

A publication of



MERRICK

Community Services

Growing. Stronger. Together.

Working Together to Brighten the Season

As the year comes to a close and cold weather sets in, many of us seek the warmth of tradition: exchanging gifts, cooking family recipes that have been passed down through generations, and spending quality time with loved ones.

Ideally, the holidays provide time to take a deep breath and reflect on the past year, but the season comes with pressures of its own. Especially

last few years, including mental health struggles, homelessness, and the tragic loss of several relatives. Resourceful and determined to provide for her children, she now works as a housekeeper and has a two-bedroom apartment, but every day is difficult. "My kids deserve so much," she says.

Keyandra and her family will be taking part in Merrick's Holiday Share event, December 16 and

of year. From delivering poinsettias to seniors to distributing new bikes to East Side youth, we know that if the community works together, a little generosity goes a long way toward making the season joyful for our neighbors.

Please join us in our mission to improve the lives of the residents of the East Side of Saint Paul by empowering individuals, strengthening families, and promoting their independence. Make a tax-deductible gift using the enclosed envelope, or give online at

merrickcs.org/donate/.

"A little generosity goes a long way toward making the season joyful."

for those who are struggling to make ends meet—who aren't sure if they can afford rent and groceries, much less gifts for their family—the stress of the holidays can outweigh the joy.

Keyandra, a mother of four on the East Side, has faced incredible challenges over the

18 at the Merrick Community Center. This annual celebration of giving provides toys and gifts to families facing poverty on the East Side.

People like Keyandra are the reason the staff and volunteers at Merrick Community Services go into overdrive this time

Best wishes for a safe and happy holiday season.

With Sincere Gratitude,

Daniel A. Rodriguez
Executive Director,
Merrick Community Services

Holiday Share - December 16 & 18

For more than 20 years, this festive two-day celebration of giving has provided gifts and basic needs items to hundreds of families facing poverty. Get involved by donating toys or volunteering at the event.

DONATE

Through December 11, donate new, unwrapped toys for children and teens by bringing them to the Merrick Community Center between 9 am and 4 pm, Monday through Friday.

Toys can also be dropped off at one of our partnering businesses around the community: Heppner's Auto Body, Donaldson's Uniform, Borchert's Meat Market, and Minnesota Music Café.

Contact Brandon Griffin at bgriffin@merrickcs.org or **651-219-5557** to schedule a toy drop-off. Visit merrickcs.org/holidayshare to sign up for volunteer shifts.

VOLUNTEER

1. Holiday Workshop, December 11-14

Thousands of toys donated by our dedicated supporters need to be sorted and organized for distribution to East Side Saint Paul families. This is a great volunteer opportunity for groups of 6-12, taking place at the Merrick Community Center Monday, December 11 through Thursday, December 14. Volunteer from 8:30 am to 1 pm or 12:30 pm to 4 pm.

2. Holiday Distribution

Help distribute gifts and household items to more than 700 families during our two-day Holiday Share event, Saturday, December 16 or Monday, December 18 from 8:30 am to 1 pm or 12:30 pm to 4 pm at the Merrick Community Center.

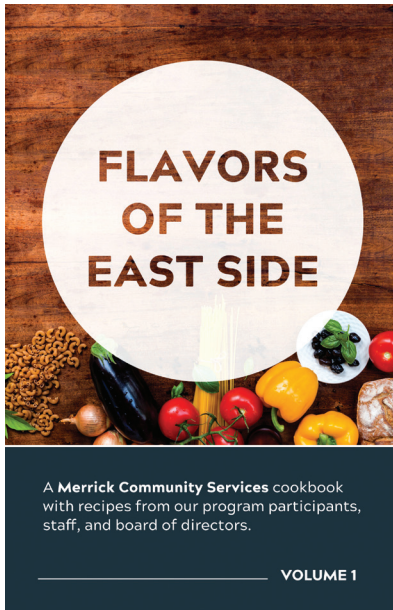
Adopt A Family

Take your giving a step further this holiday season by "adopting" a family in need of holiday gifts and basic needs items. Make a pledge to purchase all the items on their wish list by December 11.

Donors participating in the Adopt-A-Family initiative can choose to be matched with a family with anywhere from one to eight children.

If you'd like to make the holidays magical for a family on the East Side, contact Brandon Griffin at bgriffin@merrickcs.org or **651-219-5557**.





Donate \$20 or more to Merrick's food shelf and receive a copy of **Flavors of The East Side**, a Merrick Community Services cookbook.

