

# ORION Communities



When you are in town - take a peek at Orion's changing window scenes - thanks to all the creative talent that keeps our display looking great!

## Kudos to Phoenixville Borough Council

It's being called a 'national crisis'. Whether buying or renting, the monthly costs for housing are going up across the US. Over 500,000 people nationally are homeless on any given night. In town, there are 5 shelters and transitional housing for the homeless.

Phoenixville is ahead of the curve in responding to the need for low priced homes. Last winter, the Affordable Housing Task Force, led by Borough Manager Jean Krack, presented forward thinking ideas to Borough Council.

The final report was accepted in January 2018 and the Phoenixville Council for Affordable Housing was created to establish priorities and assist with implementation. Led by Janice Biros and Kathryn Evans, this committee is now being invited to talk with other communities to share Phoenixville's local experiences for addressing this national challenge.

The pace of rebirth in the Borough has taken many people by surprise yet local leaders are committed to a community that can work for all residents. New conversations are popping up everywhere with developers wanting to understand the need, landlords interested in learning about housing vouchers, business owners concerned for their employees, and bankers looking at new loan programs.

The Council recently completed interviews with Phoenixville Media Group for the upcoming Affordable Housing video, stay tuned for further developments.

### Did you Hear?

Phoenixville Borough Council approved a 50 unit elder housing complex that will have rents of \$300-800/month! No wonder other communities want to learn how Phoenixville is finding new affordable and accessible housing options for our neighbors.

This is a big deal - many thanks to the community leaders who support new affordable housing options in Phoenixville!

## How Do You Define 'Affordable' Housing?

Does your family spend less than 30% of your monthly income on housing? Then your home is affordable according to the the federal government. In 2010, 33.2% of borough residents spent more than 30% of their income on rent, by 2015 the number had increased to 46.8%.

If you worked at a local restaurant making \$10/hour for 40 hours each week, you would earn \$1600/month.... 'affordable' housing would be just \$480/month which is hard to find. The Federal Reserve Board says 40% of Americans would need to sell something or borrow money to pay an unexpected \$400 bill. Many low income families are paying 50-70% and more of their income for housing so that unexpected repair, job change or medical charge can be catastrophic.

### Win a Jamaican vacation!

Raffle ticket inside or go to [OrionCommunities.org/raffle](http://OrionCommunities.org/raffle)



## Can't pass up an opportunity like this!



For those of you who have been following Orion for the last couple of years, you know Orion has changed a bit. In 2014, Orion worked out of a small office on Bridge Street that was open 20 hours/week, staffed with volunteers and saw about 15 clients-in-crisis a month. We began an outreach program going to community festivals (Blues, Blob, Pumpkin, Food Truck, etc.), keeping our doors open on First Fridays, and talking with everyone to let them know Orion could help our struggling neighbors.

People came to Orion – all sorts of people - neighbors in need, volunteers, partner organizations, new staff, donors of furniture, funds, and personal items for our clients. We grew right out of our little office.

Fortunately, another office was available just 5 store fronts away so with the help of our friends and clients, we moved. More people came to Orion – again those in need of supportive services as well as more volunteers, partners, and donors. And they came with new ideas on how to help those who were struggling.



With the development of two new programs, STARS\* and GLAD, and visiting partner organizations, Orion's office is now open 50-60 hours each week. Our Board President explained that "STARS\* and GLAD focus on getting children and parents ready for success in school, at home, and in life. Healthy children and healthy families grow healthy communities." All good, however, things have been getting a bit cozy in the office.

And then it happened! Our downstairs neighbors were interested in doing things differently and would Orion be willing to take over their lease? It has daylight in the front, wheelchair access from the back, and already has many essential office features. Orion's Board said 'yes' and the landlord said 'yes' so we find ourselves moving a couple of walls and adding stairs so that we have room to accommodate our programming and visiting partner organizations.

It's very exciting and we hope to have the renovations started in early September and move in by mid/late October! Feel free to peek in the window and watch the progress or check out Orion's social media for updates.



## A Client Story

This mother and teenage son are very supportive of each other in their new country. Sometimes she gets behind with her bills and Orion has helped out in the past but she always returns the funds. This time they had been kicked out of their home and were accused of 'intimidation' when actually it was the landlord who was being intimidating over their residency status. The landlord filed charges against them and they needed to appear in court but didn't know how to do it.

Orion connected them with the Montgomery County Bar Association that has a program with reduced fees for low income families. Orion helped with the fees. Not expecting the woman to fight back, the landlord backed down so all charges were dropped.

Shortly after, the mother and son received their residency cards and proudly showed them to Orion's staff with big smiles on their faces.

Proud member of  
**Cc**  
the Community  
Coalition



The first GLAD grads!



