



ALIVE! Food Hub: A Partnership

The ALIVE! Food Hub flung open its doors on May 26, in the West End of Alexandria, brought to life by a partnership between ALIVE! and the City of Alexandria. This mini-grocery store — offering groceries, personal grooming items, school supplies and more — is ALIVE!’s only brick-and-mortar food location, augmenting its current lineup of the Last Saturday food program, pop-up distributions, and the provisioning of food to pantries. The ALIVE! Food Hub’s goal is to be the wheel that connects people to where they can find help — including connecting people to volunteers who can help fill out applications for longer-term assistance, job placement services, health services, etc.

“May this be a space of love, a space of sanctuary.”

REV. TIM BOBBITT
First Christian Church

The first thing you notice is the Food Hub’s art. Welcoming murals in the entryway, provided by The Oasis Alliance, a local non-profit that transforms space into places where trauma survivors can heal, were created by local artists. The Oasis Alliance also provided some of the furniture and shelves, and arranged a children’s play area. The mural art was partially funded by a contribution from the West End Business Association.



Gerry Herbert, Rabbi Steven Rein and Joan Hartman Moore with Agudas Achim, Mayor Justin Wilson, Fazia Deen with Dar Al-Hijrah Islamic Center, and Rev. Tim Bobbitt with First Christian Church.



Ribbon cutting with Mayor Justin Wilson and city leaders.

“Thoughtful” was the word most mentioned by attendees at the ribbon cutting for the new store. Greta Gordon, consultant to ALIVE! for this project, asked community members and ALIVE! staff what they would like to see in the hub, ensuring a hospitable and logistically-savvy space. Clients will select their groceries according to a flow, designed by a team led by ALIVE! Program Operations Director Jose Amaya. On the bottom shelves are the heavy groceries; the refrigerated goods will be the last items to be bagged. Volunteers Christine Brown and Gerry Hebert also helped map out the flow of traffic in the space and made sure all the lights were turned on and repairs made before the doors were open.

“ALIVE! is the Swiss army knife that the city turns to when we need help; it never lets us down.”

MAYOR JUSTIN WILSON

Small things matter. The client focus group revealed a strong desire to choose spices at the store. Because flavorings are expensive, many people do without, denying cooks the pleasure of imparting their signature style to a dish. So ALIVE! plans to offer a spice selection when spices are donated. (For

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ALIVE! Food Hub *(Continued from page 1)*

information on donating food to the hub, visit alive-inc.org.) Choice also extends to clients' ability to select groceries they prefer, which reduces food waste. Fresh fruits and vegetables are also stocked regularly.

Through the listening sessions, Gordon received feedback on what hours suit the clientele, how they will transport pounds of food to their homes, and whether they would bring their children.

Yes, children will feel at home, since there is a nook with a table, puzzles, books and toys; non-school age children typically accompany parents on shopping trips. Older children can help carry food home.

People in the communities served by this hub are encouraged to volunteer. The community partnership will be nurtured and strengthened when shoppers see their neighbors involved at the hub, leading to increased use of this resource. Clients who are welcomed to this space for food are encouraged to meet with volunteers and staff when they are there about other things they may need assistance with.

“This place lifts up hearts and souls.”

ROLF BLANK
ALIVE! Board Vice President

Recognizing that the Van Dorn Station Shopping Center location is difficult for north Alexandria neighborhoods to reach, ALIVE! hopes to open a second food hub in the Arlandria/ Chirilagua area in the future.

Made possible with funding from the American Rescue Plan Act, the Food Hub is the “one stop shop” that not only provides food, but connects Alexandrians with support services from ALIVE!, the City, and other non-profits. With their children playing in the nook a few feet away, visitors have access to rental assistance; emergency family assistance; and food delivery for the elderly, persons with a disability, and single parents. Services offered by the City of Alexandria — such as SNAP eligibility, housing, or childcare — will be advertised via a monthly Food Hub schedule.

