

IT TAKES A CONGREGATION . . .

Building the Center for the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the South Jersey Shore

October 2013—Fifth-Year Anniversary



Friday, June 20, 2008, 1:13 PM . . .

Building Update from Captain Richard [Grzywinski]

As of June 18, the entire shell of the building has been constructed, framing of the rooms at the sanctuary level is complete, and framing of the classroom level rooms is underway. Under-floor plumbing in the basement has been installed..

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Contributors

Carl Benner
Jesse Connor
Debbi Dagavarian
Doug Dickinson
Peg Felix
Stephanie Garrett
Helene Gentile
Bob Gillies
Sharon Gray
Richard Grzywinski

Barbara Miller
Judy Pereira
L. Primrose (Prim) Reeves
Richard Schurig
John Searight
Betsy Searight
Jeff Taylor
Kim Trotto
Arlene Yacka

Edited by: Bob Baum, Debbi Dagavarian, Betsy Searight

Mariann Maene created a photo blog with commentary as we were in our year of building. It remains on our website, and we strongly suggest that you look at it in addition to reading this collective narrative history. The words and photo on the cover are from Mariann's blog.

It Takes a Congregation . . .

L. Primrose (Prim) Reeves

It takes a village to raise a child, and it takes a congregation to build a church (or center, or house of worship, or cathedral). You name it; we built it, and build it WE did.

Overview

Betsy Searight, congregational administrator during the period from the purchase of the land to the building's completion

We completed the purchase of our 6.2 acres of land on October 30, 2003. During the “due diligence” phase prior to the purchase, we learned of the myriad hurdles for approval to build in the Pinelands Preservation Area. (No wonder our purchase price of \$80,000 seemed so reasonable.) This included building on only 7.5 % of our land, and the paved parking lot (paving mandated) was included in this footprint. Also, we would need to have environmental surveys done. The Board moved ahead with the purchase, understanding that we would need to build a two story building and include an elevator.

On Sunday morning, November 23, 2003, we held a service to dedicate our land. During the next four years, we were occupied with capital campaigns, long range plans, first-home grant and chalice-lighter grant applications, architect plans, and environmental surveys, the most memorable and aggravating being to prove that there were no endangered pine snakes living on our property.

Keeping with the Seventh UU Principle, we wanted to follow the best environmental construction and operating practices available to us. And we would do as much with volunteer labor as we possibly could. Within these two important guiding principles, a miracle emerged. We had among our membership and friends people not only willing and enthusiastic workers, but people with a wide range of professional skills and experience who were willing to volunteer their time to make all of this happen.

These experienced and skilled volunteers included:

- Richard Grzywinski, Construction Manager: He was a recently-retired professional engineer who had specific experience in the construction and rehabilitation of houses of worship. He was responsible for the final design process, and oversaw the actual construction, including all contracting, scope negotiation, scheduling, permitting, inspection and approval of work performed.

- Chris Holaday, Site Supervisor: Chris is an experienced builder and carpenter with his own building firm. He provided his services at a nearly 50 percent discount from his commercial building rate. He was responsible for directing day-to-day construction activities, coordinating the work of the various trades, purchasing much of the building material, and providing the carpentry crew and equipment.
- Jeff Taylor, Plumbing, Heating, and Cooling Resource Person: Jeff had a career in plumbing supplies, and was still connected to a large plumbing supply firm. He was able to make all purchases at the best possible price, as well as be a consultant in his areas of experience.
- Tull Benton, Electrical Designer: Tull designed our high-energy, efficient electrical system.
- Tom Jansch, with his son TJ, Tile Setters: Tom Jansch was a retired tile setter and his son TJ, our member, also knew the trade. They worked many hours, using lights working off the generator, to tile all of the bathrooms and the foyer.
- Jack and Jesse Connor: Instrumental in getting our Pinelands Environmental studies done by volunteers from their network of nature consultants. Jack did the early morning and late night field work over a period of several months that provided the basis for our 20-page Habitat Assessment that he authored.
- Jesse Connor, Landscape Supervisor: Jesse, a professional landscaper and Master Gardener, developed our landscape plan and supervised our congregation's volunteers in planting native grass, shrubs, and trees. In addition Jesse headed a group called the Interior Committee, which made decisions as to color schemes, building materials, and furnishings. She directed our volunteers, always matching what needed to be done with those willing and able to do it.
- Victor Maene, Solar Panel Expert: Victor was working for a solar panel installation company at the time we were building. He was able to facilitate the placement of our panels, and see that we had a favorable financing with taxes and solar energy credits.
- Jonathan Shambare: Jonathan, whose expertise is in architecture, was a member of our community who had to move for professional reasons. He was also knowledgeable about alternative energy sources.
- Rob Sturts and Ted Ellis, Professional Carpenters: They did much of the work on the decks, and installed the door frames to the various rooms.

All of the work cleaning construction debris, clearing brush, preparing soil, planting, watering, sanding, painting, and constructing wooden ornamental brackets in the sanctuary, was done by

volunteers. The savings based on all the volunteer effort was estimated to have been worth over \$375,000 to the congregation.

By the end of 2007 our plans and permits were in place, and capital campaigns completed. We held a groundbreaking service on November 18, 2007. From January 7-10, 2008, the trees were cleared and construction began immediately. Nine months later, on September 30, we obtained a temporary certificate of occupancy at 4:30 PM and were able to hold our first worship service that evening, satisfying the deadline of September 30 for occupancy that enabled us to qualify for property tax exemption for the next twelve months. Having things come together just in the nick of time was another miracle.

Events and Services Held on our Property Prior to our Building's Completion

Betsy Searight

Land Dedication, November 23, 2003, less than a month after the purchase was signed. The only way to access the land was the road that is alongside our property. At this time, it was a barely used sand-dirt road that widened out a bit as it passed through a grove of pine trees. We used this spot for our gathering. Technically, it was not our land. Our speaker, Jack Connor, talked about our theme, embracing the Pine Barrens. Our children were asked to find some natural artifacts, and these were examined and identified by the speaker. We poured water onto the land from various sources, including water from members of the UU Wilmington Growth Committee who were with us on this day. We took a group photo beside the sign that Chris Holaday had made and erected, "Future Home of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the South Jersey Shore." We then had a luncheon at the nearby and newly opened Catholic Campus Ministry Center. This was very fortuitous, as we learned that they were happy to rent it to us on Sunday mornings. In a month, we began using this facility.

