

Thanks to everyone who made our 39th Anniversary Covered Dish Supper and Celebration possible!

Thanks to everyone who helped with set up (especially Laura Greene-Truett, Dicky Stone, Dane Spencer, James Jones, Kate Sheets, Moncello Stewart, Susan Earl) 35 creative & talented Table Hosts, The Savannah Station, HostSouth, Stagefront Production Systems, Resort Services Incorporated, Wade Herring for being our MC, Emily Earl for invitation design, Maggie's Morning School, Event chair Moncello Stewart and Kate Sheets, and all of our Board Members, The Rev. Sierra Wilkinson Reyes and Rudy Reyes, the band SOAP, the Unknown Trio, Jessica Feucht, and everyone who came on up for the Come on Up Community Choir, Storytellers Linda Wittish, Cathy Schmitz and George Seaborough, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity (The Savannah Sigmas), sweet and unsweet tea from BarFood and CoffeeDeli, flowers by Kim Bokius-Suwyn and Christ Church Episcopal, Mobcave Photography,

bartenders Tom Hussey, Brad Baugh, Quentin Marlin, Scott and Sallie Vaughan & Bill Behrens, Kelly Steele, Robert Cohen, Kristin Mulzer and Savannah Country Day School Students, Savannah Arts Academy students, Kitchen crew led by Paul Miller, Kathleen Fritz, Carolyn Tucker, Bill McLaughlin, Carmella Alifi, Jane Fishman, dishwashing team including Rob O'Brien, Tom and Maureen O'Brien, Pat and Jeanne O'Brien, Katie O'Brien, Martin O'Brien, Julia O'Brien, Madge Giorgio, Savannah Samba Drummers: Andrew Hartzell, Andy Young, Nicole Edge, Lu Fang, Rochelle Coatney, Monique Gordon, Jorn Schroeder, Kat Robertson, Josh Gary, Moses Gary, Ira Miller, Cleanup crew led by Ann and Andrew Hartzell and the Savannah Sigmas, the Sentient Bean, Molly Lieberman, and everyone who stayed to help clean up, Beth Mount for the beautiful quilt we



are using as our backdrop. All the Great Cooks who "Cooked Big" (especially Kevin Lawver, BJ Lowenthal, Murray Wilson & Martha Nesbitt) and everyone who brought a delicious covered dish to share. And everyone who jumped in to help make it such a wonderful evening!

Thanks to **Mob Cave Photography** for their wonderful photographs in this issue – find them on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/mobcave> or contact them at flashmobphotography912@gmail.com

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CHATHAM-SAVANNAH
Citizen Advocacy

Savannahians helping Savannahians for almost 40 years...

Chatham-Savannah Citizen Advocacy is a 39-year-old community-based non-profit organization that recruits, matches and offers support to over 100 local citizens in voluntary citizen advocacy relationships.

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Reflections on the Covered Dish Supper and Celebration

by Tom Kohler, Coordinator

As we wrap up our 39th Anniversary Covered Dish Supper and Celebration, I wanted to take a moment and talk about some of the strategy that supports the ethos of this event.

We first held our annual meetings in restaurants as banquets. We did what we had seen other organizations do. We held it at the **Blue Dolphin Restaurant**

on Mall Boulevard (for you Savannah historians) and had a head table on a platform. Charlie Brooks, chair of the Chatham County Commission, sat at the head table with our board chair and officers. The room was predictable -- tablecloths, silverware, glasses, all the same. Very official ... and very much sending the signal that things need to be uniform and tidy, and there is one way to do things. Hmm, not what we are trying to bring into the world.

We gradually realized that we were unconsciously promoting a way of looking at the world that we were trying to challenge and change: the "important" people up front, everybody else down in the cheap seats. Not exactly the model of "intentional egalitarianism" that we were creating by asking people who come from very different social statuses in life to find common ground and common purpose by becoming allies and advocates. We also realized that the \$15 pricing excluded people. Remember, it was 1978!

We shifted to **First Presbyterian Church** to a covered dish supper, and attendance



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started climbing. We kept doing the head table thing for a couple of years, and then we realized we didn't have to (old habits die hard). We got rid of that and went to a single music stand with a microphone in the center of the room, almost like doing theater in the round. It took a couple of years to come up with the "every table is different and decorated by someone different" idea. The message here is "things don't have to be the same to be beautiful" and "everyone has a gift to give." Same with people bringing food as a covered dish ... food from home, home-cooked, from the heart, not corporate.

First Presbyterian Church's fellowship hall was our home for many years until we outgrew it. We then moved to the Hellenic Center for our 30th anniversary event with board member Kristin Russell chairing and turbo-charging it. We packed the gym, the food was spectacular as were the stories, and we had a band and a dance afterwards. It rocked, but we outgrew that venue as well.

We've been at Savannah Station for many years now, and between 300 and 400 people turn out to celebrate one another with us. Here's a list of a few things we do, and why we do them.