Rooting this operation in partnership with a host of Alexandria non-profits, volunteers, and the City will keep this ALIVE! hub alive and growing,” Shelley Spacek Miller, ALIVE!’s Director of Client Services, said.

FOOD HUB HOURS:

- Tuesday through Thursday, noon - 6:30 pm
- Friday and Saturday, 10 am - 1 pm.

HOW DOES THE HUB’S ART AFFECT YOU?



The colors of Ricks’s mural echo those of the ALIVE! logo.

PHOTO BY KARL BACH

First, you experience the colors — bright and welcoming. As your brain makes sense of the murals, there’s an “aha!” moment when you decipher the affectionate and maternal imagery, prompting an emotional response, perhaps.

Most noticeable as you enter the Food Hub is the outsized tufted titmouse. The artist **Eric B. Ricks**, a premiere mural artist located in Wheaton, Maryland, was inspired by the bird’s caring expression. The butterflies symbolize agents of change, according to the artist, and the mural puts “a brighter spin” on a place and a situation that Ricks is familiar with. At age 13, Ricks and his mother fled war-torn Liberia and



"Each individual will take from the mural what they will," Eddie noted.

PHOTO BY KARL BACH



Benay used her preferred color, turquoise, which blends well with other murals' ALIVE!-themed colors.

PHOTO BY KARL BACH

subsequently made their way to the U.S., where food pantries like ALIVE!'s "that give you the dignity to shop for what you need" were not an option.

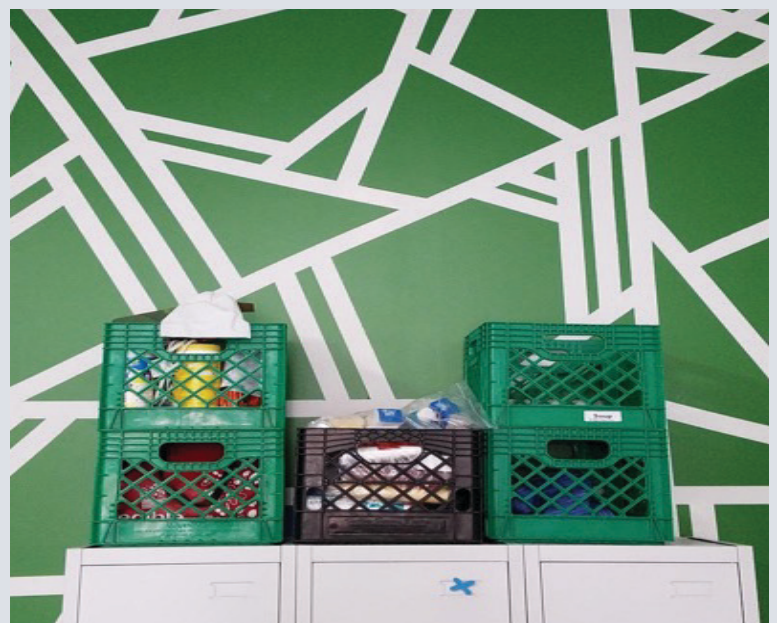
The Oasis Alliance tapped Ricks and other local artists to transform the space and created some of the murals themselves. "We co-create personalized spaces that encourage and support recovery, growth, and mental well-being," according to **Danielle Woodhouse Johnson**, The Oasis Alliance's CEO.

Eddie Harris, a native of Alexandria, with a studio in northwest D.C., created an origami design reflecting the bond between a parent and child.

To delight Arabic speakers, **Benay L. Walker**, an Arabic Calligraphy muralist with BLingual, based in Mount Rainier, Maryland, rendered the Arabic word for "alive" into a heart shape. The Arabic translation looked like this: **عالة حي ق دي ل** and was transformed into the art shown in picture at left.

