

VIM Gala A Rollicking Success!



Clara Londoner and Nancy Bernstein

We said “Come One, Come All” and come they did...more than 200 VIM Berkshires supporters celebrated the clinic’s 10 successful years under the “big top” at Ski Butternut.

“We had the biggest and best Gala yet,” said VIM Trustee Jane Salamon. “Everyone had fun with the jugglers, mimes and fortune-teller and then pitched in to raise much-needed funding to keep VIM operating and able to offer top quality healthcare services to the uninsured.”

With an informal setting and carnival atmosphere created by colorful flags, bunches of balloons and clown posters, the party began with cocktails and hors d’oeuvres, followed by dinner served by Rita Welch Catering.

“We were really fortunate to have such a dedicated, hard-working Gala Committee, especially Nancy Bernstein and Hildi Black, our co-chairs,” said Art Peisner, Board Chair. “It’s gratifying to see our donors support their efforts and the efforts of the VIM Berkshires clinic so enthusiastically.”

Cont’d on page 2

The Ten-Year Bonus

Jeffrey Blake, MD

We become doctors for many reasons. Certainly for me, one of those core reasons is the patient-doctor interaction. This interaction, the unlocking of each patient’s particular puzzle, is elevated to a purer form at VIM. There is no undercurrent of commerce, none of the business of medicine. The patients sense this and appreciate it.



All of us who volunteer do it for similar reasons: We believe in the mission of the organization. We feel good about giving back to the community and that we have skills that can be put to use. I saw my first patient at VIM Berkshires 10 years ago and those years have flown by. VIM has grown and matured and the need for our services has not diminished. We seem busier than ever this year. I continue to be energized by the experience of volunteering in the clinic.

This year we had an especially interesting case at VIM that allowed us to use our skills and to elevate the role of VIM in a patient’s life. In my training days this patient would have been termed a “fascinoma.” All the students and residents would be taken to see such a patient because of the unusual aspects and educational value of the problem.

- Our “fascinoma” patient is a 35-year-old farm worker who immigrated to the Berkshires 10 years ago. He has been coming to VIM for 6 years for basic

Cont’d on page 2



Tina Sotis



Christopher Eyers Yerlig

The Second Decade!

“It’s the greatest mistake to do nothing because you can only do a little – together we can do so much.”

It is clear from our very name that VIM was created and serves through a cadre of incredibly devoted volunteers. From the clinicians, to the patient liaisons, interpreters, outreach and fundraising, as well as Board and committee members, every one of the past and current volunteers shares a conviction that the world can, and should be a better place. In this issue of VIM VOICES, we are happy to highlight just a few of our long-term, as well as new volunteers and share our pride in their contributions to VIM.

VIM is blessed to have such a cadre of caring and dedicated individuals and businesses: every contributor; each event attendee; all of the businesses who provide discount opportunities in our Coupon Book, and every individual who purchases them; all of the dedicated and outstanding volunteers who provide services or reach out to the community to inform and educate; hospitals, markets and members of the healthcare community who provide free or discounted care to our patients; our board and fund-raising committees and the broader Berkshire Community.

“Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

GALA

Continued from page 1

"We were happy with the delicious food and the festive mood and the setting at Butternut worked beautifully for us," said Co-Chair Hildi Black.

"Of course the biggest thrill is that ticket sales and our auction raised more than \$125,000 for VIM," said Co-Chair Nancy Bernstein. "We especially want to thank State Representative William "Smitty" Pignatelli for his enthusiasm and skills as an auctioneer."

VIM Clinical Care Coordinator Ilana Steinhauer, MSN, FNP gave the crowd a taste of the kinds of patient stories the clinical staff and volunteers see play out every day at the clinic. "It is no exaggeration to say VIM saves lives. Through the generosity of our volunteers and donors we are able to effectively improve the health of our patients, and for that we, and all of those affected are very grateful."



Photos Courtesy of Rural Intelligence



*Clockwise starting at top left:
Sally Haver, Dr. Walter Scott, and Rhonna Goodman;
Sunny Schwartz and Molly Sberiff;
Nancy Fernandez-Mills and Jane Bernstein;
Jane Salamon, Elaine Roberts, and Judith Brinberg;
Richard Aldrich, Phyllis Webb,
"Smitty" Pignatelli and Meredith Tiedeman*

Dr. Blake

Continued from page 1

preventive care and appeared perfectly healthy. A few years ago he fainted and collapsed while playing soccer. He was out only a short time and came to VIM a few days later to be checked. The rest is interesting: Our examination found indications of a possible cardiac issue and we initiated an evaluation with cardiac testing. One of those tests involved wearing a cardiac event recorder to monitor his heart rhythm.

