

# CONNECTIONS

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2011



## THE FIRST WORD

### EXPLORING AND CELEBRATING IDEAS

“Racing Toward Possibilities” is the theme of the 2012 Mennonite Health Assembly. Board and staff leaders, chaplains, nursing leaders, physicians and other health professionals will be coming together to explore and celebrate new ideas that are emerging, even in spite of a still-uncertain global economy.

Again this year, a half-day governance track will provide board members with education and opportunity for networking with other volunteer leaders. A task force led by Rick Stiffney is developing a program that will address topics critical for board members.

Dates are March 1-3 at the beautiful Galt House Hotel ([www.galthouse.com](http://www.galthouse.com)) in downtown Louisville, Ky. As you plan your schedule, remember this change from previous years: Mennonite Health Assembly will end on Saturday with a brunch and noontime speaker.

Registration will open in November.

Mim Shirk  
Vice President



## CONSULTANTS HELP OHIO ORGANIZATION DEVELOP STRATEGY TO ADDRESS FUTURE NEEDS

In February 2009, as the economy was approaching the nadir of the Great Recession, Mennonite Home Communities in Ohio (MHCO) also found itself at a crossroads. The Bluffton-based organization had a new chief executive officer, three different campus sites in various stages of development, and a whole bunch of questions about its future direction. Now, more than two years later – following a period of time focused on reflection, consultation, and decision-making – the MHCO board of directors and CEO Laura Voth have a strategic plan that is guiding choices as the organization moves forward.



“We had been working toward bringing the Green House® model of care to our campus since 2004,” Laura recalled. “During that time we never wavered in our belief in the model of care, but the long, drawn-out process had become wearying and discouraging. What was holding us back?”

As Laura thinks about the situation two years ago, she realizes that the board and staff were grappling with so many questions that paralysis had set in. She remembers, “For every question, there were multiple options and opinions (and usually strong opinions). We had not reviewed our mission, vision, and values statements since 1993. We needed market study information. We knew that we had to build financial strength even as the economy was tanking. What was the future of long-term care?”

Fortunately for Mennonite Home Communities of Ohio, board members made several key, wise decisions to help the organization move forward. They had provided vital support for their just-employed CEO by engaging LaVern Yutzy as an executive coach a few months after she took office. The board also agreed that the time had come to develop a new strategic plan. And the board saw value in contracting with external consultants to guide them through the process.

The board considered several consulting options before deciding to work with consultants associated with MHS Alliance. Laura said, “MHS Alliance gave us the confidence that they would understand and respect our history and culture, be sensitive to our Mennonite-Christian values, and yet would challenge us to make the necessary changes to be prepared

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Laura Voth

for the future.” Consultants LaVern Yutzy, Dennis Russell, and Tim Stair participated in the project at various times from October 2009 through August 2010.

As Laura remembers the process, “The consultants helped us lay the ground work for strategic discussions with the board and employees, they helped us write a strategic plan, and they continued discussions with us as we implemented the plan. In other words, we weren’t dropped as soon as the plan was on paper.”



LaVern Yutzy

Laura praised the consultants for the experience they brought to the project. “They were people who had actually done the work,” she said. “They were outsiders, which gave them credibility. LaVern’s leadership style and ability to engage a group in discussion as well as keep them moving toward the goal was remarkable. Dennis, being from the west coast, could talk with authority about ‘what is coming’ to Ohio. He was a wealth of information and perspective, helping us understand state and federal budgets and how they would likely have an impact on us.”



Dennis Russell

LaVern’s perspective on the process overlapped with Laura’s: “The board and senior management were determined to find a path forward. They were willing to ask the

hard questions and test their assumptions with the realities of current and projected industry trends. Board and senior staff were able to gain a common understanding of current realities and identify a path forward. Senior staff were able to develop action plans to implement the strategic priorities that had been approved by the board.”

After working with MHS Alliance in a focused way, Laura said that Mennonite Home Communities of Ohio “is in a much better position to serve our elders both today and in the future. We have a plan for expansion and future improvements on our current campuses. We have a direction and we can head there.”

Her counsel for other organizations who are considering a similar process? “Bite the bullet and do it. It is money well spent.”



Mary Ellen Rohrer

## MEMBER NEWS

MHS Alliance has gained a new member:  
**Countryside Christian Community**  
200 Bellann Court  
Annville, PA 17003  
717-867-4636  
Fax: 717-867-1332  
ucchmer@comcast.net  
The executive director is Mary Ellen Rohrer.

### Staff News

**Dennis Russell**, CEO of Friendsview Retirement Community in Newburg, Ore., will join MHS Alliance as a vice president in February. He will serve primarily as a consultant for campus and project development, quantifying operational performance, and developing strategic plans. He brings more than 25 years of management experience in a variety of health-care settings, including service as CEO of Mennonite Home (now Mennonite Village) in Albany, Ore.

