“You know, we take everything here…”

When I recently drove into the parking lot at the Mary Brennan INN to drop off a car load of donated clothing, housewares and toiletries, one of the volunteers came out to help me bring them inside. He was very friendly and seemed genuinely happy to be helping me lift the heavy bags. He kept saying “thank you so much…thank you so much…is that everything? You know, we take everything here…”

I almost started laughing because I knew that was true but it was so funny to hear a volunteer say it so happily and so proudly. He had no idea who I was…I was just another donor dropping off donations. I thanked him for being so helpful and was grateful for the inspiration his simple remarks had provided me at the start of my day.

Later that day, when I was speaking with another volunteer, they said that if we ever want to do another video, we should consider shooting the amazing exchanges that take place each day in the parking lot at the Mary Brennan INN. So many people come from so many different places, all simply wanting to contribute. Some bring what they no longer need and in some cases donors have gone out and bought new items that they wanted to contribute. Many even represent organizations that have made sandwiches, collected towels and toiletries or cooked an entire meal to be served to the guests.

The INN has been truly blessed to be the conduit for so many people’s compassion for twenty nine years.

We have never asked a question of a guest other than how can we help and we’ve been able to welcome everyone who wants to come and volunteer as long as they understand that they cannot judge or begrudge any guest whatever they may receive. It takes a very special strength and courage to show up at The INN, regardless of which side of the counter you may stand…and we have always remembered that anyone of us could be on either one.

Thank you for all your support in whatever form you contribute, whether it be your time, your talent or your treasures. We take everything here and we give everything away…we only need everyone’s continued patience and understanding to know that how we do what we do is as important as what we do. We do it with dignity, respect and love…thanks for all of yours.

With love and gratitude,

Jean Kelly
Executive Director
It is the nature of the human experience that we tend to take things for granted. What has always been part of our lives we expect to always remain part of our lives. We usually don’t value things until we lose them.

Up until a few weeks ago, the act of walking (for me) was as common place and unremarkable as breathing. I did it and didn’t think much about it. Then I injured my right hip. How I injured it I still don’t know, but every step I took was accompanied by a stabbing pain. My right leg felt like it might buckle at any moment when I put weight on it.

Fortunately, I was acquainted with a remarkable physical therapist who had helped me with other problems and with his due diligence I am close to my old self again. But the experience made me think about other things I take for granted—because I’ve never been without them.

First and foremost there’s food. I’ve always had enough money to purchase whatever food I needed. I haven’t always made wise food choices, but that’s a story for another day. Then there’s shelter. I’ve always had a roof over my head, a safe/warm/dry place to sleep every night. I’ve always had a job that paid me a sufficient amount to provide for my needs and the needs of the ones I hold dear.

Last but not least on the “things I’ve taken for granted” list is family and friends. I’ve always had family that would support and encourage me in times of trouble and hardship. And there has been hardship—for none of us escape this life unscathed by the vagaries of misfortune, disease, and sometimes just plain bad luck. I’ve also been fortunate to have had a few close friends who were willing to rally around me and lend a helping hand because they saw something worthwhile in me.

It has become all too clear to me through my work with The INN that there are so many people—so many neighbors—who have not had all the advantages that I’ve had. People who know all too well what it is like to not have a job—to not have the funds they need to provide for themselves and their children and loved ones.

The more good fortune I’ve had in my life the more I feel a sacred obligation to help those who haven’t been as lucky. I know too well that in the dark moments of my life that someone reached out to me and gave me that helping hand that made the difference between hope and despair.

That is why I’ve worked for the past ten years to support the mission of The INN (Interfaith Nutrition Network), which has provided food, shelter, and support services to Long Island families for over 29 years. It’s why I ask each of you dear readers to share a little bit of your good fortune with our neighbors in need.

The INN needs people willing to network among their friends and neighbors to encourage donations for The INN’s 22 soup kitchen locations. It is grass root support like this that makes it possible for The INN to serve over 400,000 meals each year and provide shelter and support services to our neighbors in need. If you’re a “people person”, we’ll give you the tools and guidance to succeed. Think how good it will feel to know that your efforts helped hundreds of children, hundreds of senior citizens, and hundreds of homeless veterans. If you are interested, please contact Joe Barry (516) 486-8506 ext 106 or email: jbarry@the-inn.org and he will meet with you to help connect you with other volunteers in your community to get you started.

In the end, our lives will be measured and remembered not by the size of a wallet, or a car, or a house, but by the size of our hearts, by the size of our compassion for one another. The most important lesson life has taught me is that the surest path to a rich and fulfilling life is by helping others.
WalkINN Makes a Difference

On April 21st and 28th hundreds of walkers across Long Island joined together to raise awareness and much needed funding for The INN. Hofstra University served as a backdrop for the third annual WalkINN to Fight Hunger for Nassau County. Young and older supporters joined together for a walk around the beautiful arboretum section of the campus.

The following weekend the Shrine of Our Lady of The Island saw another group of dedicated walkers maneuver through the hills and valleys on an equally beautiful Saturday in Manorville. Together the walkers were able to generate 541 sponsors to raise $20,281 to help support the works of The INN. Please consider joining us for next year’s WalkINN as we look to attract even greater support.

TO SPONSOR A MEAL CALL (516) 486-8506 EXT. 115
How Do We Teach our Children?