Intergenerational Tailgate Lunch & Treasure Hunt, March 13, 2005. We wanted our children to connect to our land and our future building. The younger children, with their parents, walked up and down the dirt road bordering the property, looking for hidden paper items that were to be pasted on to a diagram of our building. The older children had a treasure hunt, and placed the found objects within the outline of the building that Chris Holaday had prepared, such as a chalice in the sanctuary, and a figure in a wheelchair in the elevator space. Most memorably, play money was scattered throughout the woods to finance the building. A wonderful upshot of this is that some of our children decided to pledge some of their own money towards the building.

Meeting our student herpetologist, October 15, 2006. Part of our environmental study of the land was to prove that there were no endangered pine snakes. The survey company dug a long trench throughout much of our land, and erected a fence along it that diverted any would-be snakes into wooden box traps, which had to be checked daily. The Connors found a Stockton

student, Phil Skipworth, to check these traps as a part of his biology major project. We gathered at our land and learned from him about the project. He showed us a very small red bellied snake, which turned out to be his only find.

Groundbreaking Ceremony, November 18, 2007. The Reverend Richard Speck, the Joseph Priestley District Executive, was our speaker for the morning service at the Lions Center, and also participated in the Groundbreaking Service that followed. Richard Grzywinski had cleared a path through the brush to a spot where our building was to be, and had removed enough brush to give us a circle for standing. We had a collection of borrowed shovels (no shiny new ones) that Margaret Rea had decorated festively with ribbons. After the folks who had been selected for the honor of breaking the ground were finished, all were invited to do what they could to turn the well-rooted soil. At the end, the rain that had been threatening all day let loose just as folks had reached their cars

Open air service, April 13, 2008. On this date, we could not use the Lions Center for our service, as they were having a Pancake Breakfast. At this point, our steel structure was complete, and the sanctuary floor was in place. There were no walls as yet, nor roof. We held an informal service at the site, beginning with a processional of “Enter, rejoice and come in!” Everyone was invited to say a few words, using our bullhorn. Afterwards, we used the basement walls for yet another survey of possible names to replace UUCSJS. Our children (and some adults) enjoyed writing their names on the steel girders. It was a great day.

Summer Solstice Service, June 22, 2008: This was held in the area to the side of our building. We borrowed molded plastic chairs from the Catholic Campus Ministry Center, and enjoyed a well-planned and joyous service.

Service of worship and rejoicing, September 30, 2008. Our building was complete, and the temporary certificate of occupancy was obtained late that day just prior to the closing of the Galloway Township office. That night we had a worship service that enabled us to qualify for tax free status for the year, as October 1 was the deadline. Reverend Rosemarie Newberry led this service, which is described below in this document. It was truly a service of joy.

Accidental service, October 19, 2008. Another Pancake Breakfast at the Lions Center that we had not known about in advance left us no choice – we cleared the sanctuary floor of the lumber that was piled there to become baseboards, and held our service.

First official service, Sunday, October 26, 2008, led by Reverend Rosemarie Newberry.

Our Groundbreaking Service

Barbara Miller

On Sunday, November 18, 2007, a rainy and chilly morning, we stood in a clearing in the woods and blessed the land on which we would build our UU Center. In song, word and deed we embodied our hopes for our future. We sang “Come and Go with Me to that Land.” Richard Speck offered a message. We took turns with a shovel making our imprint on the land. I did not know what to expect from the year of building and could not predict how it would feel a year later to gather and worship in a place of our own making. It is a joy that few people get to experience. I thank Chris Holaday, Richard Grzywinski, Steve Fiedler, Victor Maene TJ Jansch, and Jesse Connor to name a few of those who gave a new meaning to the word “generous.”

Reflections at our Groundbreaking

Kim Trotto

I stood in the forest. A small piece of forest, but amazing still for a woman who’d grown up surrounded by vast open spaces. Someone—I don’t remember who—was about to turn the first spade of soil for the new UU building. In order to raise this structure, we’d need to cut down (kill) several trees. And someone else spoke of thanking the trees for their sacrifice. I thought of how drawn to paganism I’d felt after learning that, unlike many Christians who claimed dominion over the Earth and the right to do with it as they pleased, pagan people often gave thanks and sometimes a share of the bounty back to the Earth they took their living from. Oh, to belong amongst a group of people who could also feel that way! My heart went out to the unfamiliar forest. I was eager to see the new building but I stopped to thank the trees.

Volunteers “Came out of the Woodwork . . .”

Richard Grzywinski

Well, it seemed that way to me. Managing the construction for UUCSJS, I was, of course, deeply embedded in the process of ordering supplies, getting bids, negotiating contracts, scheduling and reviewing the work performed, re-designing as we went, obtaining permits, arranging regulatory inspections, and, occasionally, putting on my builder’s hat and doing some labor. Chris Holaday and I formed a great working partnership during the design phase. During construction it was a joy working with him and his talented carpenters. I don’t recall ever having a disagreement and I know I learned a lot from him. Nearly every day Chris, or his foreman, and I consulted each other on the work plan for the day. Occasionally, when we had perhaps thirty paid contractors working on site, I would post the project schedule and “things to do” list on a wall somewhere so Chris and I could keep track of all the activities. I recall that many of Chris’ crew were of Mexican nationality, and I learned to appreciate their particular strong work ethic and dependability. I also recall fondly how they referred to my dog,

a miniature pinscher that I would occasionally bring on site, as “Hey, Chihuahua” and feed him Mexican food at lunch time. I still laugh about it.

