

# SALS JOURNAL

*a publication of the  
Southern Appalachian Labor School*



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Spring 2021

## GAINING A FUTURE IN HOUSING

By Marcus Wilkes,

As part of SALS's effort to improve housing in overlooked communities in our service area, a number of programs are being offered. Even though the pandemic has interrupted volunteer support relied upon in the past from national faith-based, university, and professional groups, our dedicated staff put together projects that helped families.

Projects such as Self-Help made building materials available to eligible owner-occupied houses, which helps families, make modest repairs on their houses. Veterans can qualify for a program to assist in making necessary repairs that make their houses more energy efficient. Also a more limited approach to help low income families is SALS's YouthBuild training program.

SALS is hard at work constructing and rehabilitating housing through multi-family and individual family projects. Construction and rehabilitation projects are progressing in the communities of Page and Oak Hill, Brownsville, as well as Beckley, WV.

Being a recognized fair housing counseling agency, SALS is servicing clients who are searching for affordable housing. Referrals for housing counseling classes to qualify for low interest loans are being accepted. Also, if individuals need assistance for avoiding evictions, referrals for housing assistance, or needing information on foreclosure matters, they can contact our organization.

Recently individuals have sought help in paying past due utility bills. Assistance began in October and support will continue until funds are spent.

The Federation of Appalachian Housing

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Enterprises (FAHE) is seeking to advance prosperity in this region by helping their network of local, regional, and national leaders acquire funding to make homes more affordable and efficient. FAHE is promoting the investments that yield construction jobs for housing repairs and upgrades in Appalachia, which will make communities more attractive for businesses and homeowners. SALS recently received an award for its housing advocacy work from FAHE.

For instance, in Fayette County homeownership stands about 65%, but the amount of homes that are substandard and unsafe is just as high. Many of the houses are relatively old and built at the turn of the century for coal mining families. Now, most of these homes are occupied by individuals who are low, very low-income families, elderly persons, and individuals with special needs. When mortgages, rent, and utilities are more than 30% of families gross income, housing affordability is

*Continued on page 10*



*One of the unsafe houses SALS works on to make livable for its owners*

# War on Covid Calls on Patriots to Sacrifice

*Letter to Charleston Gazette-Mail & Beckley Register Herald, 11/20/20  
By Joseph Golden, MD*

As we all live through the Covid 19 Pandemic, a segment of the population has been complaining about restrictions on their lifestyles including limited social contacts, decreased recreational opportunities, and wearing face masks. They perceive these aspects as invasion of personal privacy and rights as citizens. Although the Pandemic has been expanding rapidly, these people do not seem to feel that the danger to themselves, to others around them, and to the strain on health care resources, warrants some alterations in their daily habits, attitudes, and personal interactions with family and friends. Perhaps they do not feel that dealing with the Pandemic is similar to being in a wartime society.

Using the analogy of wartime social changes, I would like to reflect back to the days of World War II, when both my parents were in the US Army in the Pacific, and many of today's citizens' parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents were experiencing turmoil and danger. They had very tough adjustments to make: They were separated from loved ones in the armed forces or were at great distance from them in this country or in the world. Most people communicated by letter, or perhaps the occasional phone call. At home, they dealt with gasoline and other material rationing. They were stressed emotionally, economically, and socially. How did they get by?

They accepted the conditions which they as individuals and collectively as a country, had to endure and live with. They relied on internal character traits to live as best they can, to accept the worries that come from having a family member overseas, and to support and help each other in their communities. They had to have faith that the war would end, and that conditions would improve. But day to day they made sacrifices personally and collectively to help the country and their fellow citizens.

How do the adjustments and "sacrifices" being asked of us now to combat the Covid 19 Pandemic,

compare to the emotional, physical, and social sacrifices our forebears made during World War II? How little is asked of us to help not only our families, but our neighbors and unknown members of our communities. Are our civil rights really being denied in order to provide measures for the common good? Are we being patriotic when we take risks by not following pandemic control guidelines, and potentially leading to infecting others in our communities whom we don't even know?

