

Passing of the Baton

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Change is an everyday event in most of our lives. It may be as simple as changing a shirt or as complicated as changing jobs. Change can be motivated by many things and occurs not only to individuals but to organizations as well. Organizational change usually does not occur on a daily basis but may have a daily effect on our lives.

The Mental Health Association of Lebanon County is experiencing a change. After successfully serving as the Executive Director for over 10 years, Janet Frick retired on December 31, 2009. I would like to personally thank Janet for her effective and remarkable leadership over these past 10 years. Janet's work continued to promote the mission of the mental health association and made Lebanon County a better place to live and work. Janet, on behalf of those individuals and organizations who have been touched by your work, I say thank you and wish you the best in your retirement. Enjoy your retirement.

The time to pass the baton has arrived. After Janet announced her retirement the Board of Directors formed a search committee and interviewed several candidates. I was fortunate enough to be chosen by the committee to receive the baton from Janet and carry on the work of the mental health association.

Carry on does not seem to fit the role of Executive Director. An Executive Director is responsible for not only carrying on the mission but also for the evaluation, assessment and improvement of the program(s). As I

assume this new role, I would like to share my vision for the Mental Health Association of Lebanon County.

The Mental Health Association has a long history of providing education and advocacy to Lebanon County residents, agencies, schools and other organizations. I plan to continue this work and to seek ways to improve community outreach. Therefore, I will take the time to assess the accomplishments of the agency and determine the best way to move forward. I believe that a good program continues to seek improvement and growth.

My vision:

1. Improve our community impact – education, promotion of mental health, improvement of perceptions and attitudes, assessment and monitoring of the mental health service system, collaboration with other agencies and partners, and impact the system through prevention, change and system improvements
2. Promote recovery and resiliency principles and programs
3. Promote Community-wide mental and physical health
4. Provide Strategic Planning focused on the Mental Health Association's mission

I plan to use a common sense approach in this column to discuss mental health awareness and mental illness. I will do my best to stay out of the political arena but I realize there may be a need to address political issues which affect mental health and mental illnesses, such as health care reform, my first topic for this column.

I conclude today's column with a short introduction of myself which I hope will be useful in building a relationship with you as a reader.

Lebanon, PA is my place of birth. My parents were the late Wilbur S. and Gloria Maxine (Herr) Heller. I have two older sisters, two younger brothers and two younger sisters. I am a 1975 graduate of Hershey High School and a 1988 graduate of Dallas Baptist University. I hold a Bachelor of Science Degree in Psychology and I am working on a Master of Arts Degree in Management with a concentration in Health Care. My work experience in the Human Services field includes inpatient psychiatric and substance abuse treatment, vocational rehabilitation of injured workers, inpatient and outpatient drug and alcohol treatment, crisis intervention counseling, facilitation of family support groups, behavioral health rehabilitation services (Wraparound), mental health case management, and director of mental health services for Lebanon County Mental Health/Mental Retardation/Early Intervention Program. I am a retired United States Navy Master Chief Petty Officer with a combination of 30 years of Active and Reserve Duty.

I currently work with the Healthy Lifestyles Committee and the Process and Procedures Sub-Committee of the Community Health Council of Lebanon County, the Lebanon County Disaster Crisis Outreach and Referral Team (DCORT), and the Lebanon County Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Team.

I look forward to the challenges of this new position and continuing to provide the Lebanon County Community with mental health education and advocacy. Have a healthy day – do something good for your mind, body and soul.

By Shem Heller, Executive Director of the Mental Health Association of Lebanon County.