I was often both elated and surprised that other congregation members seemed to just “show up” at opportune times to accomplish so many necessary tasks, some which I requested and some, well, just because there was critical work to be done. It took me a while to learn that Jesse Connor and others were leading this hidden volunteer force that became so absolutely essential, without which we would have seen the building delayed and costs skyrocket. Here are a few notables I can recall – there were so many more:

- We needed to have thick steel plates delivered for our steel columns that form the basis of our structure. The fabricator couldn’t schedule delivery in time, and the company setting the concrete demanded that they be delivered now or else there would be a delay (“extra costs”). I put out a request, and just in time Mariann Maene pulled up and dropped off these heavy steel plates from out of her car having gone and picked them up in central NJ.
- Boxes. Boxes. Boxes. So many of our deliveries came in cardboard or other recyclable materials. Someone kept on showing up, with no fanfare, getting to work and removing these special wastes from the job site using his trailer. “Who is this guy?” I wondered. I soon came to know Richard Schurig very well as his spirit of volunteering kept going well after the building was done.
- I happened to pass the nursery one day and noticed beautiful and creative artwork starting to surround the walls. How it got there I really didn’t know. One day I found Kim Trotto working hard in her painting frock turning a dull room into a lively and enchanting nursery. Like so many volunteers, she quietly and humbly was making her contribution to the building.
- “Botelas” means bottles. “Papel” means paper. Many of the workers were of Hispanic nationality. Someone saw the need to make sure that they understood to recycle waste materials into properly labeled containers. Waste drywall, of which there is always a lot at construction sites, was packed into a van that kept showing up. The same with metal scraps. It was Steve Fiedler who kept on top of everyone to make sure we recycled everything we could, even getting a magnet to pick up scattered nails, and hauling out the drywall.
- Miles of trim to be painted, and repainted, or so it seemed. All to be done before it was installed. I hate painting!! But we had a barrage of volunteers doing the tedious work of painting window and door trim, investing many hours in this task.
- The interior cornices that were initially in the building design had been taken out due to the cost. But as the sanctuary neared completion, it seemed to be lacking something. Chris Holaday designed the cornices, and Jack Miller cut them out, thus coming to the rescue. The eight cornices around the room added the dose of character that was badly needed.
- We were having trouble installing the new bamboo floors. I brought in my power floor nailer and thought I would show the contractors a thing or two. NOT! After nearly

breaking my wrist trying to install the first board I concluded that we have a serious problem here. Bamboo, I learned, is 13 percent harder than maple and 27 percent harder than northern red oak. Fortunately, TJ Jansch knew who to call and in a few days our floors were down. Another crisis avoided.

- In construction, there is nothing like making payments on time to assure that the contractors are responsive and cooperative, thus avoiding delays and extra costs. So while we focus on our structure, it is worth recalling the contributions of our financial team who controlled the purse strings and saw that requests for payments were made on a timely basis. Many thanks to Prim Reeves and John Searight for being on call, sometimes at a moment's notice, to dispense the funds as work progressed.

Final Statistics

No. of design drawings.....54
No. of individual contracts and/or purchase orders issued.....85
No. of contractors or vendors.....about 70
No. of doors purchased.....32, five of which are double doors
No. of windows.....38, five of which were donated by Bill and Peg Felix, and stored for a year by Paul Utts
Square feet of roofing.....5,300
Square foot of the building.....7,200 (3,600 per floor)
No. of light fixtures.....138
No. of elevators.....1
No. of steps from floor to floor in each of two stair towers.....21 (12 feet, 3 inches)
Time to build from first bulldozer (January 8) to Certificate of Occupancy (September 30):
262 calendar days
Pounds or gallons of fossil fuels to heat or cool the building.....ZERO !!

UU Building

Jesse Connor

I remember pulling together a three-page thank you after we moved into our Center, listing all the volunteer efforts with a brief mention of what each person had contributed. I could have easily quadrupled the number of pages and still not done justice to the story of how each person's artistry, skill, labor, and generosity added to our building. I wish we had the space here to include that list of names again.

You may have heard of the often-cited statistic that 20% of any group does 80% of the work. We defied that trend. I remember saying five years ago with enormous pride, that more than 80% of our Congregation pitched in – at the crack of dawn, after school, after work, in the morning, in the evening, on the weekends – with some even putting in 10-20-30- hours a week. Some volunteered while simultaneously watching toddlers; others who had to drive distances

to join the effort stayed overnight at friends' houses so they could put in longer days on the site.

Our Center became a beehive of activity, and the enormity of what needed to be accomplished in a short time seemed overwhelming. But we were extraordinarily blessed with many talented members and friends (even relatives pitched in!), and the challenge was one that helped us grow in a myriad of ways. Our dedication to our values and our mission was constantly being tested. So many decisions had to be made that we had to develop ways of reaching consensus, and we became better about seeking input and hearing all voices. So many tasks had to be accomplished in such a short time that we were thrown together with others we barely knew – watering, sanding, painting, scraping the basement floor, removing materials for recycling, spreading eco-soil, and the list could go on and on. In the struggle to get it all done we grew to know each other better and to treasure each other more – and we were repaid for our efforts many times over by the joy and love that are the cornerstones of our new home.

A Real Live Green Building Project!

Steve Fiedler

In my case, the new building project was my introduction to UUCSJS. I had only heard of UUs at all through some conversation with Lee Campbell at our Galloway Environmental Commission meetings. A very nice picnic invitation to the home of Jesse and Jack Connor conveniently put Barb and me in the company of some of the key players of the project. I suppose it was the perfect storm for UUCSJS and me; being in the kitchen and bath field and actively studying green building. Part of my role became to help keep the building on a path to become certified as “green” or sustainable, under the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) program. We have not been in a position to afford the final review process, but, for the record, we used those guidelines to great effect and can someday still easily pass the LEED scrutiny!

What a beautiful and effective group of professionals and determined volunteers! Richard Grzywinski was the perfect project manager: tough, resolute, focused. Chris Holaday and his crew worked so very hard with the construction. Jesse Connor brought out the best in all of us, quietly organizing workers and tasks. Jeff worked tirelessly to help smooth the plumbing process and navigate, with Richard, the geothermal heating and cooling system sizing and installation. Tull Benton designed the lighting and electrical system, receiving supplemental power from the solar panels supplied by Victor Maene.

