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Celebrating New Beginnings

The beginning of fall is a reflective time—savoring the last days of summer, seeing kids gear up for a new school year, and looking back on everything that has happened. I've been thinking about how much things can change in a year. Last September, we were unpacking boxes and settling into our new space at 1669 Arcade Street. It was one year ago that Fran Ivory, the beloved former executive director of Merrick Community Services who recently passed away, was standing beside me at the dedication and open house, humbly giving his blessing. As the leaves change and the weather cools, I'm so thankful to those like Fran who paved the way, and to all of you who help make the work we do possible. **I hope you'll join us this fall at the 5th annual Merrick Mix & Mingle** to celebrate 110 years on the East Side, and raise a glass to the possibilities that await us.

With Sincere Gratitude,

Daniel A. Rodriguez,
Executive Director



MERRICK
Community Services
Growing. Stronger. Together.



**Meet our celebrity guest
for the Mix & Mingle:
Community Host Tom
Whaley**

Tom Whaley is part owner and executive vice president of the Saint Paul Saints and the 2018 chair of the board of directors at the Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce. A St. Louis native, Whaley became part of the Saints organization in 1993 after leaving behind a law career that wasn't as exciting as helping grow an independent professional baseball team. A brief absence from the Saints took Whaley to the Boston suburbs where he was involved in the start-up of the Brockton Rox and construction of a new stadium, giving him the experience to return to the Saints and help build a new stadium with Saint Paul Parks and Recreation.

Whaley lives in Lino Lakes with his wife Kathleen. Together, they have three grown children.



Remember to RSVP!

Don't forget to reserve your tickets for Merrick Community Services' 5th Annual Mix & Mingle coming up in October.

DATE: Thursday, October 11, 2018

TIME: 5:30-8:30 pm

VENUE: James J. Hill Library Event Center, 80 West 4th Street, Saint Paul (off the corner of Market and 4th, up the grand staircase in front of the water fountain)

VALET PARKING: Included with your ticket

The Merrick Mix & Mingle fundraiser is a social gathering of 200+ philanthropists, community leaders, organizational partners, and friends of Merrick. This cocktail-style event is an engaging networking opportunity for all interested in making a difference on Saint Paul's East Side.

The event includes:

- Live music and entertainment.
- Heavy hors d'oeuvres.
- Live and silent auctions.
- An inspirational program highlighting Merrick's work on the East Side.

More than 1,000 Backpacks Distributed at Biggest Back to School Celebration Yet



On August 18, 2018, Merrick Community Services hosted our largest Back to School Celebration ever, giving away **1,082 backpacks** to East Side youth in preparation for the school year.

In the weeks leading up to the event, **102 volunteers contributed 324 total hours of service** collecting and organizing backpacks, notebooks, pencils, glue

sticks, crayons, calculators, and more as part of our summer School Supply Drive.

In addition to receiving backpacks, students had the chance to stock up on school supplies, choose from hundreds of donated books, and participate in a produce distribution coordinated by Merrick's Food Shelf. The event also featured collaborative crafts,

a bake walk, free haircuts, a nail salon, bounce houses, engaging STEM activities, and free snacks.

Thank you to everyone who hosted school supply drives, donated items, sorted supplies, assembled backpacks, and volunteered at the celebration. We couldn't have done it without you. Best wishes to all for a great school year.



Left: Volunteers from Xcel Energy made fun props and decorations for the Back to School Celebration.

Right: Volunteers from Edmentum and Cummins Sales and Service made fleece blankets to give away to youth and families at the event.

SAVE THE DATE

Merrick Volunteer Night Out at the Twins Game

Tuesday, September 25
7:10 pm

Merrick volunteers are invited to enjoy an evening at the ballpark as a thank-you for your hard work and commitment to the East Side community.

Give to the Max Day

Thursday, November 15
Minnesota's 10th annual day of giving. Visit givemn.org to join the momentum by supporting your favorite organizations (including, we hope, Merrick Community Services!)

Holiday Share

Saturday, December 15 and
Monday, December 17
An annual two-day celebration of holiday giving for East Side families led by our Youth Services staff. 1,500 youth received gifts and basic needs items at last year's Holiday Share. For more information, visit merrickcs.org/holidayshare.

Remembering Fran Ivory, Former Executive Director



Former Merrick Community Services Executive Director Francis P. Ivory (known affectionately as Fran) passed away peacefully on July 27, 2018, with his beloved wife Rosemary (Roie) by his side. For several years, Fran had lived courageously with Parkinson's disease, and had recently celebrated his 70th birthday.

Fran served as Merrick's executive director from 1997 to 2011. One of his greatest accomplishments was starting Merrick's Construction Training Program, providing an opportunity for those with little to no income to embark on a new career path and earn a livable wage.

In addition to his 14 years at Merrick Community Services, he also worked at Friendly House in Davenport, Iowa; Neighborhood House in St. Paul; and most recently at the Xcel Energy Center. For many years, Fran and the Ivory family managed a strawberry shortcake stand at the Minnesota State Fair.

Fran will be remembered for his gentle spirit and firm commitment to serving those in need. Last year, Merrick Community Services dedicated its Meals on Wheels room to Roie and Fran Ivory as an acknowledgement of their many years of service and dedication to serving seniors in our community.

