

Neighbors helping out neighbors

3/19/20

By Cheryl Ryan Maloney

The Wellesley Friendly Aid Association recently celebrated its 110th anniversary of helping citizens of the Town. Currently, Deborah Cogill, resident of Wellesley since 1985, chairs the WFA Board of Trustees.

"We are a Wellesley-based organization focused on neighbors helping neighbors," said Deb Cogill. "WFA grants emergency financial aid to families, loans health equipment to any resident at no charge, funds camp scholarships, supports college-bound first-generation high school students through Wellesley Connects and hosts programs for seniors, for example, the Friendship Circle."

The Wellesley Friendly Aid website (<http://wellesleyfriendlyaid.org>) has information about all of the charity's programs as well as the organization. There are nine members on the board who meet throughout the year to oversee finances and programs. They also serve as active volunteers in WFA programs.

Board members Margot Lansing and Sharon Kieran, for example, founded and co-facilitate Wellesley Connects, which they launched four years ago. Over 40 Wellesley High School students work with volunteer mentors to guide them through the college application and financial aid process. Current seniors and their parents in the program are now reviewing college acceptances and financial aid packages along with their mentors. Juniors in the program are beginning the process, which includes taking an SAT prep course sponsored by Wellesley Connects



Deb Cogill, president and chair of Wellesley Friendly Aid Board, and Peter Johannsen, vice president of WFA Board.

[COURTESY PHOTO]

as the Wellesley House and Garden Club, the Wellesley Service League, National Charity Inc, ESL programs, and Cradles to Crayons. Roche Brothers supermarket generously donates grocery gift cards, which are distributed during the holidays by the WFA.

"We know Wellesley Friendly Aid makes a positive contribution to the well-being of our community and has done so for over 100 years," said Cogill. "By reviewing our programs, seeking input from volunteers and those we serve and identifying unmet needs of our community we hope to continue and expand that good work for another 100 years. We are in the process of drafting a new strategic plan. One of the new goals we have identified is to find ongoing tuition funding for low-income families so children can attend preschool programs in town. Attending quality preschool programs has a positive and lasting effect on student learning into elementary school and beyond. We are looking for ways to raise \$50,000 annually to support low-income eligible three and four-year-olds in Wellesley. We need a donor or donors willing to commit funds each year. We will expand our annual

sure our budget continues to fund current programs."

Wellesley Friendly Aid holds a fall fund drive, which this year raised \$46,624. The total was slightly less than the amount donated in 2019. Each spring, Wellesley Friendly Aid launches another appeal to raise money for summer camp tuition for low-income families. That drive will begin this April. Doug Mansfield is the board member who oversees this program. Through his efforts and those of other board members and volunteers, last summer, 63 children were able to attend camp.

"Neighbors helping neighbors, that is the mission of Wellesley Friendly Aid," said Cogill. "We are grateful to our volunteers, donors and local businesses who help. Their generosity makes such a difference in the lives of Wellesley children, seniors and families. We want to spread the word about the good work of this organization. Our goal is to increase donations and, therefore, our outreach within this community."

Any community members interested in making a donation or learning about opportunities to volunteer with Wellesley Friendly Aid should call the

Another board member, Sally Miller, oversees the coordination of social programs for senior residents and residents with disabilities living in three low-income public housing sites in Wellesley.

"Socializing with friends and neighbors supports the health and well being of senior residents and involving community volunteers enhances the social experience and generates friendship and awareness," said Miller. "WFA provides funding and organizes volunteers, including board members, to run social events in the community rooms. We work with the volunteer community to make sure there are hosts and refreshments when the seniors arrive."

Miller also involves youth volunteers so that events are multi-generational experiences. Of particular significance is the relationship with The National Charity League Inc., which generously sends volunteer teams of mothers and daughters to co-host monthly Sunday afternoon BINGO parties. Other youth volunteers have included Brownie Troop 8234, the Wellesley High School Key Club and various Wellesley performing arts students.

The Friendship Circle is a weekly gathering, organized by board members Alison Bedenkop, Linda Griffith and Karen Griswold, which brings senior women together for programs and to socialize. They listen to presentations that enhance their lives and participate in craft activities. This year the Friendship Circle is meeting in the Warren Recreation building and enjoying having access to the kitchen for lessons and cooking demonstrations.

The WFA coordinates with and receives support from other town organizations and businesses, such