Some of my memories of this project:

Huddling with the building team after services at the Lion's Center to unroll the plans and discuss details, changes and alternatives.

Seeing really, for the first time, the emotions on the faces of members at the groundbreaking and later at the opening ceremonies.

Working closely with Jesse Connor and Jon Luoma on green decisions and material research; balancing cost vs. benefit.

Getting up often at 4 AM to work alone on the site, when I could get my truck up close and work on multiple rooms without disturbing others. When the crews and volunteers arrived, it was time to go start my business day.

Road tripping with Jesse to check out green materials successes and failures, particularly the non-toxic floor coating for downstairs. She put on a backpack pump sprayer and applied the three-step coating like a pro by herself!

Traveling to Burlington County's MUA to recycle drywall, rigid plastics and scrap wood; taking friends along for company each time!

Bob Gillies methodically working, with NPR as his constant companion.

Pitching in with folks in the driving rain, trying to stop the grass and topsoil from completely washing away into the drainage basin.

Taking precious breaks now and again with tired, dirty, but smiling people!

Performing a green kitchen renovation in my own home during the UUCSJS project; with both projects eventually taking almost the same amount of time . . . the UU Center was completed first!

With Jon Luoma, proudly taking folks for tours of the newly completed building to describe its green features!

Oh yes, and all the while, finding out more about Unitarian Universalism and eventually becoming a member after about four years!

How to Turn a Cadillac into a Prius

Jeff Taylor

Most of the usual suspects were there – Richard Grzywinski, Chris Holaday, Steve Fiedler, Jon Luoma, Tull Benton, Jonathan Shambare, me, and many others who came occasionally. We would gather at Richard's house, usually around the kitchen table with plans spread out. Moving from one page to another, each of us with ideas of how to make the building more environmentally friendly and, most importantly, how to save money. The sessions were like

a job meeting. Each trade trying to coordinate with the others. Was this possible? Would that work? What clearance would this need? Most importantly, how could we cut the cost? We were trying to turn the Cadillac the architect gave us into a Prius that we could afford.

My part was to do the value engineering for the plumbing and HVAC systems. The plumbing was easy – just making sure we were using the correct sensor faucets, low flow toilets, waterless urinal, and instantaneous water heater. Also, getting rid of recirculating water lines and making sure the piping lines would work efficiently.

The geothermal system was more of a challenge. The original design called for 12 wells, 30 tons of air conditioning, a huge duct system, a large fresh air system, and a computer-controlled ATC system with no written design. With a little help from my friends we came up with an alternate design. Friends from Mill Pond (experts in local geothermal design and water table knowledge) looked at equipment sizing and well capacity. Other friends, from Mechanical Supply, worked on the heating and cooling load calculations and put together an alternate ductwork design. We received lots of information from Testwell Craig labs on types of wells, and they priced out various options. We came up with a redesigned system and bid package with much smaller geothermal equipment, with 21 tons of AC, four wells, smaller ductwork, a much smaller fresh air system, and a thermostat-controlled system. Then Richard sat down and recalculated all of the cooling and fresh air loads from his engineering manuals and we agreed that these ideas would work. All of the changes were resubmitted to the architect and the project engineer. After some discussions back and forth our design was approved. We then put the project out to bid, met with contractors, compared prices and selected the contractors.

Through this whole process Richard spent untold hours with me, his engineering books, and the plans. And he was on the site all day for most days as the general contractor. I am personally so grateful to Richard for the year+ of his life that was devoted to our wonderful UU Center.

Volunteer

Peg Felix

Working on the church construction was such a positive endeavor; it felt a bit like it must have been for early settlers going out west and building their first home. Bill and I did a number of different things, outside and in, but in addition to the many who got the whole project going, I want to pay a special tribute to Jesse Connor, who every day organized all the volunteers who showed up, and there were a lot of us. People arrived with or without skills, with or without any idea of what they could do or wanted to do, and Jesse always found a way to settle them on a task, and demonstrate how to do it if necessary, so that they actually did something useful, and just as importantly, finished that day's work with a sense of accomplishment.

Reflections

Richard Schurig

Upon seeing the drawings at the Lions Center I was impressed with all that was presented. So much work and detail was provided by so many. A home, not a borrowed space, was on the horizon. I wanted to be as much a part of building our new home as much as I wanted to be a part of Unitarian Universalism. The commitment to seeing such an undertaking was obvious. My thirty-five years in the building trades would be put to good use again. When I first saw the large hole in the ground I remember thinking, "We have a long way to go." Each day that passed brought us closer to a reality that had been just a dream. List after list. Piles of material moved from the lot to a predetermined place in the building. Sweaty people covered in dirt lending their various talents for a common good. The roof was on and we were signing our names to two-by-fours before the sheet rock went up. A conversation with Chris Holaday in the gravel lot went like this: "Chris, I said to myself one day that if I ever hit the lottery I would build a church. It would be different than any other." "Richard, I've had that same thought. Maybe hitting the lottery is what has happened here. It doesn't always have to be money that fulfills a need."

The UU Center: How Much Did It Cost and How Did We Fund It?

John Searight, Chair, Capital Campaigns I & II and Member, Finance Committee

Our beautiful green building cost \$1,171,753, our six acres of Pinelands \$89,000, and furniture and equipment \$16,546. Total Cost in dollars: \$1,277,300. The added value of the huge number of hours contributed by so many members and friends is difficult to convert into dollars, and perhaps should not be. Some gave days, weeks, even months of their professional expertise; many more came forward to contribute like amounts of sweat equity, from painting, pounding, sawing, scrubbing, and watering, to tile setting, plumbing, electrical work, design, and landscaping. While most can understand how and why we contributed our time and talent, many find it much harder to imagine how we accomplished the funding.