Patriotism, personal responsibility, and compassion for our fellow citizens, dictate that we consistently and conscientiously use face masks, do social distancing, and limit gatherings until the Pandemic is contained, controlled, and eventually conquered. Would our grandparents expect anything less than this?

*Dr. Joseph Golden practiced for 41 years as a family physician and geriatrician in Raleigh County with the New River Health Association and currently volunteers at Beckley's Health Right Free Clinic.*



*See WV Senator Joe Manchin's PSA video on mask wearing at:*

[www.manchin.senate.gov/coronavirus/maskupwv](http://www.manchin.senate.gov/coronavirus/maskupwv)

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We welcome articles and submissions by our readers.

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# Director's Report

By John David

As others have noted, it has been a very difficult year. I cannot express my gratitude adequately for how everyone at SALS figured out ways to innovatively provide help to those we serve with our programs.

Our main difficulty was financial. Overall, many grants and donations dried up. We scrambled but the set-backs were significant and not only for us --- but also our partners that provided us with volunteers. Normally, we have around 600 volunteers; this year, aside from the NCCC team of 11, we had zero. We filed a "business interruption" claim – and the insurance firm simply laughed.

On a beautiful and inspiring note, we were startled by a letter from the AFL-CIO Union Labor Life Insurance Company. Jackie Kienzle, Retired Assistant Education Director of the AFL-CIO and a loyal SALS friend, had died and left SALS her legacy. She was 92 and had used much of it, but her decision was really wonderful. We joined a national memorial virtual service with many progressive people from the labor movement.

The year had some positive outcomes. After years of struggle, we were able to put the Historic Oak Hill School on the National Register of Historic Places. We obtained and distributed 45,000 face coverings, all made, ironically, in Vietnam. Marcus has been extremely helpful and we are very pleased that he passed the test to become a certified housing counselor. This helped us in receiving a HUD Housing Counseling Grant again. We received a ton of state credits to give away. And we worked together to Keep Hope Alive. However, the year closed with the local health department closing our tiny office for a while because all of us there tested positive for COVID. Also, as noted in Barbara's piece she is retiring from SALS. This will be a major loss since she has been a huge asset. But health is the key and we want her to recover and be o.k.

If you can help us out today, we would greatly appreciate your support. If you can include us in your legacy documents, you will Protect and Save SALS for the future. You will never find a more dedicated and passionate staff --- and "Thank You"!

*Right: Marcus Wilkes unpacks masks to prepare for distribution around the community.*

*Center: Beckley Register/Herald gives SALS a 'Thumbs Up' for mask distribution*

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*Left to right: John David; Dr. Sujatha Reddy (SALS donor) and Lakshmi Gogineni, crafter of SALS Mugs in Jim Hores' pottery class.*

## OUR OPINION

### Thumbs up to SALS for helping provide masks to keep pandemic at bay



To Southern Appalachian Labor School working with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to distribute personal protective equipment. The masks, which were delivered to the Historic Oak Hill School, will be utilized to assist in public health efforts in the area as part of Project: America Strong. That endeavor features the federal government distributing reusable cotton face coverings to critical infrastructure sectors, companies, health care facilities and faith-based and community organizations across the country to help slow the spread of Covid-19. SALS will be distributing, for free, 45,000 coverings. The masks will help residents in light of Gov. Jim Justice's face covering mandate (where social distancing isn't possible).





# The Community Garden Project

By Kenna Bass

We've had a good summer here in the garden at SALS but now the season is closed. Lots of vegetables got delivered to families and seniors in the community throughout the COVID epidemic. We had a wide range of a variety in our garden this year. From tomatoes and green beans to Brussels sprouts and Kale. Lots of summer squashes, zucchini and eggplants, broccoli, and corn. Even including our own fresh herbs like rosemary, oregano, dill, parsley, and chives. We also harvested potatoes and asparagus, green onions, and garlic. Many things to bring smiles to the families through these hard times.