- Two weeks later while wearing this recorder he again collapsed playing soccer. The recorder transmitted his heart rhythm to a local hospital where a life threatening cardiac rhythm disturbance was detected. Paramedics arrived and transported him to Baystate Medical Center.
- Over the course of a year he had multiple treatments, tests, and procedures. Doctors in Boston finally diagnosed his condition as Chagas Disease, a rare condition due to a parasitic infection found in Mexico and Central American, but not the U. S., that damages heart tissue. It infects many people in poor rural areas and fortunately most have no ill effects. But some, like our patient, do have life threatening cardiac issues that are difficult to treat.
- With the aid of the CDC (Center for Disease Control, in Washington DC) he has been treated; his heart condition is stable. He has returned to work and all activities. On his most recent visit to VIM this summer he remains fine.

- He reported that he is now "famous." The Boston doctors wrote up his case as a clinical teaching evaluation. It is published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. He is very appreciative of all that VIM did and continues to do for him.

I had an old medical school professor who reminded all young students that one of the privileges of being a doctor is that it allowed you to ask anything about a patient, even on the first interaction. But he also stressed how much we young doctors could learn just by listening to people's stories. I still learn and am fascinated by the circumstances in patients' lives that affect their health. Some of our VIM patients have harrowing tales to tell about their lives and their journeys to western MA. The grit and tenacity of these people is impressive.

While I practiced as a cardiologist until my retirement ten years ago, at VIM my role is primary care and routine preventive care, and I have learned a great deal. We see many patients with hypertension and some with cardiac issues such as congestive heart failure, coronary disease or valve problems. These allow me to slip back into my comfort zone.

Whether the issue is primary care, a preventive measure, or intervening in a serious cardiac issue, we at VIM improve patients' lives every day, every visit. That is a pretty good ten year bonus.

From Day One to Today

Susan Minnich, Volunteer Coordinator

How do you pick the real “start date” for something as important and complex as a free clinic? Would it be the day someone said: “we really need a quality and compassionate clinic for uninsured or underserved people in Berkshire County?” Or would you place the date when non-profit status was attained, or when the first patient was seen? Perhaps it is the ribbon cutting for the facility, on August 13th, 2004 .

VIM Voices, Volume 1, Number 1 was published in Spring, 2004, more than ten years ago, even before that ribbon cutting. The newsletter has evolved and grown; ranging from a single page to four or eight pages; printed in black ink on beige paper to now in color. There have been three editors.

Since that first edition every newsletter has included the Board of Trustees. However, five initial Board members that appeared on the very first issue remain present in this issue, **Jeffrey W. Blake MD, Matthew B. Mandel MD, Arthur M. Peisner and Marion A. Simon**, as well as **Steven Picheny**, who continues to appear as a Board Member Emeritus. Ten years



later these founding board members continue to donate their skills, energies and talents to the development and operation of the organization. Each has worn multiple hats: building the medical program,

developing clinic administration, and raising funds for operations. Beyond that, their leadership, vision and planning have been central to the success the clinic has achieved; their advice valuable to staff.

In September 2004 the medical team began seeing patients during preventive screening sessions. During those first sessions Dr. Jeffrey Blake saw patients with the assistance of **Priscilla Cote, RN**. Priscilla was a founding volunteer at the clinic, participating even before the ribbon cutting, and has been an active member of the team ever since. Not only does she volunteer during clinic sessions as a nurse, but she oversees the clinic’s immunization program.

Very quickly after that, VIM added dental services. On February 25th 2005 the dental clinic saw its first patients. Of the original dental team, three are still involved, and each has taken care of patients every month since then. **Drs.**

James Whitman and **Robert Edwards**, along with dental hygienist **Joanne Simpson** have helped countless patients. Their reliable efforts have been instrumental in the growth of the dental facility.

VIM provided optometry services for its patients well before the optometry office in the building was opened. Volunteer **Dr. John Herman** saw VIM patients in his offices in Pittsfield for over a year until the optometry facility here was ready. Since then he has been at the clinic twice a month, as well as continuing to see VIM patients when necessary in his office. **Dr. John Galt** has assisted in the optometry program since its inception, helping with patient intake, room setup and glasses choice.

That’s the clinical side of VIM services. The clinic cannot function without administrative volunteers, and several of them have also been present since the very first days. Both **Roz Forman** and **Turbi Smilow** have volunteered as receptionists, greeting patients when they arrived, helping with paperwork, and answering phones. Both have helped with fundraising events including the gala, and with selling our coupon book. They have seen many changes throughout the years in both reception and fundraising.

