



# Tales from the White Dog Cafe

A Quarterly Newsletter 3420 Sansom St. Philadelphia Summer, 1997

## Summit for the Future We Choose for Ourselves

A sense of excitement and camaraderie ran through the Broad Street subway that Sunday morning as citizens from many different Philadelphia neighborhoods hopped on board the north bound train for a day of community service. As a delegate to the Presidents' Summit for America's Future, I joined 5,000 volunteers in a high school stadium in North Philadelphia for the kick-off event with Presidents Clinton, Bush and Carter, along with Vice President Gore and General Colin Powell. Our national leaders, normally at odds, were gathered in one place not to debate, but bound by a common purpose - a belief that restoring citizenship and service to community would provide a better life for America's children. The packed stadium radiated the energy of collective goodwill. As I looked around at my fellow citizens, I felt something now rare - the great joy of community. As the crowd poured out of the stadium to take up our work assignments, pink petals from the flowering cherry trees lining the street floated down over the exuberant crowd like confetti on a homecoming parade.

For the moment, I put aside the anger I felt toward this same government that had so recently abdicated its responsibility to insure basic needs for all children, leaving millions abandoned in poverty. I did not want to choose between supporting volunteerism and demanding that our government uphold its Constitutional duty to "promote the general welfare." There is no doubt we need both. In a society divided by race and class, volunteering provides the rare experience of working in community and understanding that it is in our own self-interest that we "raise the barns" in our disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Following the day of service, the morning paper showed before and after photos of boarded up store fronts along Germantown Avenue cleaned of graffiti by volunteers. I couldn't help but feel that the absence of graffiti was insignificant; the ugliness and despair lay in the boarded up businesses and homes, with or without a cosmetic paint job. The problems run much deeper than we care to admit. The reality is that houses are abandoned at a faster rate than volunteers can restore them, and businesses and jobs continue to disappear from Philadelphia neighborhoods where 50,000 welfare recipients, mostly mothers with children, are expected to find employment in the next five years.

Essential as it is that citizens fulfill a Summit pledge by connecting personally with children in need, how can we say to jobless and underpaid parents that volunteers will provide role

models for their children while they are denied living wage jobs so that they can do it themselves? How can business and citizen volunteers commit to the Summit goal of a healthy start for every child when it will only be for those lucky enough to receive the sprinkling of well-intentioned corporate handouts and volunteer hours rather than the guarantee of a national health care system for everyone? Even though we open our workplaces and church basements for tutoring and after-school care to fulfill the Summit pledge to provide safe places, can we honestly believe that we can deliver a sustainable program for every child without creating paying jobs for professional care givers in public schools funded until 6pm with full time summer programs? As crucial as it is that business provide students with workplace experience, can we really achieve the Summit goal that all

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## Mid Summers Night Dream Dance

Friday, June 20, 7pm

at Bartram's Garden, 54th & Lindbergh Ave.

Picnic supper in America's oldest botanical garden followed by Circle Dancing led by Shaker McNeil, accompanied by Anja Daniel. An ever evolving variety of movement, Circle Dancing ranges from gypsy dance to ancient temple dance, from the silly to the sacred, with music from Bach to Madonna. Shaker is director of Touchstone Farm & Yoga Center in Massachusetts, an organic garden and host to events where dance, myth, dream, stories, nature and drama are used as mediums to attune to the inner journey. Anja is a traveling troubadour singing songs of peace, joy, and celebration around the world.

\$30 for picnic dinner and dance, including tax & tip. BYOB.

Reservations 386-9224

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children graduate with marketable skills when so many begin without Head Start and attend public schools inadequately funded to prepare them for the challenges of the marketplace?

If our leaders have made children and youth a national priority, our federal budget should reflect those same values. Education, child care, job training, housing, community development, and nutrition should be priorities. Far from it, government is actually cutting these low-budget items, while continuing to spend 50% of discretionary funds, \$266 billion annually, on the military. Though we contribute 40% of the world's military spending, we have the lowest per capita spending on poor children and the highest child poverty rate in the industrialized world. To make matters worse, our excessive military budget, still at Cold War levels and more than the ten next largest combined, does not increase our national security, but actually makes us more vulnerable. The greatest threat to our security is not an external force, but the poverty that afflicts one out of four American children, who are ill-equipped to compete in the global economy and wounded by crime, drugs, violence and lack of basic housing, nutrition and health care. It has never been that government has spent too much to eliminate poverty, but that we have never spent nearly enough.

Even as volunteers are called on to save our children's future, government continues to squander that future to line the pockets of defense contractors and their political cronies, and arm dictators around the world who keep wages low and resources cheap for the same corporations who have laid off the parents of America's children. Not only have we wasted our resources on an unnecessary Cold War, but we continue to fund it even now that it's over. The losers of the Cold War continue to be the American poor, our bombed out inner cities at the epicenter. "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fire signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientist, and the hopes of its children," said President Eisenhower in 1953.

Looking out at the 5,000 volunteers that first Sunday morning, another general, Colin Powell, Chairman of the Summit, proclaimed that he was happy to have an army again. His interests, he said, had turned from the Cold War to what was going on at home. Can his move from Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Chairman of the Summit on volunteerism be seen as a symbolic shift of our priorities from war to peace, from military spending to human needs funding? Can we see that an army of community workers rebuilding our cities and protecting, nurturing, and teaching our children is just as important to our national security as an army of soldiers and should be assisted with equivalent funding? Can the Summit on America's Future be a time to demand a government truly by and for the people to create the future we choose for ourselves? Can citizens of all ages work with that government to build a safe and prosperous world, not by using weapons and force, but through economic justice? Shall the goals of our summit be set for the day when the stores of Germantown Avenue are open for business again? Can we envision a time in our history when ticker tape parades celebrating the return of war heroes have been permanently replaced by an army of volunteers showered with blossoms falling from trees? Do we dare to believe that time can be now?

Judy Wicks

## White Dog Community Service Days

### Habitat for Humanity, West Philadelphia

Saturday, June 28, 9am-3:30pm  
4948 West Stiles Street

With the goal of rehabbing all 32 houses on the 4900 block of W. Stiles (at Girard Ave.) Habitat has completed 15 houses, and is currently working on 5 more. We will work on a variety of construction jobs with supervision from the Habitat crew. No construction experience necessary. Wear comfortable clothing, appropriate for the weather & sturdy shoes. Ages 16 and up. A complimentary White Dog lunch will be served.

### Graffiti Cleanup & Mural Painting

Saturday, August 2, 10am - 2pm (postponed from 5/17)

In a West Philadelphia neighborhood we will join members of Philadelphians Against Graffiti in an area cleanup. Jane Golden, Director of the city's Mural Arts Program, along with other artists and youth, will oversee our painting of a wall mural at the site. Painting instruction will be given and a complimentary White Dog lunch will be provided. Ages 10 & up.

**Registration required. Call 386-9224 for any of these days.**

## A Declaration for Independence

We, the undersigned, in order to reclaim our democracy, demand that Congress declare independence from the influence of special-interest money by passing effective bipartisan campaign finance reform by the 4th of July.

The bipartisan McCain-Feingold bill, currently pending in Congress, provides the framework for effective campaign finance reform.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Print your name \_\_\_\_\_

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Please return to:

Project Independence, c/o Common Cause

PO Box 98297, Washington, DC 20090-8297

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