

BELOVED COMMUNITY NEWS

Gaithersburg Beloved Community Initiative (GBCI) at Asbury Methodist Village (AMV)

GBCI Programs in Times of COVID

Despite many unknowns and challenges, GBCI has continued to offer some of its programs, albeit with new twists and some turns. In this newsletter, we share updates on our various programs. **REMEMBER—We welcome you to get involved! A strong community depends on engaged citizens!**

English Conversation Group – Alone Together!

When the English Conversation group started out 10 years ago little could they have predicted that one day they would deliver programs virtually. Here we are in 2020, and not only are they doing that but also being led by one of their early participants, Milagro Flores (Mily), who is now the leader of GBCI partner organization Mujer Fuerza y Coraje.



The August/September “blood, sweat and tears” of recreating a program to work virtually and then putting in the training hours to learn Zoom paid off for the volunteers as they welcomed adult “students” back to their virtual classroom the first week of October. With hard work and determination of key people—Mily, GBCI program leader Georgia Portocarrero, tech support guru/AMV resident Dave Dammen and 13 fabulous volunteers—the group learned to use Zoom and create a meaningful virtual program, now in its 5th week.

Zoom screen shots of some participants

Each session starts with a big welcome, large group announcements and the sharing of community resources. The large group of about 40-45 people is divided into beginner and intermediate and more intimate conversations and practice takes place in small breakout rooms. So far the group has covered a range of topics, including COVID-19 and the presidency. All miss being together in person but recognize the many benefits of being together virtually.

Mily sums up the sentiments beautifully: “For many years our English conversation class has worked to help the Latino community perform better in their daily and work activities by reinforcing English language learning. It’s a very successful and persevering group! Over the past months, our life perspectives have changed and we have had to adapt and face great challenges, with one of the greatest being technology (both for our participants and our volunteers). I am completely surprised how our volunteers have responded to the demand to learn new technology. They have put in many long hours of training, resulting in a great group of very dedicated and organized volunteers above all willing to continue contributing to the community with a lot of love and patience. It is fantastic to see how they work together. We are very blessed that even in such difficult times there is a group of volunteers giving their time and knowledge. We are all learning and walking together, with a single goal: love for each other and hope for a better future.”



For more information:

Michele Bulatovic, Director
301.216.4090
mbulatovic@asbury.org

Spence Limbocker, Board Chair
301.216.5780
limbockers@gmail.com

Hal Garman, Founder
301.987.6436
hgarman1@gmail.com

Mentoring Programs Move Outdoors

Participants Average a 10 on the Temperature Scale!

"I'm a 10 because I'm here!": a common pronouncement these days from the regulars who attend the GBCI outdoor mentoring program.



As GBCI participants know so well, program facilitator "Ms. Carien" (Quiroga) introduced an effective way for participants to gauge how they are feeling—with a temperature check. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being great and 1 not so good), they share their number with the option to explain why. "It gives us a quick way to assess how students are arriving into the group and, if we do the check at the end, we learn if the program had a positive effect," says Carien. She has been instrumental in moving the program outdoors and rethinking how to engage with students whose needs are different now that they are online and inside most of the day.

GBCI made the decision to move the programs outdoors when in mid-September MCPS announced its policy on virtual programming for organizations

"Probably the biggest difference this year is that we are providing a fun, communal, multigenerational experience in a time when those experiences have been sorely lacking."

— 8-year veteran mentor
Mary Jean Davidge



like ours. We decided that we could serve the students better by meeting them outdoors.

Armed with an infection prevention plan, GBCI got approval from Grady Management at Cider Mill to use a grassy area in its complex, and the City of Gaithersburg gave us permission to use the outdoor space behind the Olde Town Youth Center. We are ever so grateful to have several mentors willing to brave the outdoors.



They sense the enthusiasm that everyone has in being together safely outdoors. Sometimes even parents and siblings join in the activities.



Conversations on Race Continue at AMV

by Spence Limbocker

"These discussions have helped me begin to think about racism differently."

at up of have been meeting every other week. Led by a facilitator, each conversation has focused on a reading or video which participants study prior to the session.