It’s easy enough to find a date for the first clinical appointment or reception shift. It’s harder to identify dates for activities that happen off premises. A huge thank you goes to **Catherine Mandel** and **Jane Salamon**. Both have been enthusiastic participants since the first year. Each has helped in many necessary ways: interpreting for patients, writing press releases, helping organize volunteer recognition and parties, and so much more. Catherine was our newsletter editor for years; Jane chaired our first gala on September 16, 2006 and has been involved in the event ever since. Our communications and fundraising efforts would not be nearly so successful without their volunteer efforts.

Spanish language interpreter **Tom Drury** has been volunteering since the first days of the clinic, not only interpreting in the clinic, but volunteering at many Pittsfield appointments also, particularly with optometry and dental patients.

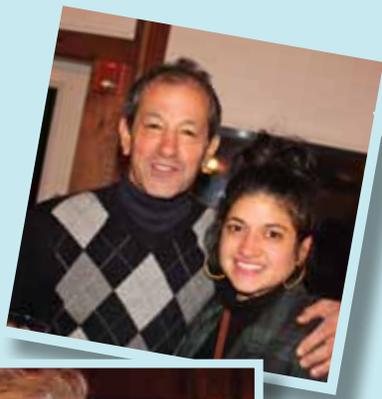
Congratulations, bravo, kudos, cheers, good job and hooray to all of these volunteers who have been involved since the first year of the

clinic. (Please forgive me, all those of you whose names were inadvertently omitted, but are a precious part of our legacy and current success.) Thanks! The clinic wouldn’t be what it is today without your dedicated, compassionate and extraordinary work.



From Left to Right:
Marion Simon, Jane Salamon

From Top to Bottom:
James Whitman, DMD,
John Herman, MD, Arthur Peisner,
Priscilla Cote



Annual Volunteer Holiday Party at Dewey Hall

Susan Minnich

VIM's ninth annual holiday party was held Monday evening, December 15th, at Dewey Hall in Sheffield. It was a delightful party, attended by about 80 volunteers and their families. The party always provides a chance for VIM volunteers to see others whose clinic schedules do not coincide with theirs. Located in the center of town on Route 7, Dewey Hall is built of fieldstone, marble and shingle with a high arching ceiling and exposed beams. It was built in 1887 to honor Orville Dewey, a Sheffield resident born there in 1794 who founded the Union Library. It more than accommodates VIM's large group in its wood-paneled space. There is a stage, a sound system, a kitchen, and adequate parking, all of which help to make our event so successful

We were a mix of volunteers who had been at VIM since before we opened our doors, to volunteers who have joined this year. Of course, most of our volunteers fall somewhere in between that ten-year span. Huge thanks go to each and every one of them! Special thanks to volunteer Allan Goldstein, who cooked the delicious hams; to Domane's Liquors & Fine Wines for the selection of wines; and to Xicohtencatl, Bizen and Siam Square for donated food. Pictures should be posted on the VIM website soon.

GREAT OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOU.....

We are looking for a few exceptional people to join our team of Clinical Volunteers – we can guarantee that “all work and no pay” can be a gratifying and meaningful experience. Helping your neighbors and the community achieve optimal health, despite a lack of adequate insurance can provide a lot of joy, and even fun!

We are especially in need of

- Primary Care Physicians
- Spanish Interpreters
- Dental Hygienists
- Nutrition Counselors

The hours are flexible to work with your schedule, and we promise rewarding work!

If you would like to explore this fulfilling opportunity, please call Susan Minnich at VIM: 413-528-4014

Beginning Our Second Decade

Arthur Peisner, Board Chair

When you receive this issue of VIM Voices, we will have just celebrated the 10th anniversary of opening the doors to our first patient on December 4, 2004. Let's take a look at what's happened in that time...More than 2,100 patients have been served

- Our total patient visits have exceeded 22,000
- Over 300 people have volunteered their time and energy
- Volunteer clinicians have contributed more than \$3,000,000 of their skills and expertise
- Donors have provided more than \$5,000,000 to support our operating expenses
- VIM has provided over \$10,000,000 worth of free health care services!

Elsewhere in this issue you'll get a taste of how this has impacted the lives of people in our community. It's amazing and heartwarming. But that's about the past. I want to talk about the future.