## The View from Regina Three Rivers Apartments

By Brenda Warrick

Regina so far is thriving and we even planted the community garden. And then looked forward to the harvest fest. The folks here have really helped out with planning and organizing our summer activities, which everyone looks forward to.

So far we are trying our best to protect everyone from the COVID-19 virus. SALS has made sure everyone has masks, including folks in the community. They also were given hand sanitizer to prevent from passing this evil virus away and so far we have succeeded.

The goats are being kept for the time being on a beautiful farm away from the coyotes that are coming into the area. They seem to be very happy when I visited them. Baby ran out in the rain to greet me along with Ruthie and her baby Haley. We also have 14 chickens that should be laying anytime. During this time of strife, I fell sick and could not have asked for better tenants...not only were they waiting to help me up my long flight of stairs in the late hours of the night, for weeks after I returned they went to the store for me and made sure I was fed delicious meals. Special thanks to Dale, Duke, Justin, Hal, Will, Ed and Elizabeth and so many more. In my opinion I am truly blessed and love them dearly.

Most low-income housing complexes that I have spoken to have had huge problems with their rents right now, but here at Regina we are not having those problems such as not being able to pay rent. On the contrary, we came together as a family and

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*Beds are prepared for planting at Beards Fork.*



*High Tunnel greenhouse extends the growing season at both ends of the calendar.*

family takes care of family. They would never want to disappoint myself or others. It may be a while before we beat the COVID-19 virus but our plan is to stay together. I want to thank John, Marcus, Lisa, and Ruth for their kindness and help. Keep us in your thoughts and prayers please.





*Beards Fork Community gardens provide nourishing produce for local food pantry*

## **Moving Ahead During Tough Times**

*By Vickie Smith*

This past year has been very enlightening and busy. SALS has made many new transitions the past several years in all areas. Our construction crews, though small, have been extremely busy. Mowing all summer long, repairing our many rental properties, picking up trash weekly from rentals and office buildings, repairing vehicles to keep them on the road, working on donated properties, trying to complete a home we bought and took down to its bones in order to sell it to a deserving family and starting two new homes in the Page area. We also managed to distribute building supplies for group work camp families to do self-help projects in the Upper Kanawha Valley and Fayette areas. Our youth also distribute food once a month to at our two food pantries.

These are crazy times we live in. We missed our volunteers this year due to the pandemic. What a crazy time we live in and all have had to change many things in our lives and work environments. We have had members of the staff sick with COVID but thankfully we have several locations and able to separate our staff, workers, and programs.

SALS is moving forward with many changes taking place. As they say, "Out with the Old and in with the New". New people have been selected and put in place the last couple of years to move the organization forward. John has the vision and his sights on the future for the organization and single handily sets it up as he sees fit. Of course, often we do not agree on his methods of practice. As this transition takes place many of us will be stepping

back to let the younger new generation of people take the reins and move forward. This changing of methods and experience of course takes time.

I feel like I have put many years of endless days and nights making the organization what it is today. It was not always easy, in fact hardly ever, but the organization did grow from a small several thousand-dollar weatherization program that incorporated the local vocational school in the 90's to an impressive affordable housing program with AmeriCorps and YouthBuild programs. These programs enabled young adults to obtain construction training and to obtain their high school equivalency diplomas. Then we starting buying properties to manage that would help the organization maintain itself for years to come.