Merrick Staff in the Spotlight:

Jake Weidenbach, Youth Services Manager



“I realized I could be the person that a lot of kids need, and that a lot of kids don’t have.”

- Jake Weidenbach

Jake Weidenbach began his career in youth services when he was just 14 years old—still a youth himself.

This early start came as a result of his mother’s work with Parenting Inside Out, a prison parenting program for incarcerated mothers and fathers. While the parenting groups met, Jake spent time with the kids and talked with them about their lives.

“I was 14 when I started doing youth work,” he says. “Someone sparked critical thinking in me at that age, and I realized I could be the person that a lot of kids need, and a lot of kids don’t have.”

“I’m really interested in teaching critical thinking—teaching kids to ask questions.”

While still in high school, Jake took college-level courses in early childhood education, and at the age of 16, he started working with the Boys & Girls Club, serving in a variety of positions. He managed the game room (where, he says, he played countless games of pool and Sorry, and broke up Monopoly-related fights); and facilitated an arts program, putting on art shows and involving youth in a community mural project. He stayed with the Boys & Girls Club for eight years, and ultimately took on a director role, overseeing two sites: one in Zimmerman and one in Elk River.

Jake has 13 siblings, and he and his twin brother are right in the middle. Growing up in a household with so many people, he is very accustomed to group dynamics, preparing him well for a career in youth work. Being a middle child in such a large family, he says,

“is sort of a mediator position.”

This July, Jake started working at Merrick Community Services. He is particularly excited about hosting the East Side Lego Robotics League. “I’m really interested in teaching critical thinking—teaching kids to ask questions.” He’s also fired up about Merrick’s Youth Leadership Committee, which meets once a week, involving 7th-12th graders in youth program planning and development. “It’s about empowering teens, getting them to use their voices and be the change they want to see in the community,” he says.

While working at Merrick, he will be finishing up a degree in early childhood development, with a focus on child psychology.

“I’m interested in why kids are the way they are, and how their circumstances affect them,” he says.

Benjamin's Story: The Making of A Career

"You've only got one life to live. You've got to do what you love," says Benjamin, a recent graduate of Merrick's Construction Training Program.

For him, doing what he loves means building things. "I want to build houses," he says. "I like doing stuff with my hands. I like that kind of thing."

Benjamin grew up mainly in Indiana, but he's lived, he says "here and there." He moved to the East Side of Saint Paul in October of 2017, and his sister encouraged him to check out the Construction Training Program. He attended an information session and signed up. "I thought, maybe one day I could build my mama a house...that's one reason why I liked the idea of getting into construction."

In his youth, Benjamin made some decisions he describes as "bad choices" and had some run-ins with law enforcement, but now he's on a different path. In the Construction Training Program, he never missed a day of class and received OSHA 30, First Aid, Forklift and Boom/ Scissor Lift certifications. He interviewed with several construction companies, but because of his past, employers were hesitant to offer him a

position. But, confident in Benjamin's dedication and work ethic, Merrick Career Services Manager Robert Taylor was determined to find him a job. Robert connected Benjamin with Baker Handy Man Services, LLC, where Benjamin is now working full time renovating houses.

"We're doing a lot of painting, dry-walling and reconstruction," says Benjamin, who sees this job as a step in the right direction toward his goal of becoming a construction worker.

"There's a difference between a job and a career," he says.

A career is a sustained journey, with celebrations, setbacks, and surprises along the way. Since Benjamin enrolled in Merrick's Construction Training Program, that's the kind of journey he's been on.



Benjamin with his niece



Benjamin at work

"I thought, maybe one day I could build my mama a house...that's one reason why I liked the idea of getting into construction. "

- Benjamin

Merrick Partners with Metro Transit to Replenish Driver Ranks

This August, Merrick Community Services partnered with Metro Transit to address a bus driver shortage resulting in the indefinite suspension of more than 60 trips or routes. In a July 31st Kare 11 article,

Metro Transit Spokesperson Howie Padilla said, “There were times in the last few weeks, where we simply did not have enough hands, just didn’t have enough people behind the wheel, to operate some trips.”

As part of a campaign to hire more drivers, Metro Transit planned a series of bus driver applicant preparation classes, one of which was hosted at the Merrick Community Center. The class, which occurred over two sessions, attracted a crowd of Twin Cities residents eager to become bus drivers. Participants learned what it’s like to drive a bus, reviewed what is needed to apply as a bus driver with Metro Transit, and received in-person help completing the application from Metro Transit and Merrick Community Services staff.



Nearly 30 individuals attended a bus driver preparation class at the Merrick Community Center.

Thank You to Our Recent Partners and Donors





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GATEWAY

FALL 2018, VOL. 12



MERRICK BY THE NUMBERS

1,032

Number of backpacks distributed as part of Merrick's Back to School Celebration, enough for every student at Farnsworth Aerospace Lower and Upper campuses.

\$43.31

Recently hourly wage obtained by 2018 Construction Graduate, Henrique Kai, as an HVAC Mechanic. This equates to \$90k/year.

55,000

Pounds of food distributed each month by the Merrick Food Shelf. Equivalent to the total pounds of cheese sold each year from the Mouth Trap Cheese Curds Booth at the State Fair

14

Number of years the late Fran Ivory served as Executive Director of Merrick Community Services, a legacy that won't be forgotten.



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