It was early in our fifth year (2005) as a member congregation of the UUA that we decided the time had come to find out if we could have our own building. We had purchased land in 2003, so the idea of having a place that we owned instead of rented had been with us for awhile. If we were to grow and prosper in southern New Jersey, most of our 73 members believed, we needed a place of our own, a place where a liberal, diverse, and inclusive congregation would be safe and permanent and not dependent on the good will of a landlord. Our supporting congregation, First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, recommended that we consult with the professional fundraising staff of the UUA, and we learned that the first step in deciding about a Capital Campaign was to have one of their consulting staff work with us and facilitate a visioning weekend, followed by a feasibility study to see if a Capital Campaign were possible.

The resulting recommendation, a “stretch goal” of \$275,000, stunned us initially, but we were close to unanimous that we should go for it. The true depth of our commitment soon became apparent when our campaign began and members and friends stepped forward with amazing generosity. 52 pledge units (members) and 18 friends and supporters pledged a total of \$285,500, to be contributed over a three year period. We had seven pledges ranging from 15 to 36 thousand, nine pledges from 5 to 15 thousand, nine from 3 to 5 thousand, and forty-five pledges from 500 to 3000 dollars. The success of the campaign enabled us to apply for a First Home Grant from the UUA. A brief addendum to this initial phase of our capital fundraising: the \$89,000 purchase of land in 2003 was paid for by two major gifts from members and a \$20,208 Chalice Lighter Grant. And, we had several unexpected gifts of significance, including \$10,000 from the sister of a member, \$5,000 from a member of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Mill Creek, \$1,100 from a member of First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, \$1,000 from the mother of a member, and \$700 from birders who had participated in our Birding B & B’s. And, yes, we did receive a First Home Grant of \$25,000.

It was the summer of 2007. We finally received approval of the Pinelands Commission in July. In September Galloway Township approved our Building Plan and groundbreaking was set for November 18th. There was one problem: the estimated cost of our building had grown considerably and the number \$840,000 was put forward with the caveat that we might well exceed one million. After much discussion and serious reflection, we decided to have Capital Campaign II. The theme of the first campaign was “Building a Home for U & U.” We added “The Journey Continues” and set a goal of \$200,000 with the call of “Let’s Exceed It.” In December, with the ground broken and construction about to begin, we did exceed it with pledges totaling \$245,888. An added bonus: completing a second campaign enabled us to apply for a second First Home Grant, which we did and which we received.

Construction of the UU Center began January 18, 2008 with the removal of trees, always painful, but necessary. The earth movers arrived January 20th and the foundation was dug and grading completed. Structural steel was ordered and the footings were poured February 20th. We were very much underway!

By mid-July 2008 the roof was in place, the duct work almost completed in the sanctuary, and we were running out of capital funds. We needed to apply for a “bridge loan” to complete construction, in order to be eligible to apply for a mortgage. However, the real estate bubble had burst, easy money was no longer available, and we were facing the prospect of interest rates as high as 16 to 18%. It did not take long for a few members of our congregation to step forward and offer short term, low interest loans. More followed and we secured seven loans totaling \$554,000. We also successfully applied for a “double” Chalice Lighter Grant (\$40,000) from the Joseph Priestley District. We had the necessary funds! Construction continued, and we received our temporary Certificate of Occupancy at 4:20 PM, September 30, 2008, enabling us to have our real estate tax exemption beginning January, 2009.

However, we were not quite done with the necessity for more financing. We needed to complete finishing work inside, landscaping outside, and provide additional furnishings in order to

become fully and comfortably operational. Once again members of the congregation came forward and we secured two short term year loans of \$50,000 each. The only remaining challenge was to obtain a mortgage so we could retire the seven loans that enabled us to complete construction. We turned once again to the UUA and their building loan program, and in February, 2009 we made settlement on a \$500,000 mortgage. We have a rate of 4.25%, which is excellent, considering we are considered a “business” for mortgage purposes. Our monthly payment is \$2,609; the amortization schedule is 25 years, and we have to reapply in the fall of 2015 when the interest rate will be reset. All the in-house loans from our members have been retired.

The generosity and commitment of those who gave so much to the Capital Campaigns, those who loaned so much in our time of need, and those who contributed so much of their time and talent live on as part of our heritage.

Summary of the Amounts and Sources of the Funding for Our UU Center

JPD Chalice Grants (3): \$60,200
Sponsoring UU Congregations: \$7,750
UUA First Home Grants: \$50,000
Capital Campaigns I & II: \$531,400
Additional Gifts from UUCSJS Members & Friends: \$70,000
UUCSJS Member Short Term Loans: \$640,000 (all retired)
Mortgage Supported by the Use of UUA Veatch Funds: \$500,000
Totals: \$719,350 in Contributions and Grants; \$500,000 in Mortgage;
\$640,000 in Short Term Loans

Financing the UU CENTER

Carl Benner

The land had been purchased and the commitment had been made to build. We had successfully completed our first capital campaign. We had money to begin. Then the matter of financing this building that we had underway came to the forefront. Several of our members who were accustomed to dealing with money matters were requested to speak to their bankers and report back so that we could obtain the most favorable terms for “the mortgage.” When all reports came back, it became very obvious that there were no favorable terms to be had. Thirty year mortgages *might* be available, but double digit interest rates were all that was heard; *if* a small congregation with such grandiose ideas for a building would even qualify.

I came forward with an idea. Let’s sell three-year bonds to members and friends of our congregation. We would offer a five percent annual rate of return to them and a promissory note to redeem the bonds in three years. This would save the congregation a ton of money and allow us time to build a financial history of our meeting our financial obligations and might

provide a reasonable time for interest rates to ease off to a more reasonable level. It would also provide a return higher than the bank deposits were offering to depositors. A win/win concept. Except that the financial committee considered it a non-starter. The UUA financial consultant had advised that it is a bad idea to finance with congregants' money.