The objective of the discussions has been to deepen our individual understanding of individual racism and structural/institutional racism. We believe that the conversations will lead to further actions or activities that will be decided by the groups themselves.

According to many participants, the most powerful materials were the Washington Post series on "George Floyd's America" and the video on "Deconstructing White Privilege" by Robin DiAngelo. Both of these helped the participants understand the explicit and implicit biases that we all have and the power of white privilege and structural racism that makes it difficult to address the issue of racism in the United States.



Participants engage in race conversations—socially distanced across the Asbury campus

Photo Credit: Jim Pearson



Some of the comments from participants were: "We need to realize that racism exists before we can do anything about it." "We take our white privilege for granted and I need to address this in my life."

The groups will develop some next steps in the next couple of weeks and more will be shared with the entire campus.

Group leaders meet via Zoom to discuss next steps

November Monthly Meeting Tales from the Front Lines: GBCI Volunteers Share Their Experiences Tuesday, November 24, 1-2:00 pm

On November 24, GBCI Founder Hal Garman will moderate a panel that includes volunteers:

- Jim Doyle, AMV resident, Middle School Mentor
- Peg Vert, AMV resident, English Conversation volunteer and founding member
- Carol Tyson, community member, GES Elementary School Mentor
- Rollie Smith, AMV resident, GBCI board member and leader of GBCI Neighborhood Action team

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301.987.6436
hgarman1@gmail.com

GBCI MONTHLY MEETINGS
Livestreamed for off-campus viewing
www.youravtv.com/gbcilive.htm

For on-campus viewing
AVTV channel 975



Food Distribution Efforts Going Strong

by Frank Lostumbo

On November 8, GBCI's newest project, the food delivery from Epworth United Methodist Church to the Cider Mill Apartments community, reached the 20-week mark. From modest beginnings on June 28 with three cars delivering to 20 families, the food deliveries have grown to serving 150 to 200 families on average.



As part of the Montgomery County Food Council, Epworth (and the Lord's Table Soup Kitchen) teamed up with GBCI to collaborate on distributing food to needy families in the Greater Gaithersburg area. A critical part of the food distribution program has been the delivery of food from key distribution areas to the residents, many of whom do not drive. On occasion GBCI has delivered to some 300 Cider Mill families with the help of 14 GBCI

volunteer drivers and an additional four volunteer drivers from the Cider Mill Resident Association, Safe Places|Lugaras Seguros, allowing for a well-organized transfer of food boxes every Sunday afternoon.

Over the past weeks, Safe Places has developed an efficient 30-member core team that helps with food distribution in Cider Mill and represents tenants on a wide range of issues from lighting & safety, sanitation & public health and maintenance. The real challenge to the program began on September 22, when the USDA announced a significant reduction in the weekly food allocation to the states. Montgomery County was reduced from 22,000 to 4,000 boxes per week. Thankfully, the Montgomery County Food Council was able to address this huge USDA shortfall by securing additional boxes from a produce company out of state.

However, November has been perhaps a sign of the ups and downs ahead. On November 1, a special supply of 450 boxes and 100 bags of food were provided requiring a fleet of 16 vehicles to deliver the boxes from Epworth UMC to Cider Mill. Then a week later there was a drastic reduction to 50 boxes and 30 bags, a level that



will likely continue for the rest of the month as the County is unable to continue to fill the huge gap in federal funds. Nonetheless, many of our drivers observed a beautiful scene the day of the shortfall as Cider Mill residents receiving food boxes began to share with those who had none. Their sense of community and reliance on each other has been a source of inspiration for many.



GBCI friends, neighbors and partners continue to provide resources for the project. We are also donating winter coats and various gifts for the children to support our neighbors. And GBCI is grateful to Faith United Methodist Church for providing funds to purchase durable food carts and PPE equipment for the project.

As December approaches supplies remain uncertain. Federal resources are essential for this program to continue as state and local resources have been severely depleted by COVID related costs. We are all fortunate to live in Greater Gaithersburg where the City and County agencies, many faith-based organizations and NGOs are working so seamlessly in support of each other and for all the residents.