



# Working for Our Communities



## NATIONAL NeighborWorks® Week JUNE 2-9, 2007

The St. Lawrence County Housing Council, Inc. has organized the local celebration of the 24th National NeighborWorks® Week, June 2-9. The NeighborWorks® Network, of which the Housing Council is a chartered member, is working to revitalize more than 4,414 communities across America. The St. Lawrence County Legislature, as well as many local village boards, have proclaimed NeighborWorks® Week in our area.

- ◇ *Saturday*: Participating in the Dairy Princess Parade in Canton
- ◇ *Monday*: Cleanup Day in Heuvelton
- ◇ *Monday*: Coffee at Cambray Courts—Gouverneur
- ◇ *Monday*: Lunch at Sunrise Valley—DeKalb
- ◇ *Tuesday & Friday*: Displays at Farmers' Market in the Park in Canton
- ◇ *Tuesday*: Cleanup Day at Edwards
- ◇ *Wednesday*: Annual Board Meeting of the Housing Council
- ◇ *Wednesday*: The Housing Council's Annual Dinner with Deborah Boatwright, NeighborWorks® Northeast District Director, as featured speaker; and the presentation of awards to persons who have made significant contributions to the Council's work. (see below)
- ◇ *Thursday*: A special post-purchase workshop for people who have purchased their first homes with Housing Council assistance.

Spring 2007

### Special points of interest:

- NeighborWorks® Week plans.
- The Nichols family has a new home!
- Cheryl Rabbitt 's home is safer and more comfortable!
- Jean Miles-Francher loves her apartment.
- Peter Van de Water's vision has impacted Canton for the better.

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**YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND  
THE ANNUAL DINNER  
OF THE  
ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY HOUSING COUNCIL, INC.**

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 6, 2007 AT 6:30 PM  
AT THE BERBEN ROOMS OF CHEEL CAMPUS CENTER  
CLARKSON UNIVERSITY**

**THE FEATURED SPEAKER WILL BE  
DEBORAH BOATWRIGHT FROM NEIGHBORWORKS®  
AWARDS WILL BE PRESENTED FOR  
"RURAL HOUSING LEADERSHIP" AND  
"PEOPLE WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE"**

**CHARGE: \$25 PER PERSON      RSVP 386-8576 BY JUNE 1  
CASH BAR 5:30-6:30**

## Home Ownership Assistance

Staff : **Kathy Cary, Annette Matthews & Marie Schneller**

Summer and Ryan Nichols were both born in Gouverneur. Ryan grew up there but Summer and her mother moved to Watertown and then Arizona. Summer returned when she was 17 because she had so much family in the area and felt connected to Gouverneur.

Summer took a job at Jreck's so she could meet people, and it worked: she met Ryan. They had their first date 4 years ago and they quickly knew this was it!

They are the parents of the charming Lexi, who is 2, and the curious Andie, who is 5 months old.

Summer and Ryan went back and forth between rented apartments and living with Ryan's parents so they could save money for a home of their own.

Ryan works in the St. Lawrence Zinc mine. Summer worked for the Village of Gouverneur until she found that child care cost almost as much as she was earning.

Summer's sister purchased a home with the help of the Housing Council and she urged Summer and Ryan to look into it. They attended homeownership classes last Spring, which they say taught them a lot about homes that they needed to know but never would have thought of.

Annette Matthews, Housing Development Specialist with the Housing Council, whom the Nichols say they "love," helped them to look at how they spend their money. Summer called Annette almost every day for a while and says "she always

answered every question."

The Nichols spent almost a year looking for a house. One day, when they were at Ryan's parents home, Ryan found an interesting one on the internet. They called the listing agent who met them at the house ten minutes later and they knew they had found the home they had been waiting for.

The Housing Council's Direct HomeOwnership program was able to provide down payment assistance as well as monies for closing costs and repairs to the heating and electrical systems. Without the help of the Housing Council, which the Nichols say was "awesome," Lexi, Andie, Summer, Ryan, and their new puppy, Ranger, would not be in their own home.



## Housing Rehabilitation

Staff : **Jennifer A. Berbrich**

Cheryl Rabbitt was born and raised in the North Country, graduating from St. Lawrence Central School. She married and for 40 years lived in Syracuse, Florida, and Nevada.

Her mother went to Nevada to care for her when Cheryl suffered an aneurism. When Cheryl's mother had heart bypass surgery eight years ago, Cheryl, having divorced, moved back to South Stockholm and purchased a house in which she could care for her mother.

She found that wages for bookkeepers here were half of what they had been in Nevada. With mortgage payments and food, she did not have enough to pay for her needed medications but she

was making too much to qualify for Medicaid. As a result of going without medication, she experienced a severe stroke in 1999 which left her physically disabled.

The only heat in their home was from a wood stove and Cheryl's disability made keeping that up difficult. There were also multiple roof leaks she could not afford to address. She points out that "a 'Honeydew list' is not much use when there is no 'Honey' to do the work."

Her sister saw an announcement of a meeting about the South Stockholm Rehabilitation Program. The Housing Council received a grant from the Governor's Office for Small Cities to assist homeowners in that area who had limited means to get needed

repairs for their homes.

Cheryl attended the meeting, filled out an application, and came to the Housing Council offices for an interview with Jennifer Berbrich, the Council's Housing Rehabilitation Counselor. Cheryl met the criteria for assistance, so Jim O'Neill and Ron Williams, inspectors on contract with the Housing Council, went to her home and identified additional critical repairs that needed to be done. Jennifer provided her with a list of approved contractors from which Cheryl selected the ones who completed their work in April.

