

MELLON PSFS
Good Neighbor Award
June 8, 1993

I want to thank Mr. Thomas Donovan and Mr. Dick Torbert of Mellon PSFS for the Good Neighbor Award and for the \$5,000 grant for People's Emergency Center (PEC). I am grateful to the members of the Awards Selection Committee for their dedication to our community for their commitment to social justice, and for their faith in all of us. I am honored to have been selected for this prestigious award, and to be included among this stellar group of recipients!

We will be dedicating this grant to the development of twenty units of permanent rental housing, which, when added to the thirty units of homeownership housing currently under development, will mean that fifty homeless families will be able to move into their own homes in West Powelton, where fifty vacant and abandoned houses now stand. This gift will become part of the solution to homelessness and deteriorating neighborhoods -- because housing and jobs are the answers to homelessness, not shelter and welfare.

There is an enormous gap between homelessness and independence. Reverend Wells, Sr. Mary, Bill Parshall and all of us who serve the homeless understand that our mission is to build a bridge across that gap - to provide a continuum of help, available in a graduated process so that each person can move to independence and self-esteem in a one-day-at-a-time kind of way, though often it means going two steps forward, and one step back, and it is not easy. It cannot be done alone and cannot be done overnight. It takes courage and support both for those who build the bridge and for those who are crossing it.

The successes we see each day and recognition like this raise our spirits. I am continually revitalized by working with the young women at PEC who were homeless three five and ten years ago and today are fully employed neighbors who own their own homes. Their participation in the solution to their own homelessness was crucial to their success. Today, these courageous women are some of Philadelphia's most important bridge builders.

Partnership with each homeless person is critical if we are to reach independence. Tonight I want to call for a parallel partnership that must include government, community and business so that together we can move Philadelphia across the deep divide from a city focused on removing streetpeople to one committed to strengthening lives and infusing energy into every person, every block and every neighborhood.

Our work requires courageous leadership by political, religious, neighborhood and business leaders -- leaders ready to commit to a true partnership with the homeless, leaders willing to gather the support of the entire community, leaders able to change old ways of approaching this issue. In order to bridge the gulf - we must work together to construct a compassionate and highly structured system that will be available for any and all who want help, from the street, to shelter, to transitional housing with services, and finally to jobs and permanent housing.

City tax dollars cannot and should not be the sole resource. Civic groups, synagogues, churches and service clubs have known this and have dedicated themselves to helping the most vulnerable and needy. These small but powerful groups donate funds and volunteers, offer classes, serve meals, tutor children, paint walls, serve on Boards, and help in hundreds of ways that make a difference.

And, major corporations like Mellon/PSFS, have made substantial and literally ground-breaking contributions that enable homeless people to move from the streets into permanent housing and into the workplace.

What we need now is the commitment and support of the entire community, without which no social problem can be solved. Unfortunately there are still many neighbors, businesses and even elected officials who don't want to help. Angry, perplexed and frustrated, they don't believe that

change is possible or that they have a role to play in it. A few have portrayed the homeless as the major obstacle to a revitalized city. They would rather closet the homeless in shelters fence off subway entrances, and hope for clean streets than spend the energy to build housing or create jobs. Their response casts the homeless as the enemy, polarizes our community, and widens the gap.

Let me remind you of Maya Angelou's words at the Inauguration "Do not be wedded forever to fear, yoked eternally to brutishness." It is time to change hostile and divisive attitudes and to call a halt to turf battles and self-interested practices. If we are going to successfully rebuild our city, we must join together to silence the "not in my backyard" chant and its echo: "not in my workplace, not in my classroom, not in my church."

We have so many energetic and spirited partners in our attempts to strengthen lives and transcend Philadelphia's social divide. Sr. Mary, Reverend Wells, Mellon PSFS and many other wonderful people and institutions are trying to organize a "parade" of bridge builders. We're asking each of you to "Please come join us." There is a special place for you in this effort, right in front of the parade.

Remarks by:
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