So, back to the banks, where we were greeted with the same terms and informed that a construction loan would be required, at even higher rates, until the building was actually granted an occupancy license. Back from the financial committee came the bond sale idea. However, it was referred to as loans. Our president, Paul Utts, drafted a letter to a sampling of our members who might be in a position to offer loans for up to three years, at 6% interest. We all held our breath, but in a few days the affirmative responses came rolling in. We *had* our financing and the terms were going to be reasonable and not saddle us with a financial burden that might strangle our future plans and actions. Let the record show that the commitment of our members to UUCSJS was both sweat labor and "risk" capital.

As a post script to this narrative: Well before the loans were due and payable to our members, the UUA approved UUCSJS for a low interest mortgage and the congregation was able to retire almost all of the loans held by members. At the UUCSJS we are what we are and the reason we are is that our members are what they are.

Paying the Bills

L. Primrose (Prim) Reeves

Some had many roles but mine was singular. The money! Pay the bills, the contractors, the non-voluntary workers, and try to track it all. You might expect by that I mean I sat back and waited for Heidi to bring in the mail and then write a check. That would have been easy. Most of the time it was quite different because Richard Grzywinski had a plan: if we used local businesses and we paid on delivery, they would give us a good discount and we could really keep our costs down. Richard was wise, Richard was experienced, and Richard knew what he was doing!

Sometimes I was lucky because Richard would call at the end of the work day to tell me what materials would be delivered in the morning, whom to make the check payable to, and for how much. The days I remember the most are the days when a call would come in at 8:00 AM saying can you be here in an hour with a check for _____? And my answer always was: "Sure, I'll be there! How do you spell that name and how much is that invoice and what's it for?" To this day I still thank Richard for saving us thousands of dollars.

All payments were backed up with receipts; all expenditures were accounted for. But the part that I enjoyed the most was being able to see the day-to-day progress when I delivered the check.

Signing the Beam

Helene Gentile

The event I remember most was the signing of the vertical beam. A group of us signed or printed our names, some with a funny phrase, some with a deeper message, but it was done in a spirit of excitement and anticipation. All of us realized that when this beam would be once more exposed, many of us would probably not be around, yet there was a hope that the congregation would be would-be new people searching for meaning and finding it here, just as we had searched and found it.

Recollections

Sharon Gray

Before construction started, we held the land dedication. The Reverend George Blair was part of this, as was Andy Kreutzer, one of our founders. Four years later, we held a groundbreaking ceremony, in the rain, with several of us holding a shovel.

With the help of some old friends at Atlantic City Electric, our electric power installation and pole settings were streamlined. I bought them a fruit basket for eliminating some of the red tape for us. My co-worker Andy Shawl, a civil engineer at BL England Gen Station, designed the septic system that the Atlantic County Health Department requested be expanded. That was a sign for us to grow much larger in numbers!

I was still working. My grandson Justin was in the Oakcrest School Band, Scouting, and working part-time at Wawa, or traveling to Long Island to visit his then-girlfriend. Sam, my student from Bangladesh, came in August of 2008. I recall that Sam was more available to help us than was Justin, given his schedule. One day Sam was helping move some boards, and Richard Grzywinski inadvertently swung the boards around, broadsiding Sam in the head. Sam survived quite well, with a bump and a bruise, but Richard felt soooooo bad. It was during that time that the support beams were set for the front portico. The kids and some adults got to write something and sign their names on the beams, before the siding was finished. Sam signed in a couple of different languages. It was sort of a 'time capsule' that will never be opened unless the portico is torn down. Everyone who had time worked very hard. I recall Bob and Peg Gillies being two of the hardest workers. In fact, when Justin, Brian and Sam were moaning about the heat ("how much longer do we have to stay?"), I used Bob and Peg as examples. I told them we couldn't quit as long as the Gillies were still working that day. That kept them going for another couple of hours. Many of us were involved in watering the grass, watching it grow, and cutting it. I hadn't done this for ten years since I lived in a community with a condo association.

We used the walls of the unfinished basement to 'vote' for a new name for UUCSJS, which we never did change. That's good. I had fun working with others on painting, cleaning and whatever I could. So many people pitched in to help in so many aspects of the construction.

Being on the Interior Committee

Betsy Searight

The Interior Committee is what the group of about eight called ourselves. Jesse Connor was our very able leader. The committee was started on the advice from another congregation that we should have a group to make decisions as to what donations we would accept – a very delicate subject when a person has a piece of used furniture, or a treasured painting, that just does not go with the surroundings or with the needs. Who is empowered to say “No, thank you.”

We began with developing a collective vision for the guiding aesthetic, and came up with something like “simple, Shaker, natural materials, and environmentally green.” An early project was choosing the chairs for the sanctuary, along with the fabric and color. As we progressed, we were choosing all of the paint, elevator colors, tiles and colors, exterior colors, and flooring choices and colors. We also chose the decorative lighting fixtures.

It was interesting to see us move from a group with few collective possessions to owning a furnished building. Originally, and in order of acquisition, we owned an outdoor sign, hymnals, and, by our third year, a banner. While at the Catholic Campus Ministry Center, we purchased eight-foot long folding tables, and our Yamaha piano. At the Lions Center we purchased a library cart for our hymnals. Along with RE supplies, this is what we had to move into the building.

Our only new purchases were the Sanctuary chairs, which were included in our building budget, and the green and blue RE tables and chairs, which were purchased from a grant from the Wilmington Growth Committee. Jesse organized a building shower, where folks signed up to donate items such as doormats, cleaning supplies, bulletin boards, kitchen towels, coffee pots, and clocks. Participation was amazing. For the other furnishings, we were able to choose many items like our library furniture and chalice table from homes that were being closed primarily due to deaths of parents. Desks and filing systems for the offices were donated, as well as the first computers. Steve Fiedler installed repurposed kitchen cabinets in all of the downstairs rooms. “Repurposing” was the mantra.

One piece that was needed was a pulpit. The Margaret circle commissioned and paid for a rounded oak pulpit done by Dave Fiedler, Steve’s brother. Steve’s other brother Martin, helped us in a big way by assembling our sound system at cost.