Cheryl praises the Housing Council for the fact that she and her mother are now able to live much more safely and comfortably.



**Cheryl Rabbitt**

**Property Management** Staff : Kristen Kenny, Rob LaFaver & Dale Coates

Jean Miles-Francher was born in Syracuse, but moved with her family to Gouverneur when she graduated from high school and her father went to work for Kinney Drugs.

She met her first husband, Ken Miles, in Gouverneur. He worked at the time for Gouverneur Talc Company. During their marriage of more than 4 decades, they had four children: Martin, Gary, Tim and Lisa. They moved to Syracuse in 1972 where Ken had a variety of jobs and Jean worked for Chapels Department Stores. Ken died in 1988.

After a time, a Gouverneur friend introduced Jean to John Francher, a saxophone player

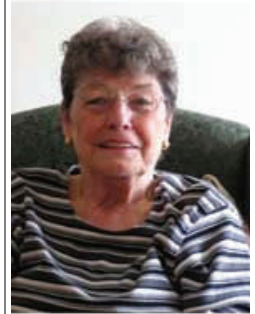
in Syracuse who had been in the Jimmy Dorsey orchestra. They married and moved to Vero Beach, Florida in 1992. John loved life and loved his music. Jean traveled with him and derived a lot of pleasure from his music and his *joie de vivre*. John died of cancer in 2005. While Jean was in Syracuse for his burial, Hurricane Jean devastated their home in Vero Beach.

One of Jean's sons fixed up a space for her in his Syracuse home, but Jean came to the conclusion that she needed more psychological space than living with any of her children would provide. She decided to return to Gouverneur and long time friends. Fortunately she applied for an apartment at Kilkarney Courts, a property managed by the Housing Council, at just

the right time.

Jean lights up when she is talking about her children and grandchildren, and also when she speaks of life at Kilkarney Courts. She bubbles with enthusiasm about the other residents. "John Mullin," she says, "bends over backwards to help people." She praises David Spilman, the maintenance man. She refers to the Housing Council's Property Management Director, Kristen Kenny, as "the sweetest thing." Jean says she has not had a single complaint in the 2 1/2 years she's lived there.

Jean feels very fortunate to be living in such a comfortable place with such nice people, and looks forward to many more years there.



Jean Miles-Francher

**Community Facilities** Staff: Dan Foster and Dave Weissbard

The Grasse River Heritage Falls Island Park is one of the ongoing projects to which the Housing Council's Community Facilities team has been making a significant contribution.

It is one of the many outcomes of the day several years ago when Peter Van de Water was stopped in traffic on Miner street, looked at Canton's lower Main St., and said, "This is disgraceful."

Peter came to Canton in 1954 as a SLU student, following in his father's footsteps. He was followed in turn by his sister and 2 brothers. Peter married Becky Blaisdell, a SLU student, and returned to become a part of the SLU staff after earning his PhD. In the meantime, his parents had moved to Canton.

The Van de Waters have raised their three children in

Canton and the level of their commitment to the North Country is unsurpassed.

Peter followed his Miner St. experience with action. He organized Canton's Downtown Revitalization Committee and raised money to help local storekeepers improve the fronts of their stores.

He played a significant role in the 1997 Canton Community Action Plan which yielded 50 recommendations for change, most of which have been instituted.

For the last 4 years, Peter has served as President of the Grasse River Heritage Area Development Corporation.

The organization encouraged the improvement of Willow Island. Peter is eager to see its current project, made

possible by two grants written and administered by the Housing Council, come to fruition this summer. It includes rebuilding the historic bridge between Coakley and Falls Islands, clearing trails and constructing a boardwalk on Falls Island with interpretive signs showing where the 9 mills were that once made Falls Island the heart of Canton's industrial life.

Peter stresses the significant number of people who have been actively involved in the projects. These same people stress how central Peter's vision, enthusiasm and skills have been.

The Grasse River Heritage Board has a great vision for other dramatic improvements along Canton's riverfront and the Housing Council looks forward to assisting in making them real.



Peter Van de Water by the Falls Island bridge

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**Working for Our Communities**  
 Spring 2007

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**From the Executive Director**

**\$3,496,340**

That is a lot of money! That is the amount that staff at NeighborWorks® America, the national network with which the Housing Council is affiliated, have estimated that just our home purchase activities alone in 2006 will mean in economic benefits to St. Lawrence County in the next decade. Consider that we have been doing this work for 26 years and you can only imagine the total impact our small organization has had on our county's economy.

Economic impact is not our primary focus, as the stories in this newsletter of some of the people whose lives we have impacted show. There are countless people: children, adults, and seniors; females and males; persons with disabilities, and the presently-abled; many people who are struggling to keep up, whose lives have been transformed through the services we have provided.

In the economic realm, which is easiest to measure, it is estimated that those who were able with our help to purchase their first home last year will accumulate more than a million dollars in equity over the next ten years. The lenders will receive almost \$2 million in interest from those mortgages. County realtors and brokers collected nearly \$200,000 in commissions from sales to our customers last year. We paid more than \$200,000 to home repair firms for work on those homes to bring them up to code.

Up until now, the vast majority of the support that has enabled us to do this work has come from outside St. Lawrence County. Most of our sister organizations in the NeighborWorks® network receive significant support from their own communities. We are being asked why it is that what we do is not valued more highly by the people and businesses in St. Lawrence County. I fear we have not asked for help clearly enough. *Will you help us help others gain access to decent and affordable housing in vital and vibrant communities with a tax deductible gift to the Housing Council?*

*Chris Rediehs*