Even the Food Hub's back walls get the full treatment. The Oasis Alliance's Johnson improvised on ALIVE!'s tree logo on the far wall. Working with her daughter, the artist used Kelly green paint and white geometric lines to bring serenity to the space.

Radiating hospitality, this food hub is open for business and ready to serve.



A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

When the last issue of the ALIVE!Wire came out, we were eagerly awaiting the opening of the new Food Hub. As the front page article makes clear, that opening has taken place and the reality has exceeded all our expectations. ALIVE! and the City can be proud of this bright, welcoming location. Residents are heading to the Hub for food and additional services in ever increasing numbers.

While the opening of the Hub, offering clients the opportunity to make their own choices in the food they take as well as connect with other resources, marks a bit of departure in the way ALIVE! serves its clients, much about ALIVE! remains the same.

One sign of continuity is our annual StepALIVE! Walkathon which will take place on Sunday, October 16. For 41 years, ALIVE! supporters have gathered (in-person or virtually) to support ALIVE! while enjoying fresh air and getting some exercise. Although there have been changes over the years, the basics remain the same. After an outdoor registration, live music, and rousing kickoff from First Christian Church, walkers will head down to Old Town on a route passing a number of our member congregations. Others may choose a somewhat easier route heading west on King Street and passing other congregations. When they return to First Christian, they will enjoy an outdoor celebration featuring more live music, tasty snacks, and a raffle with many desirable prizes.

The success of StepALIVE! 2022 is extremely important to ALIVE!'s continued ability to provide a safety net for vulnerable Alexandrians. Requests for help remain at or near the levels experienced during the peak of Covid. For us to be able to continue to respond, we need your help. Supporting ALIVE! through StepALIVE! is an easy and enjoyable way to do so. Please join us on October 16. Details on how to sign up are available at stepalive.org and elsewhere in this newsletter. We hope to see you on the 16th with your walking shoes on!



Mary Eileen Dixon

Mary Eileen Dixon
President



Jennifer Ayers

Jennifer Ayers
Executive Director

ALIVE! Leader Recognized

Former ALIVE! Representative for Saint James United Methodist Church, **General Wilma Vaught**, was honored with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in July.

Air Force Magazine reports that, over the course of a 28-year Air Force career, Vaught, 92, was “the first woman to hold every job she ever had.”

After her military career, the General served as president of the Women’s Memorial Foundation board of directors, spearheading the campaign that raised millions of dollars for the Military Women’s Memorial, located at the gateway to Arlington National Cemetery. Opened in 1997, this memorial documents the courage and bravery of millions of pioneering American women in uniform.



A new sound and look: ALIVE! House

Two of the current House residents have taken public speaking classes to improve how they present themselves, building confidence to better their job prospects; both are employed but looking for more suitable opportunities. Required to participate in classes offered by the educational resource **HEARD**, a nonprofit that imparts life skills to adults, residents are reporting positive outcomes.

Another positive: the spiffing up of the House has delighted the two resident families. **Rebuilding Together Alexandria**, a nonprofit volunteer organization, installed energy efficient LED lights throughout the House, prompting one resident to exclaim, “It’s incredible! It’s changed the feel of the whole space,” in describing the “skylight” effect in a formerly dimly-lit bathroom. The inside and outside improvements include newly-painted walls, child-friendly blinds, a beautified patio, mulch, and a re-stained deck. Also, **Thomas J. Fannon and Sons** generously installed a new hot water heater at cost.



IN MEMORIAM

— Cathy Thompson —



***ALIVE! remembers Cathy Thompson
who died on March 18, 2022.***

Cathy first became involved through ALIVE! House, managing intake volunteers, and then she had a leadership role with a mentoring program benefiting low-income residents.

She served two one-year terms as President of ALIVE! and organized the last Saturday food distributions in the West End – first at Samuel Tucker School and then at Church of the Resurrection.

Cathy remained active with the organization, running the Personnel Committee where she was a vocal advocate for a living wage.

