



Sr. Christine Wagner Wins 2014 Farash Prize

Farash Foundation News Release
November 5th, 2014

Sister Christine Wagner, co-founder and executive director of St. Joseph's Neighborhood Center, has won the 2014 Farash Prize for Social Entrepreneurship, the Max and Marian Farash Charitable Foundation announced tonight in ceremonies at the Dryden Theatre, George Eastman House. The center will receive \$100,000.

"The center is a great example of an idea that was conceived creatively and implemented with rock-solid determination—an example of what social entrepreneurs can do," said Edward Hourihan, Jr., a Foundation trustee and chair of the prize selection committee. "Sister Christine has shown us how an idea, and its successful execution, can change the 'norm' of access to critical health and social services for those who can least afford it."

The prize, last awarded in 2012 to the late Thomas C. Ferraro, founder of Foodlink, was established to reward the efforts of an outstanding social entrepreneur in the community, to encourage others to emulate those efforts, and to honor the entrepreneurial spirit of Max Farash, the Foundation's founder.

St. Joseph's Neighborhood Center provides health care, counseling, adult education, and social service advocacy to the uninsured in Monroe County. The center first opened in 1993, after the Sisters of St. Joseph were able to acquire an abandoned building on South Avenue and find the volunteer help to renovate it. Today, three interconnected buildings serve as a home for medical care, dental care, eye care, and mental health counseling. Across the array of services, each individual's needs are considered in the context of the whole person.

The center has 17 staff members and 250 volunteers who see 950 patients annually for medical services and 1,000 individuals for other services. More than 70 percent of the patients are employed but either uninsured or under-insured. An average of 50 calls a week come from individuals inquiring about becoming new patients.

Wagner directed the establishment of the center, including renovation, fundraising, and site management, and has served as the center's executive director since 1995. She holds a bachelor's degree from the SUNY College at Brockport and a Ph.D. in social science from Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. "What I admire most about Chris," said her nominator, "is that each day, she rolls up her sleeves and puts in the physical work. There is no act too small that she would not carry out for her patients, her staff, or her volunteers." Over the past 20 years, "she has made a world of difference for the underserved in our community."

The other finalists for the Farash Prize were Louise Bingham Bennett, M.D., and Sadiya Omar, visionaries behind the revitalized Somali Community in Western New York, and Nydia Padilla-Rodriguez, founder and artistic director of the Borinquen Dance Theatre.