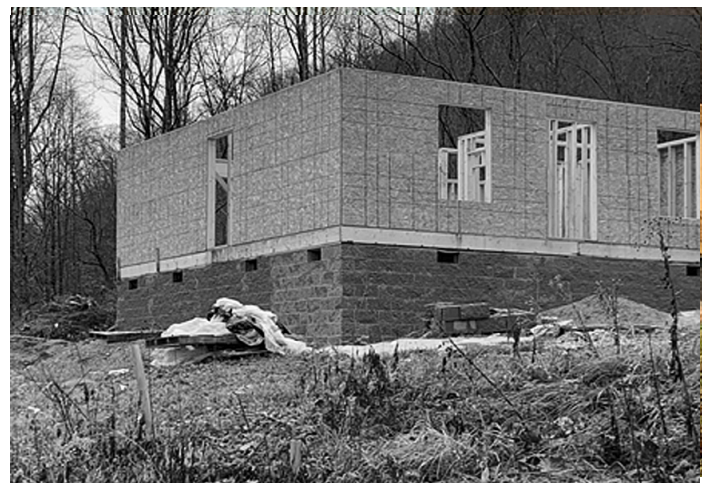
I have made many friends along the way and also many enemies but that goes with any good fight for growth. I hope we continue to move forward in good ways.

## **SALS' Beards Fork Center**

*By Artie Mullins*

Life has been strange, scary, and painful for the major portion of this year! However, it has been rewarding as well for the folks at the Beards Fork Center. Let me explain.

With the announcement of massive closings of schools and other businesses, the staff quickly mobilized to provide meals to 20 kids in our local neighborhood. We considered this as a continuation of our After School effort to provide a safe place for kids where they received tutoring, a nutritious snack and



*SALS home construction continues in Page along with renovations of existing sub-standard housing*

a full dinner. We foresaw the fact that not having that additional meal could cause financial strife for these families. After sanitizing our entire building, we started preparing 20-25 lunches for our local kids each day. We continued to provide these meals until the Energy Express began. Energy Express is a reading and nutrition program hosted at the SALS Beards Fork Center by WVU Extension Service. WVU Extension boldly decided to do a virtual reading program from Beards Fork Center with delivery of meals to Energy Express participants county wide. In addition, SALS expanded its area of lunch distribution to include the Montgomery and Oak Hill area. It was a very successful spring and summer and the gap of that additional meals was adequately filled!

In keeping with nutrition another rewarding task was making our pantry available throughout this pandemic to anyone who needed energy food on any given day paired with aggressive food distribution once a month. In partnership with Mountaineer Food Bank, we were able to safely provide food to some of the most neglected families in this area.

The construction of a walking trail along the abandoned railway which begins off Route 60 and runs the full length of the Beards Fork Community has been another satisfying effort. Earlier, Dale O'Daniel and I hiked the trail, marking obstacles and preparing continuing work on the trail. In September 2020 we welcomed a traveling group of AmeriCorps members dubbed by The Corporation for National Service as NCCC or National Civilian Conservation Corps. The eleven members worked diligently for one month to clear the path. It was no easy task. I periodically joined the team but was no match for their youth and determination to clear the entire trail. The NCCCs did an incredible amount of impressive work during their four week stay. In addition to trail blazing, the NCCCs managed to prepare a virtual curriculum for the after school program that we are developing. A big thanks to Isaiah Maxi and his fellow NCCC members.

The Beards Fork staff also remained on top of our request for a grant extension of our YouthBuild grant through the Department of Labor. This was not an easy fix but with the leadership of John David and bi-weekly conference calls for a number of months we were eventually granted an extension. There is no additional funding attached with the extension. However, it was very important to extending our enrollment time to mid-year 2020. This allows SALS to produce a more satisfactory enrollment number and an additional year to push for placement of the youth. This has been a challenging time for employ-

ment opportunities for our graduates. We can only pray that those opportunities will increase in 2021.

We also wrapped up a small grant from YouthBuild USA which allowed us to develop a curriculum for job readiness. This was massively challenging because the pandemic prevented gatherings and our virtual attempts at this curriculum was mostly nonexistent because of a lack of internet availability for most of our youth. But, we learned a lot about ways to maintain communication with our youth during national crisis.

We now have been awarded a \$25,000 grant from YouthBuild USA to specifically help us to develop and implement a viable plan for moving our current and graduate students from the YouthBuild program into secondary education. We are just laying the groundwork for this endeavor and are very optimistic about the outcomes.

So, despite the pandemic we move forward attempting to make positive changes in the lives of those we touch!