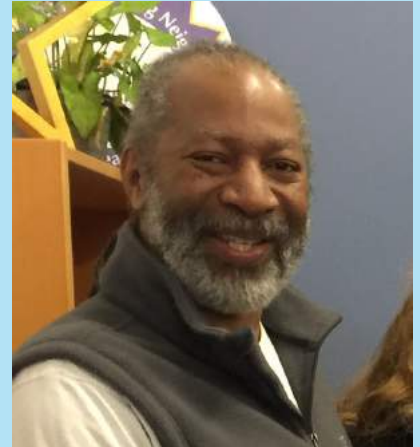
## Message from Orion's Board President

On October 18th the fourth annual Music for Everyone is returning to the Colonial Theatre and we are so excited to partner again with such talented artists. This year's themes are Love, Hope, and Gratitude. We hope to see everyone there. Well maybe not everyone as the theatre only seats about 600 but you get my drift.

On behalf of the staff and Board of Orion Communities, I want to express our gratitude for allowing us to serve our neighbors in need for over 40 years without accepting government funding. Thank you to the donors and foundations, to the volunteers and partner agencies, to our "Angels", families, and friends, and especially to this generous and supportive community.

Please join us on October 18th as we celebrate community and each of you with Love, Hope, and Gratitude.

Keith Burress



## Touched By STARS\*

The challenge presented by the Phoenixville Area School District was 'Together We Can' address the academic gap for children of low income households and their wealthier peers. Orion and friends took up the challenge and created STARS\* - Sharing Technology Advances Reading Skills. Without a computer, Internet or age appropriate books at home, a child will struggle to thrive with their academics.



With the conclusion of the 2017/2018 school year, the STARS\* Team is able to assess the program's first year. During the preceding 12 months, the STARS\* staff and volunteers (teachers, computer specialists and book enthusiasts) worked with 58 families (117 children & 19 parents) and gifted 65 computers and over 1600 children's books! One young man had earned a full scholarship to college but didn't have a computer until someone told him about STARS\*.

The feedback has been awesome and there are requests to grow the program – more families, more bi-lingual coaches, more computers and books, include high school students and add more STEM opportunities.

If you are interested in learning more about STARS\*, please send an email to [STARS@OrionCommunities.org](mailto:STARS@OrionCommunities.org). Thanks to everyone who gifted their time, laptops and books to help all of our children be the best they can be.



## Working Together

The question has been asked as to why Orion hosts other organizations in our office. It's really quite simple, Phoenixville is located at the edge of Chester County and many critical services are located in the County seat of West Chester. It takes two buses to get to West Chester from Phoenixville, three buses if someone wants to go to the Financial Stability Center or Career Links in Exton and that can take 1 1/2 - 2 1/2 hours or longer each way.

Providing office space helps our neighbors have easier access to critical resources and that will save time and money for everyone in the long run.



Crime Victim Center of Chester County – Tuesday 12:30-2:30  
Home of the Sparrow – Wednesday 9:30-12  
North Star – First Saturday of the month, 10-12  
Connect Points – by appointment  
SOAR (SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery) – by appointment  
VITA free tax preparation – Jan- Apr, hours tbd



## Neighbors helping neighbors!



Summer Fun 2018 -  
 Bob Dylan's Birthday  
 Bash for Orion;  
 Kris, Ken and Helen at  
 National Night Out;  
 Lupe and Nancy at  
 Latino Festival;  
 Francis recovering  
 nicely from knee surgery  
 and going for a walk  
 with his buddy, Glenn.



237 Bridge Street  
 Phoenixville, PA 19460



Sept 9, 9am  
 University of Valley Forge & Charlestown Park  
 Live music with RB72, free ice cream, great trails!

Thanks to our generous sponsors...

- |                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Bryn Mawr Trust                 | Safeguard by Innovation                 |
| Acme Markets                    | Phoenixville Hospital Tower Health      |
| Victus Health & Wellness Center | Videon Chevrolet                        |
| Pfizer                          | Giardina Insurance & Financial Services |

## WARMTH for ALL

November 17, 5-9 pm  
 @ the Phoenixville YMCA

Free event - share food, music and warmth

Coat, blanket and sock drive  
 as part of National Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Week



October 18 @ the Colonial Theatre  
 Doors open at 6pm for refreshments  
 the concert begins at 7pm  
 Fourth Annual Concert and drawing for  
 Jamaican Vacation!  
 Love, Hope & Gratitude

Go to  
[OrionCommunities.org/events](http://OrionCommunities.org/events)  
 for more information

Fun upcoming local events...

Sept 15, 6:30 Movie in the Park - Coco @  
 Reeves Park

Oct 6, 9-3 KidsFest @ Reeves Park

Oct 20, 10:30-4, PumpkinFest in the Downtown

Nov 3, 9-1 - Bed Races - part of HarvestFest

Nov 3, 5-7 Multicultural fest @ PAMS

Dec 8 Firebird Festival