As we embark upon our second decade, we have completed a new strategic plan. Our analysis and experience indicates that the need for our services will continue to grow, despite the implementation of the Affordable Care Act. After ten years of effort, we are still reaching only a fraction of the people in this area who could qualify for our services.

There are people that are and will remain uninsured – those who are exempt from the mandate for various financial or other reasons and those who cannot qualify for coverage or subsidies because of their immigrant status. In addition, there are always people who are temporarily without insurance due to a job loss or missed premium payment. Of course, illness cannot be timed to coincide with these disruptions in coverage and we need to take care of them while we work to help get them back into the system.

Unfortunately, the high cost of medical and other health care services, now and for the foreseeable future, makes it nearly impossible for some people to access affordable care, even with some insurance coverage. The least expensive of the ACA policies, the only ones that many of those at the lower end of the income ladder can afford, even with subsidies, carry very high deductibles and co-pays, making them essentially unusable for most primary care services. Coupled with that is the fact that more than half of our visits are for services not covered by the ACA – e.g. adult dental services. Together, this is the group we call "underinsured."

To continue to pursue our mission and help as many people as possible, we anticipate the need for expanded services and additional space, and we will need staff and supplies to support those activities. We also want to make our services more geographically accessible. Nearly 30% of our patients already travel south from Pittsfield. All this, of course, will require additional funds.

We need to increase contributions from our current donors and to reach out and bring in new donors. Consequently, a group of board members and major donors have pledged \$50,000 in matching funds to help induce new and increased contributions during our annual appeal. They will match all new or increased donations, dollar-for-dollar, to help us build the financial capacity to launch our second decade.

You should have already received a solicitation for VIM's Second Decade Campaign. We hope you will take advantage of this unique opportunity to multiply the impact of your donation and increase your annual support or join us as a first-time donor. Use the enclosed envelope or donate online at www.vimberkshires.org/donate.

Please help us make this a healthier community for all.

Welcome to the Newest Board Member: Alice Lustig

By Claudia Ricci



Alice Lustig, the newest member of VIM's Board of Directors, has a very rich and impressive professional background, but the last thing she wants to do in an interview is to talk about her own accomplishments.

Rather, Alice says she is most concerned about finding ways to be helpful to the volunteer organization. "They are an exceptional group of volunteers. I really believe in their mission. They do amazing things and I just hope that I can contribute."

Alice points to one statistic that highlights VIM's extraordinary contribution to the community. "Volunteers in Medicine is now celebrating their tenth anniversary," she says. "In that period, they have provided 10 million dollars in health care. I think this is impressive. I see what happens when good medical care is provided in a community. It changes lives."

For now, Alice serves on VIM's Finance Committee, helping to review the organization's finances. "But I really want to broaden my focus," she says. "I want to work with other volunteers to raise money to make sure VIM is sustainable and viable so that we have another 10 years as impressive as the first ten."

A mistake people often make, she says, is to think that because of Massachusetts' health insurance program and now, the federal Affordable Care Act, that there is no longer any need for an organization like VIM. That's not the case, she says. VIM provides medical care to a variety of those who sorely need it: the undocumented, people between jobs, seasonal and service workers whose employers don't supply health insurance and others who simply can't afford the coverage provided by the state and federal health insurance programs.

One of things that most impresses Alice is that VIM's clinic provides comprehensive care that includes primary care, mental health services, optometry, dental care, and nutrition services.

Alice's interest in VIM follows up on her experience as Chief Operating and Financial Officer at the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. The medical school provided healthcare to the underserved in the community that was culturally effective, accessible, and affordable. A team of attending physicians, residents, and medical students provided the care. The surrounding area had a large Latino population. To help serve these patients, the medical school developed an interpreter's program that would teach individuals who were bilingual the necessary medical terminology so they could interpret for patients whose first language is Spanish.

Prior to working at the medical school, Alice served as Executive Vice President at The Rockefeller University. Earlier, she was at Princeton University as Chief Business and Administrative Officer and Department Manager in Princeton's Department of Molecular Biology.

Alice now makes her home in Sheffield.



2015 Coupon Book Unveiled!

We wish to thank the book's SPONSORS: Monterey Church, Zabian's Fine Jewelers, and Lee Bank.

SPECIAL OFFER (UNTIL JANUARY 15): Buy one book for \$25 and get each additional one for \$20.

As of January 2015, books will be sold through the vendors listed below.

