together, but our work is far from done. If one thing is certain - there will be challenges, some critical, in the months and years to come. We certainly had our share in 2012-2013. Two major weather events, Hurricane Sandy on Oct. 29, 2012, and the Blizzard of 2013 on Feb. 8 and 9, 2013, wreaked havoc, not only closing programs but testing our resources and facilities.

The blizzard blanketed upwards of 30 inches of snow on West Haven, yet our maintenance staff rose to the occasion, aided by our private snowplowing companies. We again came through both storms with very little damage - but we were lucky, this time.

In January 2013, the federal government financial sequester began, resulting in a 5% reduction in federal funding for our Head Start preschool program. To address this, we were forced to cut the number of preschool students we could enroll going forward. Working together with our board Head Start committee, Parent Policy Council and management staff, we put together a plan that retained the integrity of the program, one that continues to prepare at-risk pre-school children for success in kindergarten.

Similarly, with program space issues continuing to affect how we offer our before and after school Child Care program, we continue to partner with school administrators and the Board of Education, addressing these issues head-on in every school, while continuing to move the program forward all the while ensuring that children are safe, and creatively engaged in the hours when parents and guardians may be otherwise unavailable.

Meanwhile, our services for adults with developmental disabilities continues to serve this population, offering them many opportunities to integrate meaningfully in the community, as well as live in group homes staffed 24/7 by caring staff.

We are also thankful to third party grant funders, like the Werth Family Foundation, and the state of Connecticut for making our Positive Youth Development after school enrichment program possible.

Our partners at the Community Development office not only earmarked funds to support our after school enrichment program, but also approved funding in the Spring of 2013 to install backup electrical generators at two of our group homes in the city so that during periods of electrical service outages we will not have to relocate our residents.

Mayor John Picard was also a tremendous advocate for us, not only leading by example in supporting our special events, but acting as a liaison between major funders including Yale University and the University of New Haven, securing thousands of dollars benefitting our clients. And many thanks to our universities, and our state representatives and senator, too, for their advocacy.

I also thank the many civic and private organizations, our vendors and individual and corporate supporters, like the Elks Club, the Rotary Club of West Haven, ConnectiCare, the United Illuminating Co., the Southern CT Gas Co., the Archdiocese of Hartford and religious community, as well as the Walmart Foundation, McDonald’s of West Haven, Stop & Shop of West Haven, Eder Bros., the Knights of Columbus, Rose & Kiernan and more.

So in conclusion, I thank my fellow board officers and members, our new Board President Stacie Phan, Executive Director Patty Stevens, our great staff and all our donors for making my three-year tenure as Board president both memorable and meaningful. And I look forward to joining with them and you as we continue together to move the Community House and West Haven forward.