- The social is a way to help people well, be social.
- The "Come On Up Community Choir" is a way to say "you don't have to be an expert to sing." It's a way to "build a bigger we." Come on up and let's create a choir.
- M.C. Wade Herring comments on "the important people" being everyone in the room -- no introductions of elected officials, no plaques for outgoing board members.
- We invite citizen advocates to tell their stories, the old fashioned way,



at the microphone, no power point, no video, just share what you feel, from your heart.

- It's not a fundraiser. Citizen Advocacy is by design based in the "gift economy" -- what can and will people freely do for and with one another without being paid at a time when people with disabilities are increasingly being seen and treated as commodities? That's a question that citizen advocacy asks -- and answers -- through action.
- It's a place of plenty. The decorations are over the top, the food is over the top, the mix of people is over the top, the quality of the MC is over the top, the music is over the top. It's a place of plenty, brought into being by many hands and hearts.

We have tried, over a period of years, to create a space that honors and enlivens our mission and our values. As you attend, you might ask yourself: "How does this event express the values of the organization? What is this event telling me about how this organization looks at the world?" These questions might be good to hold as you walk into any sort of meeting.

Many years ago Margaret Minis said, "This is what I think heaven might look like." Since then, we have heard that comment many times over.

The idea of Beloved Community rings true as well:

"The Beloved Community is not a utopia, but a place where the barriers between people gradually come down and where citizens make a constant effort to address even the most difficult problems of ordinary people. It is above all else an idealistic community."

– Rev. Jim Lawson

A Snapshot of Our Work this Year

3 STAFF 13 BOARD MEMBERS

18 NEW CITIZEN ADVOCATES ARE ORIENTED, MATCHED AND SUPPORTED TO BEGIN THEIR ADVOCACY JOURNEYS.

100 CONTINUING CITIZEN ADVOCATES ARE PROVIDED STRATEGIC, INFORMATIONAL AND MORAL SUPPORT.

400 + GRASSROOTS DONORS

= \$270,000 BUDGET.

At this year's annual meeting, Linda Wittish reflected on 37 years of being a part of a citizen advocacy relationship with Ms. Charlene Wilson.

"...When I think about being a citizen advocate, I think about lessons learned, about the power of words -- both positive and negative, about the importance of acceptance, the idea of appreciating one another, and about how life can present us with unexpected teachers, if we are willing to slow down, listen and learn. I began to understand that taking the time to see the world through another person's eyes often opens our own eyes. I began to learn that I had to unlearn some of the assumptions I had grown up with, assumptions about who belongs in our community and who is pushed aside. I have learned this by being part of Charlene's life for the past 37 years, by watching and listening to the assumptions people make about who she is and how she wants to live her life. We have each grown, learning from one another, and depending on each other for different things."

Cathy Schmitz has been a part of a citizen advocacy relationship for three years with Ms. Lisa Head. Their story of doing ordinary things offers a glimpse into one of the great challenges of our modern day – the challenge of loneliness.

"...My mother unexpectedly passed away on the day that Lisa and I were to meet each other for the first time. It was telling that on the day someone so important moved out of my life, someone else moved in. God works in mysterious ways. Most of the time we do ordinary things -- we run errands, eat lunch, get coffee, we go to the Aquatic Center for exercise. We get together, we talk. I've learned what it's like to get by on a small disability check and what it means to depend on public transportation. Lisa knows these things too well and it's eye opening and a cause for concern."

George Seaborough has been our Associate Coordinator for three years and makes and supports citizen advocacy matches. He shared part of his personal learning journey with us.

"...When I first came on board, I was taken to meet and hear from a lot of people who were personally involved. I heard stories about people going to meetings to ask questions, to challenge and change what was going on with someone at school or in a group home or in a hospital. I heard stories about people's families growing close, celebrating the holidays and finding new ways to be together. But it wasn't until I matched people with one another, and they created a story of standing in solidarity with one another that I truly understood what citizen advocacy is about."

God of Love,
thank you for the gift of tonight.
The gift of being the beloved
community in all its glory.
The gift of being our true selves without
judgment or fear.
Because all that we do tonight is
intentional.
The stories we hear from the
microphone and around the table provide
the vocabulary of our purpose.

All that we do tonight is intentional.
It can be messy.

We are packed together.
The tables are decorated with each
one being different from the other.
The food is prepared not in
industrial sized sculleries but on intimate
countertops in people's homes.
Our liturgy tonight is intentional.
The liturgy of greeting a stranger.
The liturgy of snaking your way
between tables to get in line for food.
The liturgy of seeing our neighbors anew.

For this dinner is truly an example of the
world we hope to be –
A world where everybody is
important. There is no VIP section.
A world where things don't have to
be the same to be beautiful.
A world where there is plenty ...
brought into being by many.

And so loving God,
bless the food and all the hands, voices,
bodies and souls who made this night
possible.
We give thanks.
Amen.

– The Rev. J. Sierra Wilkinson
Reyes & Rudy Reyes