Inside, you'll find a variety of recipes, from tater tot hotdish to Salvadorean pupusas.

All recipes were submitted by Merrick program participants, staff, and board of directors.

Make a gift at give.merrickcs.org/cookbook to reserve your copy today!

Sample recipe: Nigerian Coconut Rice

Submitted by Tina Olise

Ingredients:

2 cups long grain rice
1 can coconut milk
2 tablespoons cooking oil
Meat (if desired)
Chopped:
Carrots
Green bell pepper
Red bell pepper
Habanero pepper
Green beans
Onion
1 tablespoon tomato paste
1 bouillon cube
1 teaspoon curry
1 tablespoon thyme
Salt

Instructions:

1. Parboil (pre-cook) the long grain rice by boiling rice in 4 cups of water for 8-10 minutes, then removing from heat and rinsing.
2. Return rice to pot to continue cooking. Pour in coconut milk after rice is half-cooked to complete cooking.
3. Cook meat.
4. In a separate saucepan, heat 2 tablespoons cooking oil and pour in chopped carrots, green bell pepper, red bell pepper, hot habanero chili pepper, green beans, onion, and cooked meat. Stir all ingredients together and cover to cook.
5. Add 1 tablespoon of tomato paste, 1 bouillon cube, 1 teaspoon curry, 1 tablespoon thyme. Salt to taste.
6. Simmer for a few minutes. Pour the cooked vegetables and meat into coconut rice and serve hot.

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

Merrick partners with Meals on Wheels to deliver nutritious midday meals to people who are elderly or disabled, homebound, and unable to prepare their own meals. Volunteers deliver meals Monday through Friday between 10:30am - 12:30pm.

Individuals or pairs can sign up for a monthly “meal shift” (i.e. the first Monday of the month). Drivers will be assigned a route and will be in charge of delivering hot meals to seniors in their homes over the course of an hour. Some seniors enjoy socializing during the meal drop-off, others are happy just to see a friendly face. Volunteers must have a valid drivers license, have their own transportation, and must pass a background check.

Please visit merrickcs.org/volunteer/ to complete a volunteer application.



HealthEast Employees Clean Up Seniors' Yards in Time For Winter

On Saturday, November 4, forty volunteers from HealthEast mobilized to rake the yards of East Side seniors. It had snowed a few inches the night before, but that didn't slow them down. HealthEast employees and their families—including kids bundled in snowsuits and earmuffs—raked the yards of eight houses that day.

When one of the groups arrived at the home of Linda, a Senior Services participant, she waved at them from her open garage and the volunteers could see she was on the verge of tears. When they asked her what was

wrong, she said her sister had passed away the day before. Linda covered her face with her hands to hide the tears, and said she'd been worried the volunteers wouldn't come because of the snow the night before. She was so happy and relieved to see so many helpers.

The annual Fall Clean-Up is a powerful way to connect with seniors and help them stay in their own homes as long as possible. We are so thankful for this partnership with HealthEast that helps East Side seniors “age in place” with the respect and dignity they deserve.



Merrick Staff in the Spotlight: Val Neal Davis, Receptionist & Program Support



“I’ve had three or four jobs in my life, and they’ve all been about helping somebody.”

- Val Neal Davis

Fifteen years ago, Val Neal Davis interviewed for a position at Merrick Community Services and was offered the job the very next day. She remembers the phone call she received from Monica Bergdahl, the director of programs at the time. “She said, ‘How soon could you get to work?’”

Val has been working at Merrick ever since.

In many ways, she’s the face of the organization—the first person people see when they come through the door. If Merrick Community Services is a wheel with many spokes, Val is the hub of that wheel, listening to people’s needs and directing them to the right program area. She is always aware of resources available in the community, and maintains a bulletin board of job listings, educational opportunities, relief programs, and more. “I really enjoy giving people resources and saying ‘Hey, look at this. Don’t forget, the date’s

coming up. Let’s make sure you get there.’”

Val says her job has evolved quite a bit since she first started working at Merrick. “Needs are different,” she says. “I’ve seen a huge increase in homelessness from the time I started. Services like these are definitely needed even more.”

Val has always been oriented toward helping people, and over time she’s realized how much this desire is rooted in the way she was raised. “I grew up in a home with a number of foster brothers and sisters. My mother was a social worker for about 25 years. That was the beginning of me learning that there are people with needs, and we need to help them.”

As an adult, Val became a foster parent herself. She fostered three children, who are adults now. Her career, as well as her family life, has been focused on social service. “I’ve had three or four jobs in my life, and

they’ve all been about helping somebody,” says Val.