Cathy also was quite involved in setting up Carpenter’s Shelter and helped to set up the system for evening meals at the Shelter – essentially recruiting churches by getting each to agree to provide one meal a month. Together with an associate rector at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church with whom she had become friendly, she also set up David’s place.

Loving wife to Larry Thompson, ALIVE!’s current treasurer and longtime Finance Committee Chair, Cathy will be missed by all who knew her.

HAPPINESS IS A FULL CLOSET

“The housewares closet is my happy place,” enthuses Janese Bechtol, head of the ALIVE! Housewares Program. ALIVE! Housewares Program assists Alexandrians moving into places of their own by providing basic housewares received from generous donors like you. When delivering a bed to a mother and her two children transitioning from a shelter, Janese was gratified to see the previously-delivered housewares being put to good use, down to the ALIVE! dish towels hanging neatly on the oven door.

“I love sorting and organizing but the times didn’t work out for me to participate in the Housewares program until 2021.” Up until then, she donated housewares and volunteered as a Spanish translator at the West End Last Saturday food distributions.

On February 6, 2021, Housewares ended its COVID hiatus with a huge donation collection at Fairlington United Methodist Church (FUMC), Janese’s church home. The proceeds filled the Housewares closet at FUMC, the basement of Fairlington Presbyterian Church, and ALIVE! offices at First Christian Church. Janese began assisting the volunteer team sorting this bumper crop of items and

distributing them at free sidewalk giveaways. Once Janese officially became Program Chair in July, her first task was to slim the inventory in the closet to a manageable and usable level. It soon became a family affair: Janese often relies on her husband’s greater knowledge of kitchenware to figure out the purpose of specialized utensils, the identity of mystery gadgets, and the operation of complex tools such as a vegetable chopper with ten attachments.

Janese is joined by Ellen Baylis who, among other tasks, collects the donations dropped off at Sunrise Senior Living in Old Town. Donors can also drop off items at FUMC by appointment. Appointment donations typically yield the most usable and popular items since the contributions are vetted in advance.

For those setting up housekeeping, the greatest needs are always medium-size sauce pans and skillets, flatware, manual can openers, measuring cups and spoons, and trash cans. Donations that are clean and in good condition can be dropped off at the Sunrise Senior Living of Old Town front desk (400 N. Washington St) daily from 10am to 3pm, or by appointment at FUMC. You can learn more at: www.alive-inc.org/housewares-donation-alexandria-va

Helping ALIVE! Help Others

ACT for Alexandria (ACT), a community foundation that creates change through strategic initiatives and effective philanthropy, supports ALIVE! in many ways, including:

- Raising \$93,225 during Spring2ACTion 2022
- A \$5,000 mental health and wellness grant to support ALIVE! staff, in early June
- Federal rent relief funding during the pandemic, in concert with the City of Alexandria
- Convening trainings and workshops with ALIVE! staff and community partners around racial equity and inclusion
- Matching philanthropic partners with organizations like ALIVE! to help fund vital services and programs through ACT’s team of donor advisers

“ALIVE! mobilized to provide food, eviction relief, and other services, becoming the anchor of Alexandria’s COVID relief efforts,” said ACT’s Chief Program Officer Brandi Yee. “We can’t imagine what we would do without ALIVE!”

From tragedy, ACT was brought to life. In the fall of 2002, Alexandria philanthropists started a conversation about how to support local nonprofits to make a collective difference. Tragically on 9/11, Norma Lang Steuerle had died onboard American Flight 77 when it crashed into the Pentagon; her family donated part of the subsequent legal settlement to jumpstart ACT.

ACT is perhaps best known for its annual fundraising drive, Spring2ACTion, improving our community’s ability to deliver crucial services for everything from vaccine outreach to support for at-risk youth. Over the past 11 years, Spring2ACTion has raised more than \$15 million for the Alexandria nonprofit community. This year, 7,700 donors gave \$2.6 million to 172 participating nonprofit organizations through Spring2ACTion.