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One Mercantile, Riverbend Café, Volunteers in Medicine, Wash n Wag, Wild Birds

Housatonic: Housie Market, Taft Farms

Lenox: Casablanca, Cranwell Spa, MacKimmie Co., Purple Plume, Shooz, Swtrz

Mill River: Mill River General Store

Pittsfield: Steven Valenti's, Unusual Wedding Rings & More

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**To order: Call VIM (413) 528-4014.
Pick up at VIM M-F 9 - 5
(Clinic closed 12/24/14 - 1/4/15.)**

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Zabian's Fine Jewelers

Tributes

VIM is pleased to accept contributions recognizing special occasions in the lives of family, friends, and colleagues.

In Honor of Nancy Bernstein

Vicki & Joel Wolff

In Honor of Nancy Bernstein For Her Efforts on Behalf of VIM

Gayle & Joel Moskowitz

In Honor of Nancy & Steve Bernstein's 50th Anniversary

Carol Billet-Fessler

Stephen L. Cohen

Allan & Ruth Goldstein

Eric & Elizabeth Greenbaum

Judy Schwartz

In Honor of Hildi Black, a Wonderful Lady!

Love from Suzan & Stan

(Suzan Grandt & Stanley Kaplan)

In Honor of Marilyn Fisher with Thanks

Jane & Alan Salamon

In Celebration of Steve Kess' 70th Birthday

Nancy Kalodner

In Honor of Matt & Catherine Mandel

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In Honor of Arthur Peisner's presentation at BerkshireSPEAKS

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In Honor of the Reverend Arthur K. Wing & Joan Finney Wing

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In Memory of Stuart Dix

Jane & Alan Salamon

In Memory of Molly Sheriff's Sister, Marsha Dobie

Nancy & Steve Bernstein

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Joan Connor

Sue & Chuck Cortesi

Marion Donovan

Joanne & Gabriel Farkas

Roz Forman

Rochelle Holtzberg

Roberta & Charles Liebowitz

Susan Price

Mildred Quain

Frani & Al Rothman

Lesley Jane Rubinger

Muriel Shapiro

Elaine & Ben Silberstein

Susan & Randall Soffer

Joan & Michael Ury

Ruth & Martin Weinstein

Louise & Michael Widland

In Memory of Bruce Miller

June & Ron Smith

In Memory of David Papier, MD

Carol Andrea Whitcomb

In Memory of Trinity Raifstanger

Nancy & Steve Bernstein

In Memory Of Michael & Elise Richman's son Tim Richman

Denyse & Harold Adler

In Memory of Their Son, Steven Rubenstein

Ken & Fran Rubinstein

If you would like to honor someone by making a gift to VIM Berkshires, please call the clinic at 413-528-4014

Letters, We Get Letters

VIM patients often tell us how the care they, or their family members, receive impacts their lives. Some tell us at the time of their visit, or on the telephone. Others write letters. Here are a couple of letters to share. Of course, names are changed.

"I wish to express my profound appreciation for the outstanding, caring services, and your extraordinary and wonderful assistance to "Olivia." Her previous experience with health care in another city was a disaster: months-long wait for an appointment, distances to travel, and finally, a FIVE HOUR wait for the doctor. When she returned from the first appointment to VIM she was blown away – with actual tears of joy – she could not believe the time the doctor spent talking to her and the peace of mind she achieved. She is receiving beyond top notch care from caring professionals, and we are extremely grateful."

Another patient writes:

"It is no exaggeration to say that VIM saves lives. I have been around the world and nowhere seen better health care. VIM cares both in delivery of services and attitude of compassion. Every single person at VIM conveys their availability, presence and concern every time I visit. If for no other patient, at least in my case I can assert that VIM made all the difference in my life, and in all likelihood, saved me."

To the world you may be one person; but to one person you may be the world.

– Josephine Billings

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We welcome your suggestions about what you would like to see in VOICES in the future; what you like and what you do not. Please contact Denyse at adlergrp@yahoo.com. All comments are welcome!

Please visit our website vimberkshires.org!



LEE BANK
The cost of VIM VOICES is underwritten in part by a grant from Lee Bank.

Save the Dates - Excitement Ahead!

CHEF'S DINNER:

MONDAY, MAY 18, 2015, returning to the fabulous Wheatleigh, chaired again by Vicki Bonnington and her committee who produced such an extraordinary event in 2014. Last year the Chef's Dinner was sold out three weeks in advance!

MARDI GRAS ANNUAL GALA:

THURSDAY, AUGUST 13, 2015, at Ski Butternut, Great Barrington. Co-Chaired by Nancy Bernstein and Hildi Black and their hard-working committee. Have a blast beating last year's stunning, record-breaking event!

Lina Grillon
Patient Services Coordinator
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VOICES

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