## Hello Again!

*By Tracy Patrick*

My name is Tracy and you probably won't remember but in the last newsletter I did an article as an office assistant, then I became a summer VISTA and was then hired on as a full time VISTA.

Before I became a VISTA, I was learning Quickbooks and I really enjoyed that. I am hoping to use some of the things I learned to later further my edu-



*NCCC volunteers clearing on the Beards Fork Rail Trail developed from an old abandoned railroad spur.*



cation. Being a VISTA, I will be eligible for an education award.

I look forward to the next year at SALS to challenge myself and make a difference in our community.

## Hope Springs Eternal

By Vickie Smith

We have some work to do raising funds or getting donated materials and supplies to repair local homes. Most homes that are identified in our area need more work than our funding can provide. Let me explain how this works. We may have a funder that can provide a \$6000 grant to a homeowner. This is of course wonderful except it will most often just provide a heat source and a couple of windows.

Southern Appalachian Labor School provides the labor free to the clients. This enables our YouthBuild participants a hands-on training experience. We also have wonderful volunteers come to help, except since COVID hit that has all but gone away. Without labor costs, it makes every dollar count towards materials that are very much needed.

So as this year comes to an end, please consider contributing whatever you can. All donations go to a great cause. This can be items of use or dollars. Any and all donations are welcome.

They say pictures are worth a thousand words. So from me to you, here is the need we see each day. The picture on the front page is the actual house of a resident in our area that now awaits for us to find a way to repair as much as possible.

God bless everyone in this New Year!

## Working Through the Pandemic!

By Barbara Painter

Wow-what can you say about working during this pandemic? It has been interesting to say the least, as well as rewarding. I have met a lot of interesting people and assisted in a lot of areas. SALS received a BIG donation of face masks. These were for those that could not get out because they did not have a mask and could not afford one. I visited several low-income senior apartment houses and the tenants were so tickled to get a mask!! Some of the tenants had a caregiver that was not wearing a mask and that put the tenant and them at risk. They were

a great asset all around. I also visited rural churches and even several post offices in these rural and depressed areas to distribute the 40,000 masks.

I have been working with the Mountaineer Food Bank and we want to thank them for bringing emergency boxes for our clients and continuing to provide food for our monthly community donations. It has been different with no one allowed in the building and folks have to stay in their cars and give me their name, address, phone number and number in their family. For the most part though, folks have really understood and appreciate what they receive. I appreciate the YouthBuild students, Mature Workers and the AmeriCorps NCCC team that have assisted in preparing the boxes and putting them in people's cars. I understand now why there is no "I" in team!

I have also been delivering donated pizzas to depressed areas, such as families at Page and surrounding areas, low-income senior complexes and the most fun I think was our summer Read and Feed Program. There the families receive pizzas, a dessert and drink and the children got to choose a free book or two that they can keep. It is really amazing how the older children wanted a book that they could read to their younger siblings. I was volunteer reader at Collins Middle School and reading is my thing and it pleases me so that these children want to share their stories.

Last but not least, I have been taking training from The Home Builders Institute to renew my certification for the PACT (Pre-Apprenticeship Certification Training) Instructor with the YouthBuild students. All of the PACT training is completed virtually and the youth receive a certifi-



**Twin Oaks Plaza**  
9h · 🌐

**Huge THANKS to SALS and Barbara Painter for looking out for our residents.**

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*SALS ordered 45,000 reusable cloth masks and distributed them to post offices and public locations around the county like these Twin Oaks apartments*

cate for each level that they complete. As with any new program, it has been frustrating, but these youth are offered such awesome training and certifications recognized nationwide! This is such a great opportunity for our students. I am very excited for them.

I would also like to give a special thank you to my husband, Tom Painter, for assisting me by distributing many pizzas, lifting and toting books plus driving me around!

As the holidays come and go, please have a happy holiday, stay safe and enjoy your family!! If you are a giving person as many are at this time of year, please consider giving to a non-profit such as SALS, the money goes to helping those in rural, depressed areas.