Rick Glassco (left) at his retirement celebration.

ALIVE! Leader Retires

When **Rick Glassco** was honored as a Living Legend of Alexandria in 2014, it was noted that the position of treasurer was one of the most difficult nonprofit positions to recruit for, yet Rick has favored ALIVE! with 30 years of steadfast and inspired work as its treasurer. Rick's outstanding work in putting together the annual budget, producing easy-to-understand reports, and taming administrative costs drew on talents that will be difficult to replace.

Rick has witnessed the transformation of ALIVE! from a start-up to a three-million dollar a year safety net. He notes that the organization began with all volunteers and volunteerism is built into its DNA, but it has grown larger and more complex, necessitating the addition of professionals in the ranks. For example, Rick's replacement as treasurer is a CPA firm.

"An incredible outpouring of time and skills over the years is responsible for making ALIVE! remarkable," according to Rick. In 1969, there were only 14 congregation members, now there are over 50 congregation and community organization partners, but "religious motivation" is still the inspiration. He marvels at how ALIVE! can help people with many needs, not just food. A client can, in one place, stock up with food at the new Food Hub and also receive rent assistance and counseling; or an individual exiting ALIVE! House can seamlessly be provided with furniture, housewares and food.

Pre-pandemic, Rick enjoyed in-person board gatherings at different member congregations to learn more about different faiths, making friends in the process.

RENT RELIEF

As of this summer, the number of Alexandrians facing eviction is the highest since January 2021, and Shelley Spacek Miller, ALIVE!'s Client Services Director, anticipates these numbers will only increase.

This surge comes at a trying time. The Virginia Rent Relief Program expired mid-May but tenants with approved applications submitted prior to the May 15 termination are in line to receive assistance. Laser focused on these applicants, the Alexandria Eviction Prevention Partnership (AEPP) is working to expedite payments to their landlords.

For those turning to AEPP after the mid-May deadline, Service Navigators connect them with emergency financial providers such as ALIVE! Family Assistance, congregations, and the City of Alexandria. In addition, ALIVE! is working with partners to administer a Virginia Eviction Reduction Pilot program in Alexandria. The financial assistance portion of this pilot prioritizes families at the highest risk of eviction, supporting them with up to \$5,000 in rental assistance, and service navigation.

Ongoing efforts to cover the shortfall due to the end of the state rent relief program rely on increased coordination of resources and "working smarter, not harder," according to Shelley. The workload is intense as 8-15 clients show up at each outreach session. The Navigators spend 50% of their time doing outreach; the rest of their time they check on the status of rent relief efforts.

"For the time being, the gap in funding is being adequately addressed by these community resources," Service Navigator Erika Gaitan noted. In May 2022, Erika was joined by a new Service Navigator, Daphne Dorange with the Alexandria Office of Community Services. Together they are building relationships with landlords to discuss how to ensure rent is paid before landlords start the eviction process.

For the fiscal year of 2022 that ended June 30th, ALIVE!'s Family Assistance program also distributed \$500,000 worth of direct assistance from private donors to help Alexandrians pay medical bills, utilities, and assist with rent.

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Alexandria, VA 22302

Nonprofit Organization
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Permit Number 567

ALIVE! *Wire*

Neighbors Helping Neighbors



The oldest and largest private safety net for Alexandrians living in poverty and with hunger, ALIVE! serves thousands of individuals each month by providing **Food, Shelter, and Emergency Help.**

Founded In 1969, ALIVE! is comprised of **49 faith organizations** and thousands of volunteers, partners and supporters.

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OCTOBER 16, 2022

Please help support our Alexandria neighbors in need by joining us for the **41st Annual StepALIVE! Walkathon.**

Start a team, register as a walker, or donate!
Register online at stepalive.org or onsite at StepALIVE!