

**COMMUNITY FOCUS:  
DELAWARE VALLEY EMPLOYEES REACH OUT IN TOUGH TIMES  
By Julia Bluemle and Maura Kelly Koehler**

During these tough economic times, positive energy thinking is still possible, as shown by employers and employees who are committed to making a difference. Two large Delaware Valley employers – SEPTA and Kennedy Health System – stepped up in 2010 and plan to continue in 2011.

During 2010, **SEPTA** employees who were asked to donate their time, talent, and personal resources to benefit the region responded enthusiastically and had fun doing it! On a Saturday morning in April, employee volunteers were organized at a dozen city locations to provide additional clean-up in the area where commuters are served in the “Philly Spring Clean-Up” campaign. SEPTA provided volunteers with gloves, brooms, vests, and water.

During one week in June, employee volunteers were dispatched to help spread the word about the Philabundance Food Drive to commuters at train stations throughout the region. Commuters and employees donated several tons of food, which SEPTA stored in its own facilities until the campaign was completed, and sent them to Philabundance for much-needed distribution.

On a Saturday in late September, employees coordinated the “Rail Rodeo – Family Fun Day” at the Fern Rock Maintenance Facility for employees, their families, and members of local rail organizations. Casual lunch fare, activities for children, and an employee entertainment singing talent contest known as “SEPTA Idol” highlighted the 4-hour event. Over 400 employees, their families, and “Rail Fans” attended and enjoyed the activity-filled Fun Day, and leftover food was donated to a Center City homeless shelter.

Although the week before Halloween is typically a time for stocking up on candy, “A Good Book is A Great Treat Campaign” was the theme at SEPTA train stations. Employee volunteers collected 45,000 new and gently-read books for different age groups from its customers and employees, and the books were distributed through the United Way and other charitable organizations to homeless shelters and community and day care centers.

Across the river in South Jersey, **Kennedy Health System** employees have a unique fund to assist co-workers through challenging times. Established in 2006, the Emergency Financial Assistance Fund (EFAF) is a resource for Kennedy employees who experience extreme financial hardship due to an unexpected emergency situation such as a fire, flood, catastrophic illness, or death in the family. Employees in need can apply confidentially for financial assistance of up to \$1,500. Applications are reviewed and awards determined by an anonymous employee committee.

Since its inception, the EFAF has helped close to 100 Kennedy employees with over \$80,000 in financial assistance for unforeseen situations such as mid-winter repair of a heating system, partial apartment payment for an employee whose family needed to relocate after a septic tank flooded their home, and a delinquent electric bill for a single parent employee who was out of work for two months on a leave of absence.

During these difficult economic times, support for this program is critical as employee requests for assistance increase. Funds are raised and donated in various ways. Employees can elect to contribute to the EFAP through a tax deductible payroll deduction in any denomination; the medical staff and other benefactors make generous donations throughout the year; and in lieu of an employee holiday party, Kennedy made significant contributions to the EFAP in 2009 and 2010. Various fundraisers are also held. During this year's benefits open enrollment, Thanksgiving baskets were raffled off and proceeds donated to the EFAP. Every Valentine's Day, the "candy-gram" fundraiser allows employees to purchase a candy bar to thank a fellow co-worker and the purchase benefits the employee fund. Additional fundraisers include raffles for local sporting event tickets and organized day trips to local attractions.

Kennedy's Emergency Financial Assistance Fund promotes a compassionate, generous environment where employees can truly contribute to each other in times of need.

***Julia Bluemle is Administrative Assistant and Retirement Benefits Coordinator at SEPTA Human Resources Division.***

***Maura Kelly Koehler is Benefits Administrator at Kennedy Health System.***