Like the miracle of all the skilled help that came together to build the Center, the right furnishings at the right time were also a blessing. And it was thrilling to see all of these choices come together for a harmonious whole.

Remembering

Bob Gillies

When it became apparent that the building of the UU Center was going to happen, I looked forward to giving some sweat equity to the effort. But as the process dragged on, I became concerned that I was in a losing battle with my back. My back had been bothering me for decades, but I had been able to control it through exercise. It had never kept me from doing what I wanted to do and I hoped that that would continue. With the purchase of the property I began to believe that I would be able to participate, but then the Pinelands regulations struck and I again became concerned about the delays.

When we got past that and building began, I tried to find ways to contribute to the effort. I soon found it in painting. Peg and I decided to take our travel trailer up to a camp site that was off Jimmie Leeds Road. Our son Carter came to visit us and help in the work. But then Peg got sick and ended up in the hospital. We decided that while Peg was in the hospital, Carter and I would stay at the camp site and do the work at the Center. We drove up in the evening and planned to go to work the next day. However, the next morning we found that Peg was to be released from the hospital. So we drove back to Cape May to bring her home. We decided that Carter would stay with Peg as she healed and keep the medications straight, and I would go back to the Center.

I stayed at the camp site for two weeks, during which time I was fed a few times by the Connors and the Searights. When Peg recovered and Carter went home, my schedule allowed me to come up to the site on Tuesdays at noon and stay all the next day. During this time I was put up mostly by the Connors, but also by the Searights and the Cluffs, all facilitated by Jesse. That contribution by them is not generally acknowledged, but was really appreciated by me. As the completion date approached there was still a lot of work to be done. So I decided to spend a week finishing the painting. I decided to not impose further on those who had put me up before so I decided to sleep at the Center, though they continued to feed me supper. I slept in the nursery on an air mattress with a sleeping bag. I underestimated how cold it could get down there, but I survived it. There are not too many spots at the Center where I can't see some of my handiwork. But I could not have done it without those who helped me, and my wife, Peg, who was not able to work with me, but fully supported me.

Building the UU Center

Debbi Dagavarian

Five years ago we were building the UU Center. Many members worked hard, donating their time and labor. I knew I wouldn't be able to do much physical labor, but I decided that I would do what I could. I made sandwiches and brought cold drinks and snacks to the workers, something I could do easily. And I would drive Nick over to do work, as he was physically able to do many things. One day, though, I decided I'd try to do some actual, physical work. Chris let me

use one of his power tools, one of those drill-type tools that unscrews as well as screws, and my job that day was to remove the screws and washers from these large construction spools so that they could be recycled. I don't know what those monstrosities are called, but they are big and made of wood. It gave me a chance to contribute in a way that I could manage, and allowed me to feel like I was doing something more useful than feeding the troops.

With You in Spirit

Arlene Yacka

As I look back on those years, I recognize the dedicated efforts of so many of our church members. Due to age, I was unable to participate in any physical labor, but I upheld the effort with caring love and interest. I was amazed at the lay members who would dedicate their time, knowledge and efforts to our new home. I would stop by on occasion to see where they had progressed and see that they had gone quickly on to new heights. Our financial committee also had to go to new heights in achieving the goals financially that we needed for this new structure. It was one of the first experiences I had with the "green" movement—our building is an inspiration to us all. The amazing part was the dedication of the many people who put the building together piece by piece, special skill through special skill. I am so proud of our contributing members and have endorsed their labors all the way. Their efforts did not go unrecognized. Thank all of you who put your heart and soul into the construction of this building that has become a home to all of us.

Learning the Ropes

Doug Dickinson

My time with UUCSJS is shorter than some, greater than others'. Colby brought me into this wonderful family. My first encounter with you was when the vigil was held at the present location for the murdered Tennessee UUs. I was so impressed with the language spoken and the empathy felt that I was certain that this was the place for me. I was willing to help in any way – first I offered to paint – this is cute – I was told that Jesse Connor was in charge, and it better be right or I would hear about it. Sorry UUs, but the fear of God or someone was put in me! I painted half a wall and Jesse came downstairs. I said, "Is this ok?" and she said, "It's great." I lived for another tomorrow. As time has gone by I have realized that Jesse is a wonderful person! Then Chris Holaday taught me how to cut trim for the baseboard and install it. I thank him for that. Colby told me this is a family, and all I can say is it truly is, and I am grateful for the family that WE are! I love UUCSJS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

What Shall I Paint on the Nursery Walls?

Kim Trotto

The question of a theme for the nursery mural didn't hide in the back of my mind like it usually does while I consider others. Within less than a minute of being asked to do the painting, I knew exactly what it would be. Baby animals of course, but not just any would do. No barnyard ducklings or cuddly baby chimps in a jungle cradle. These would be animals the children might see right here in South Jersey. Since my plan included mommy and daddy animals too, I'd paint a baby dolphin splashing next to mom, an unhappy baby horseshoe crab, a naughty sandpiper chick getting a scolding from dad, a fussy baby blackbird, even a bear cub in mom's lap.

Actually doing the mural took a bit longer. Making concept drawings, doing the enlarged wall drawing, and painting the figures required several weeks. It was hard work and it was a great pleasure. Many people have told me how much they like it. I'm so happy I had this chance to add to the beauty of our building.

Watering the New Grass

Betsy Searight

We were mandated by the Cape Atlantic Soil Conservation Authority to plant grass, and before we could receive a certificate of occupancy, this agency had to inspect our grass and sign off on it. And the grass we were told we must plant was a non-native Kentucky bluegrass. We put a little of this in the retention pond, and used red fescue (native) for the rest of our grounds. Planting the grass was a big project in which many participated.

Watering our baby grass during the long hot summer was heroic. Many hundreds of feet of hose, and over a dozen sprinklers were borrowed from congregants. We had one single water spigot to use, which was located in the mechanical room. The hose from this went into a series of connectors and shutoffs, eventually leading to 16 sprinklers plus two large areas to be watered by a hand held hose. There was only enough pressure for two sprinklers or a hand held hose to be used at the same time. Each non-rainy day, half of our areas and sprinklers were run for 20-25 minutes each. The next day the other half was watered. We had about 15 people lined up who would take a turn, and this turn took them almost 3 hours to complete. My job was to line up the volunteers, whom we called the "watering wizards," and see that each day was covered.