At Merrick, she’s a warm and welcoming presence for program participants, volunteers, and staff alike. She has a habit of calling people “sweetie” and “dear,” and has a knack for making people laugh. “The senior services participants come in here and we chat and we hug each other and we have a good time” says Val.

The fifteen years she’s spent at Merrick make her the second most senior staff member. Only Terri Wilcox-Larkee, accounting clerk, has been there longer. “Terri and I have worked together awhile, and we’re not only coworkers, but we’ve come to be pretty good friends,” says Val.

“All of the staff are really nice people to work with. They have the same concern for the community. They want to do everything they can do to help. It takes a village, and this is like a small village here.”

Now Seeking Applicants for Youth Leadership Council

Youth in grades 7-12 are encouraged to apply to serve on Merrick's Youth Leadership Council. The council will gather bi-weekly for development meetings with Merrick staff and participate in monthly engagement opportunities including volunteering, community outreach, and team building activities. This opportunity is ideal for youth seeking to build leadership skills and develop their resume.

For more information, contact Samuel Mihelich at **smihelich@merrickcs.org** or call **651-771-9339**. Apply at **merrickcs.org/ylc**.



YOUTH EXPLORER'S CLUB

Explorer's club engages youth in fun, challenging, and interactive learning experiences in the areas of STEM (Science, Math, Technology, Engineering and Math), healthy living, life skills, and food science. Participants will be challenged to think both logically and creatively, to be strong individuals and team players, and to increase their verbal and written communication skills. Explorer's club members will also participate in physical activities and games, go on field trips, and discover ways of giving back to their community.

For more information, contact Samuel Mihelich at **smihelich@merrickcs.org** or call **651-771-9339**. Sign up at **merrickcs.org/youthexplorersclub**.

WE'RE HIRING!

Family Services Caseworker

Full-Time (25-40 hr/wk)

Manager of Employment Services

Regular Full-Time

Employment Assistant

Regular Full-Time

Youth Robotics Mentor

Contract (5-10 hr/wk)

Youth Services Assistant

Part time (20-25 hr/wk)

Resource Development Intern

Part time (10-20 hr/wk)

Learn more about these open positions and complete an application at **merrickcs.org/jobs**.



Join our staff!

Community Partner in the Spotlight: Borchert's Meat Market



Dave and Donna Borchert

Borchert's Meat Market, located at 1344 Frost Avenue in Maplewood, is a true mom-and-pop shop. Owners Dave and Donna Borchert have spent twenty-three years of marriage and raised five children in Maplewood. Community connections are at the core of their business. "We live here, we work here, we're part of it," says Donna. "This is part of our home."

The Borcherts became partners in Stokke's Meat Market in 2013, and bought out the owners in 2015, making the place their own. "We have our life on the line here. Everything's in this building, in this store," says Dave.

The Borcherts make a point to get to know their customers and greet them by name. At

the market, shoppers linger at the meat counter, chatting about recipes and asking for recommendations.

Meat is the main attraction at Borchert's—they offer a wide selection of roasts, sausages, patties, pork chops, and more—but Dave and Donna also work hard to make the market a convenient, one-stop-shop for their customers. If someone comes in for brats, they can also pick up buns, chips, veggies and condiments to round out the meal. "We have more items than you would imagine that we have," says Donna.

Borchert's Meat Market often donates meats and other products to support community fundraisers. Located just a mile and a half from Merrick Community Services, they have

become a valued partner. In August, they supported the annual fundraising event at Sherwood Lounge by donating food and silent auction items, helping to bring in more than \$10,000 for Merrick's senior programs.

Now, this Holiday season, Borchert's is a drop-off site for Holiday Share toy donations.

The Borcherts have coordinated toy collections through local churches and boy scout troops in the past, but are excited to be partnering with Merrick this year because the toys will all go to local families. "We really love to see things happen in the community," says Donna.



Toy drop-off box at Borchert's

New, unwrapped toys can be dropped off at Borchert's until December 11. The toys will be distributed to families facing poverty during Merrick's Holiday Share event on December 16 and 18.



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MERRICK BY THE NUMBERS

700

Number of families we plan to serve at our 2017 Holiday Share event.

120

Bikes to be given away at the Holiday Share, yielding almost as many riders as the Tour de France!

15,622

Hours donated by 832 volunteers this past year—equivalent to 7.5 full-time staff!

\$10K

Dollars raised for Merrick's senior programs by Sherwood lounge at their annual fundraiser in August.