We always want what is best for our children. When they are born we want them to be in the best hospitals. We look after their best interests as they develop into toddlers. Selecting the best schools and educational opportunities has become an industry in and of itself. Parents work hard to get their children on the best sports teams with instructors that can help maximize their potential. As they enter high school we want our children to pad their applications with extracurricular activities of every nature. Simply put, we all want our children to be the best they can be.

Often times in our busy schedules we can forget the simple ways in which we can pass on our family values to the next generation. Parents know all too well that their example provides the best way to teach our children about what is to be valued in life. Because The INN is a vehicle used by Long Islanders to extend help and caring to neighbors who you may never meet, we are often asked, “What can I do to teach my children about this, especially those under 16 who cannot yet volunteer?”

There are many ways children can become involved, such as through The INN’s Youth Board which empowers high school students to run fundraisers, food and clothing drives and perform service activities. Recently, hundreds of people walked and raised funds through the WalkINN to Fight Hunger. Children have set up lemonade stands with proceeds going to The INN. There are countless ways to make a difference and to share with your children, but it often starts at a young age.

Last holiday season Jane Beckhard-Suozzi was getting ready to purchase gifts for her children’s teachers at the holidays. It is always challenging to develop an idea for a teacher whom you only know professionally. She decided that it would provide a great opportunity to share with her children about their family’s support of The INN. Though they typically support The INN financially, Jane took the money that she would have spent on gifts, gave it to her children and took them shopping at the local grocery store to purchase items for the North Shore INN soup kitchen in Glen Cove.

Together they bought food that is needed for the soup kitchen and helped make a difference by delivering the non-perishable items to a place they knew would get them into the hands of their neighbors in need. Their teachers were delighted to see the card that showed they were honored by the donation and indicated the process these children had undertaken to help their community. The teachers also expressed appreciation that these children are learning to be caring and giving members of society.
INNKeepers’ Ball Honors Tom & Helene Suozzi & Raises Record Amount to Fight Hunger on LI

The INNkeepers’ Ball raised a record amount exceeding $1.2 million to support our efforts to fight hunger and homelessness on Long Island.

On Thursday, May 10, 2012 at the Long Island Marriott in Uniondale, over 550 friends and supporters came together to honor Tom and Helene Suozzi for their dedication and support of The INN. This tremendous annual event helps raise awareness and much needed funding toward serving the swelling number of those in our community facing challenges with hunger and homelessness.

The Suozzis were presented with the Humanitarian of the Year Award, represented by a silver ladle, acknowledging their contributions to The INN.

“Tom and Helene have been generous supporters of The INN for many years, and for this we are so grateful,” said Rob Kammerer, Event Co-Chair and INN board member. “Their strong Long Island presence truly helped to make this event especially successful in providing the funds The INN critically needs in its efforts to fight hunger and homelessness.”

This past year alone, The INN provided over 400,000 meals in our 22 soup kitchen locations, more than 2,500 men, women and children were housed in The INN’s Emergency Shelters and 25 families and 5 veterans were provided housing and supports as they work toward self-sufficiency through The INN’s Long Term Housing Program. This is all accomplished thanks to legions of volunteers and charitable support which enables The INN to efficiently operate with an annual budget of $5.5 million.

From left to right: Rob Kammerer, Event Co-Chair and INN Board Member; Jean Kelly, INN Executive Director; Helene & Tom Suozzi; Maureen Nappi, INN Board President; Jay Jacobs, Event Honorary Chair
Upcoming Events – Mark Your Calendar

• The INN Golf Classic will take place on Thursday September 13th at the North Shore Country Club.
• The INN Luncheon will return to the Garden City Hotel on Friday, October 5th
• Mary Brennan INN Open House on Saturday, October 13th from 11 AM – 3 PM.
• Ben's Olde Time New York Deli Celebration on Monday, October 15th at Ben's Kosher Deli in Greenvale
• Day of Thanks & Giving on Sunday, November 11th at the Mary Brennan INN
• To request an invitation or to join the committee, please contact Nora White at (516)486-8506 ext. 108 or at nwhite@the-inn.org

Our Wish List

Please take time in this busy season to consider the following items which are needed as we approach summer. Many families are in need of additional support as schools are not open to provide breakfast and lunch programs. We are grateful for any and all support.

• Canned soup, vegetables, fruit, tuna fish, pasta and pasta sauce (no glass jars please)
• Hygiene products – soap, shampoo, toothpaste, etc. (travel sizes preferred)
• Bottled water and juices
• Roundtrip MetroCards for job opportunities and medical appointments
• Disposable diapers (all sizes), baby wipes, lotion and powder
• New and gently used bed linens, blankets, towels and washcloths
• Work boots, sneakers, (new) socks, sandals and tee shirts

These donations and others can be dropped off at the Mary Brennan INN, located at 100 Madison Avenue in the Village of Hempstead, Monday to Friday, 9-11 a.m. or 2-4 p.m.

For more information and support if you are interested in organizing a drive, please call Emily Wilensky at (516) 486-8506 ext. 138. Thank you for your consideration.

The INN is on Facebook and Twitter.
To become a fan and receive updates on The INN’s activities and announcements please go to www.facebook.com/theinnli or twitter.com/the_inn.