*A Sad Goodbye...*

Last but not least and I did not take this lightly, but I had to leave SALS at the end of 2020. This has been a very difficult decision, but this past year with the COVID 19, my health problems and all of the changes in the world, I want to thank SALS for giving me the opportunity to assist families in our communities, from feeding children lunch, reading to the children and just meeting so many wonderful families.

I enjoyed my time working with the housing programs and doing energy audits and appreciate so many of you for welcoming me into your home. It has been a pleasure to serve you all.

The monthly food pantry has been so rewarding, especially during this pandemic. It makes you feel good when you can give nutritious food to a family in need. I have acquired so many new friends at the pantry and I love you all!!

The same with our youth. With YouthBuild, I have had a lot of challenges but the rewards far outweighs the challenges, I have seen success with Youth who thought they were at risk teens, but they were not at risk, as we say here at SALS, they are At Promise.

As for all of my co-workers, some of us have had differences, but they always work out. I love each one of you from the Historic Oak Hill School, Raynes Building, Beards Fork and the Regina Apartments. I will always be your friend. So for now, stay safe and may your life be prosperous.

Don't worry; we are going through a transitional period to ensure our clients that THERE will be someone to take my place and make sure that our programs will continue as always!

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*We're looking forward to when groups of volunteers, such as this one pictured from 2019, can again safely stay with us and repair local residents homes.*

## **Coordinating Home Repairs Postponed, Planning for '21**

*By Lisa Manley*

Hi this is Lisa from the Raynes Building. I hope everyone is staying safe in this crazy time.

In 2020 we had so many applications for homes to be repaired by Group WorkCamps.....and then the pandemic shut it down!

I got an email that said, "Given the uncertainty of the virus and the potential issues involved, we're determined to do our best keeping our partners, campers, residents, staff, leaders, and communities as safe as possible. After much consideration we have decided to postpone our Workcamps and Weeks of Hope this summer."

It was for the best but still sad.

But hope springs eternal and we are going to try again for next summer. The applications for 2021 are being printed and we will begin sending them out next week. Next summer is going to work out!

Shout out to my sister Carol who lives in Pratt, WV! She is my "go-to" to for putting up flyers and putting applications in post offices, stores, city halls, etc. within the 30-minute range of where the Work-Camps Group will be staying in East Bank. She will of course be practicing social distancing and wearing a mask.

SALS had 8 Summer Associate VISTAs serving with the Feed and Read program. Things were way



different this year but they adapted and many school aged children benefited from the program. Two of the Summer Associate VISTAs applied and came back to SALS as full time VISTAs and we are glad to have them. However, we gained two which means we lost two. SALS wishes them the best of luck in whatever they do next.

## A New Day is Coming

*By Vickie Mullins*

SALS "Accent Education Program" became a learning tool for all children in the rural part of Fayette County; they were accustomed to coming here and had adjusted to the model of tutoring they were receiving by our teachers along with other staff members. We began the school year with a bright hope; and then it happened; a pandemic hit our nation and caused our learning institution to shut down!

Our program ended early; no more after school, basically no more in person school for our children. Our small little town "Beards Fork" became a ghost town. Everyone became afraid, desolate, and had no hope. As the days approached us, they were filled with sadness because we learned that this virus took many innocent people off the face of this earth. Many lost their jobs causing them to lose hope, become unemployed and face hard times not knowing where their next meal would come from.

SALS food bank along with other programs provided meals to children all summer long. SALS reached out to them by offering learning materials virtually through Energy Express. It was different, but our AmeriCorps members along with their supervisor Tia made it work.

Our schools continue to be on a blended schedule, the virus is still the topic of our daily news, all we can do as a nation is pray!! 2 Chronicles Ch. 7 Vs. 5

"If my people which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

## Working in New Ways in 2020

*By Kathryn South*

Since early spring, we at the SALS Community Center in Beards Fork have been trying to deal with the after-school program and safety issues for the

children that are currently enrolled in the program. It was unclear what the school systems would be doing about whether to dismiss classes early and wait to see how much the COVID-19 virus is going to be a major concern for folks in this area.