Five years later, when I see the lovely meadow that has grown in the retention basin, and that we really do have something short and green around the building, I am overwhelmed by the beauty of it all. There is little, if any, of the mandated bluegrass, and that is just fine.

More on Watering the Grass

Stephanie Garrett

I didn't think that my small role was very important. Because of allergies and the distance from the Center to my house and my summer work schedule, I didn't think I would be able to contribute to the building and landscaping of our new facility. But, my allergist said okay if I stayed outside, and the dermatologist said okay if I kept myself covered. I was able on two occasions to water the grass seed.

As I held the hose, I thought of growing grass like growing a congregation. Both need to be fed and cared for. We had come to this point from 12 founders meeting in a classroom at Stockton to building our own facility to accommodate our growing congregation. Everywhere I looked I saw members of our congregation doing something. It really was a family affair. It still amazes me the talent we have in our Congregation, from the architectural design, to the landscaping, and everything in between. Every role that someone took on was crucial to the forming of the whole. Even watering the grass seed. I felt honored.

Images

Judy Pereira

My memories of working at our building site in 2008 cross my mind like a series of still images. One such "still" actually exists in Mariann Maene's building photo log. It shows the northerly slope of the catchment basin and in the middle distance the figures of Jesse Connor, Jerry Hannah, and me unrolling straw matting over tender grass seed (though it's hard to see what we're doing). Even after that one day encountering Jerry always feels special, and Jesse has become a much loved and admired friend. She inspired us to keep going then as she still does now, to take good care of our building and grounds.

For us amateur volunteers lots of early effort went into nurturing the grass. Indelible images from my weeks—months!—on the "Watering Wizards" team include that huge tangle of hoses like Medusa's hair, with color-coded, interconnecting hardware we had to master; that long climb down to the master spigot in the basement on stairs exposed to the open air and unprotected by the building yet to come; and that early start before sunrise, sitting in the Wizards' lawn chair drinking coffee, listening to the timer ticking, and feeling a bit virtuous.

We had it down to a science and Betsy Searight ran a tight ship, albeit with a kindly hand. The areas we had to water extended around the whole plot, not just the catchment basin. A thorough job of it took better than two hours. There was time for watching the birds, though, and it got to seem downright pleasant! Then there was the awful night waking up in a cold sweat, fearing I forgot to turn off the water; driving in the dark to the site, tiptoeing by flashlight down the stairs, and then, thank heavens! Water in the "off" position after all and the basement thankfully not flooded!

Other images capture painting—painting what seemed like endless lengths of baseboard supported on sawhorses in the sanctuary; protect that bamboo floor! (And give me any color but white.) After passing Jesse’s informal scrutiny I graduated to painting metal doorframes downstairs. But perhaps most vividly I remember painting all 12 wooden “ribs” (cornices) that visually support the sanctuary ceiling. They were so heavy; so many facets it took ages to finish two coats. In full view, they bring back memories of that unforgettable spring and summer.

On October 26, 2008, I signed the UUCSJS Membership Book in the first group to do so in our new building. As we passed down the Board of Trustees’ receiving line shaking hands, Richard Grzywinski leaned in close and said, “At least now you have something to show for all that volunteering!” Yes, yes, I do, I thought, along with many, many others.

I attended my first ever UU service at the Lions Center in February 2008. And as I now know, this was on the cusp of the final stages of a monumental effort by a group of determined individuals to create a physical space to house a permanent liberal religious presence in southern New Jersey. Lucky for me, right at that moment I was looking for something to add more meaning to my life. Somebody (thanks, Betsy!) asked me if I might want to help out with some watering.

Final image: a cherished old friend of mine (who watched me go off at 5 AM doing my duty as “Watering Wizard”) has taken to calling unselfish volunteer efforts, “Watering the Grass.”

The First Service

Debbi Dagavarian

The warm, sweetness of the heavy, humid air enveloped me, while the golden indoors beckoned me in. The grand foyer was still unfinished and dusty, yet in many ways it felt perfect. Like the stones that TJ and his dad laid to welcome all who enter, our new home was a work of art.

The bamboo floors gave the sanctuary an earthy feel, and I remember how close to nature I felt *inside* our new building! The sanctuary was just that – a sanctuary in which to hold services and a sanctuary for the soul. The classrooms were a pastel palette of colors, and one of those colors was chosen by my son, Nick. Nature and nurture – upstairs we feasted on the natural environment of our sanctuary’s elements, and downstairs were the classroom spaces to nurture our children.

As I went further into the sanctuary, I felt as if we had all come home to roost. We welcomed one another, reveling in the fulfillment of years of work, raising funds, and wondering what this moment would feel like. The building was a beautiful miracle, shepherded by Richard Grzywinski and constructed by Chris Holaday. Jesse Connor was, and still is, virtuoso of our land, preserving its integrity with native flora.

The room was uncluttered with chairs, except around the perimeter. We stood in a large circle, while our minister at the time, Reverend Rosemarie Newberry, went around to each person individually. Holding the hand of the person to whom she spoke, she led that person to the next person, going around, so that each person in the circle touched and greeted everyone else. We danced in circular braids, holding hands, celebrating our special first service. It was magical! I looked around at the circle of faces, so familiar and so cherished, and what I noticed astonished me. Quite simply, the smiles and laughter radiated sheer joy, the fulfillment of a dream. It was the beautiful end to a long journey, and the exciting beginning of another journey.

Most of all, I remember Bob Gillies' eyes – eyes moist with pleasure and gratitude, but no doubt sorry that Peg couldn't be there to share in the experience that evening. His eyes captivated my gaze, because in his eyes I saw the heart and soul of everything that everyone put into this endeavor to bring us to that evening.

I realized at that moment that we were finally at home.

. . . and build it, *we did!*