The Goshen office for **MHS Alliance** has relocated to 1112 N. Main St., Goshen, IN 46528. Phone numbers and email remain the same.



## MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS OFFERED NEW EMPLOYEE HEALTH BENEFIT PLAN

A second employee health benefit plan – featuring member ownership, some level of self-insurance, a strong risk management and wellness component, and the buying power of larger numbers – is now being developed for MHS Alliance members.

This new program, to be managed by Resource Partners of Lancaster, Pa., is also being offered to member organizations of the Fellowship of Brethren Homes and Friends Services for the Aging.

Philip Leaman, president of Resource Partners, said, “The concept is for members of the Peace Church associations to join together to form a self-funded group for a long-term solution to controlling and directing health benefit costs and to foster healthier employee populations.”

Leaman added, “The program utilizes preferred and select provider networks that match or include members’ current networks. In addition, the program provides each participating member with risk management services designed to address utilization, chronic-care management, and employee best health practices and education.”

For some time, MHS Alliance has sponsored the Medical Expense Plan, which is another successful health benefit plan. Nine organizations, including MHS Alliance as a corporate body, participate in the MEP program for which Everence provides third party administration.

Keith Stuckey, vice president for MHS Alliance, said, “We are pleased that yet another opportunity is emerging for MHS Alliance members. Using different models, both programs can be responsive to a wide range of member needs.”

For more information, members are encouraged to call Stuckey at 717-560-4296.



## BUILDING A GREAT TEAM BY BUILDING ON STRENGTHS



Everyone is unique – a snowflake with his or her own form and shape. Paradoxically, individuals can know themselves fully only when they are committed to a vision outside themselves. Bestselling author Max De Pree describes leadership as “abandoning one’s self to the strengths of others.”

So how are great teams formed? Through great recruitment and development that put the “right people on the right seats on the bus” (Jim Collins in *Good to Great*). These people are then challenged to use their strengths.

Do most people know their strengths? No. Many people downplay their strengths because these attributes seem both obvious (can’t everyone see them?) and easy (something so effortless must not be important).

The Gallup organization has tackled this issue: <http://www.strengthsfinder.com/home.aspx> . By using books and online testing resources, organizations now have another tool to help their team members become happier and more productive at work, leading to more satisfied clients.

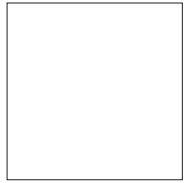
To learn more, contact consultant Shirley H. Showalter through Keith Stuckey at MHS Alliance, 717-560-4296.

## COMING ATTRACTIONS

Sept. 7 12:30 - 1:30 EDT	Great Governance for Small Organizations Audio Conference Session 3
Sept. 14 1:00 - 2:00 EDT	Aging Services Marketing Network Teleconference
Sept. 20-22	Values-based Leadership Program Session 1 Mt. Pleasant, Pa.
Sept. 21	Indiana-Michigan Chaplains Goshen, Ind.
Sept. 21 12:30 - 1:30 EDT	Great Governance for Small Organizations Audio Conference Session 4
Oct. 5 10:30 - 1:00 CDT	Kansas Human Resources Network South Hutchinson, Kan.
Oct. 5-6	Executive Circle Chicago, Ill.
Oct. 12 1:00 - 2:00 EDT	Aging Services Finance Network Teleconference
Oct. 16	Peace Church Dinner LeadingAge, Washington, D.C.
Nov. 2 10:30 - 1:00 EDT	Chaplain and Human Resources Affinity Networks Mt. Gretna, Pa.
Nov. 3-5	Mental Health Council Goshen, Ind.
Nov. 9-10	Developmental Disabilities Network Fresno, Calif.



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## THE LAST WORD

### A LEARNING JOURNEY

MHS Alliance board members think creatively about our organization's future. The diversity among organizations comprising the alliance provides both a great gift and special challenges. With the board, I have reflected on how the growth in size and complexity of organizations influences members' perceptions of needs and opportunities in relationship to MHS Alliance.

CEOs of other national, faith-based associations report that their larger member organizations tend to disengage from the association. So I have decided to devote special time to connecting with our largest member organizations.

I can offer a few initial observations after visiting three of our 12 largest and most complex MHS Alliance member organizations:

- They are addressing some internal alignment issues. Organizations with multiple divisions and many geographic points of service wrestle with incredible communication challenges and, frankly, with delivering value from the center to the edges.
- They are engaging issues of brand identity and integrity. The big challenge is this:  
How does the organization maintain clarity of core convictions, values, controlling vision, and brand hallmarks amid increasing diffusion and diversity?

I'll share more observations as I continue to listen and learn. . . .

Rick Stiffney, President/CEO