The classes ended up being canceled for the remainder of the spring, which means no graduations that folks are used to attending and no large gatherings of people.

The City of Oak Hill placed flags of all the youth who are graduating this spring lining the route through town to the East End so that some recognition was given to those who completed their goals of finishing the school year of 2020 as a graduate. Some of our former youth who attended the after-school program and who are now college students are in limbo also.

No one has experienced anything such as this virus and folks are scared and wondering what the future holds for them as to his or her education goal and finding jobs and just living a somewhat normal life because nothing is NORMAL right now and may not ever be NORMAL again.

With all the obstacles facing continuation of programs, such as Energy Express and feeding youth at area summer foods sites, we are trying our best to serve all the young people in our programs that need extra support to get through these difficult times.

The Summer VISTA programs began in early summer and Energy Express also began as planned but with lots of changes. The enrollees were read to and supplies were delivered to the sites as needed. We had fewer numbers to register for Energy Express compared to 2019 numbers, but the AmeriCorps members and the teacher Ms. Jackson did their best weekly to make the summer a success. Books were delivered to the children along with weekly meals to see them through. Social distancing made everything more difficult and challenging to say the least, but everyone persevered and completed the six weeks on schedule.

Artie and I were working with several more Summer VISTAs to prepare and deliver meals to four locations from Smithers to Oak Hill. Our numbers remained consistent with or greater than last years.

Last Fall, school started out in person but then moved to remote as the virus continued to spread. It'll be a tough winter until the new vaccine gets enough people protected.

## *A Future in Housing, from page one*

a concern.

In West Virginia, 67% of the vacant housing units are not available to the housing market, primarily due to deterioration. Almost 48% of the household in the state fall below the median household income of \$26,885. There is an immediate need for almost 49,000 new units.

SALS is committed to working with partners that are helping families acquire affordable and more energy efficient homes. West Virginia's cornerstone for future prosperity may require programs that train workers in the construction trade. Individuals can become more independent and gain life-long skills.

## **Raynes Building Update**

*Ruth Lanham*

As many know, I am not in the office everyday due to health problems. I have severe arthritis in my knees and may have to have knee replacements. I am not walking well these days.

However, I am working from home the other days preparing proposals. Hopefully, we need to get some money coming in. We are opening every venue we can to get money for our activities and home repairs.

Due to the pandemic our staff has become smaller along with our programs. This pandemic has been a nightmare for many of us.

Everybody have a blessed New Year. Please stay healthy and wear your masks!

## **Elaine and Anne:**

### **Two Powerful Voices Fall Silent**

It saddens us to share that Covid has taken two remarkable women labor activists, singers and organizers from us. WV native Elaine Purkey last fall and in February, Anne Feeney from Pittsburgh. Below are excerpts of a few of the many tributes to these two powerful and inspiring women:

A Tribute to West Virginia Labor Singer-Songwriter Elaine Purkey (1949-2020) excerpted from WV Folklife Program on 9/3/20.

West Virginia Folklife deeply mourns the great loss of labor songwriter, musician, activist, radio host, teacher, and devoted mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother Elaine Purkey. Purkey was a commanding advocate for the state's working people through her resonant original labor songs and inter-

pretations of traditional and gospel tunes that enhanced her invaluable grassroots organizing. In addition, Purkey was a dynamic music educator of the next generation in her home community. Speaking of her role in Appalachian labor music, Pete Seeger said, "Elaine Purkey's songs carry on the great tradition of Ella May Wiggins of Gastonia, North Carolina, and Aunt Molly Jackson of Harlan County, Kentucky."

A native of Lincoln County, Purkey was raised in a family of musicians and flatfoot dancers. As a teenager she played in bands with her brother, and in early adulthood she was the lead singer of a local country band. When her husband Bethel, a third-generation coal miner, got involved in the United Mine Workers of America strike against the Pittston Coal Company in 1988, Purkey began writing songs for the cause.

When Ronnie Gilbert of the Weavers came to sing for the striking miners, she invited Purkey to play. It was there that Elaine first performed one of her original songs, "America, Our Union," which became, as Purkey says, a "national anthem" for the movement.

When union steelworkers were locked out of Ravenswood Aluminum in the infamous Lockout of the early 1990s, Purkey once again wrote a rallying cry for the workers in "One Day More." It would become her most famous song. Organizer and Rick Wilson, with AFSC, spoke of the song's resonance, "Nothing could have prepared me for the effect Elaine's song had on the union families of the

Ravenswood Lockout. The first time she sang it at the union hall, people sprang to their feet, clapped, cried, sang along. And they won." That performance was filmed by director Barbara Kopple and used in her PBS special *Locked Out in America: Voices from Ravenswood* for her labor series *We Do the Work*.



For the past 40 years, Elaine Purkey was engaged in the hard work of labor organizing in West Virginia coalfield communities through her profound songs, committed teaching, and tireless community activism. Elaine believed that songwriting, storytelling, and creative work were



# Southern Appalachian Labor School - Who We Are

www.SALS.info

www.ConstructingChangeAndBridgingGaps.com

**Community Center in Beards Fork  
Historic Oak Hill School  
Kincaid Central Office voice or fax:  
Regina Three Rivers Apartments:**

**779-2280 phone/fax  
304-465-4246 phone/fax  
304-250-7627 or 304-300-1731  
304-640-5515 or 465-9732**

**John David, Director - 304-250-7627  
Vickie Smith, Const. - 304-640-3792, fax 469-9721  
Ruth Lanham, Admin. Assistant - 304-250-7627  
Marcus Wilkes, Housing Counselor - 304-673-1828**

### AmeriCorps/VISTA

James Harvey VISTA  
Tracy Patrick VISTA  
Lisa Spoerer VISTA  
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### *Two Voices, continued from page 10*

powerful tools for both personal and collective liberation. She once shared, "I don't know who this is gonna go out to, but if there's anybody listening to this or reading this and you've got any idea that you can do anything—write a story about what you're going through, tell it, write it in a poem, just put it on paper and try to put music to it or put it on paper and try to get somebody else to put music to it. Just get it out there! Just get it out there and let people know what you're thinking. And you'll be surprised how much it will free you up and help you out. Cause it did me. It made a monster out of me."

#### ***Anne Feeney Labor singer/songwriter 1951-2021***

Excerpted from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette: "...While still in high school, Anne did her first public performance, singing Phil Ochs songs, at an anti-war rally in 1969. In 1972, while at the University of Pittsburgh, she co-founded Pittsburgh Action Against Rape. She graduated from the Pitt School of Law in 1978, worked 12 years as a trial attorney and served as president of the Pittsburgh Musician's Union. She also was president of a NOW chapter and served on the board of the Thomas Merton Center.

In 1991, she hit the road hard, traveling around the country to perform at folk festivals, labor conventions and rallies, including the WTO demonstrations in Seattle, Solidarity Day in Washington, D.C.,

and the 2004 March for Women's Lives. Her business card read: "Performer, Producer, Hellraiser."

In 1992, she delivered her debut album, "Look to the Left." Her subsequent albums in the '90s and '00s — mixing original and traditional songs and blending folk, pop, Irish and bluegrass — included "Union Maid," "Have You Been to Jail for Justice?" and "Dump the Bosses Off Your Back." Her songs were recorded by Peter, Paul and Mary and she shared stages with such legends as Pete Seeger, Billy Bragg and Loretta Lynn. Her song "Have You Been to Jail for Justice?" is featured in such documentaries as "This is What Democracy Looks Like" and "Get Up/Stand Up: The History of Pop and Protest."

Editors note: Both Elaine and Anne preformed at various times for activities at SALS. Even though they are no longer with us, their spirits live on in their powerful music which will be with us always....



*Anne performing at a labor event. Photo courtesy of U.E.*