SANTA MARIA
COMMUNITY SERVICES

Helping Families Help Themselves Since 1897













2026 Fall Newsletter

CATCH UP WITH H.A.



H.A. Musser, Jr.
President & CEO

Dear Santa Maria Supporters,

As we settle into fall, I've been reflecting on the people and relationships that make Santa Maria Community Services what it is today. This edition of our newsletter is filled with stories celebrating those connections, the milestones we've reached together, and the many ways our community continues to grow.

We're recognizing Regine Gordon's remarkable 35 years of service to families, celebrating our youngest program participants as they graduate from our Early Childhood programs, and looking back on our back-to-school events, where neighbors came together to help students begin the school year feeling prepared and confident. You'll also meet the anonymous members of Phight Club, a generous group of friends whose commitment to giving back has made a meaningful difference for Price Hill families.

This season also brought two exciting milestones. After nearly seven years of planning, we broke ground on our future home in East Price Hill, bringing us closer to uniting the majority of our services under one roof. We also gathered for Passport to Success: Belonging, celebrating the connections that strengthen our community while raising critical support for our mission.

As I reflect on these moments, I'm grateful for the families who place their trust in us and the staff, volunteers, donors, and partners who make this work possible. Thank you for being part of Santa Maria's story and helping us build a stronger future together.

Warmly,

H.A. Musser, Jr.
President & CEO

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TINY PEOPLE, BIG ACHIEVEMENTS

Congratulations to our 2026 graduates of the Every Child Succeeds and Promoting Our Preschoolers programs, and to the families and Santa Maria staff who supported and encouraged them along the way! These programs help children build essential skills during their early years, laying the foundation for a lifetime of learning and growth. We can't wait to see what these young learners discover and accomplish next!









REGINE'S STORY

When Regine Gordon first came to Santa Maria Community Services, she was a college student looking for a field placement and part-time work to gain experience in social work. After spotting a position in the newspaper, she applied, unaware that she was beginning what has now become a 35-year career.

Regine started as a youth worker in Sedamsville in the early 1990s. At the neighborhood recreation center, known as "The Center," she spent afternoons with children and teens participating in activities and getting help with schoolwork. Her role eventually expanded into community organizing, working with residents on neighborhood cleanups, leading parent groups, and supporting other programs.

In 2007, Regine became a Family Advocate in Santa Maria's Early Childhood Development program. For nearly 19 years, she has visited families with preschool-aged children, helping prepare them for kindergarten while connecting parents with resources and support.

"My responsibilities have changed quite a bit over the years, but the focus has always been on meeting families where they are and helping them succeed," shares Regine.



Regine during her early Santa Maria days at the East Price Hill center



Regine during her early Santa Maria days in Price Hill

Growing With the Community

As Regine's career evolved, so did the communities she served. During her early years, she worked primarily with Appalachian and African American families in Price Hill. Today, she works primarily with immigrant families, particularly families from African countries.

"The populations and cultures we serve have changed over the years, and that has given me the opportunity to continually learn and grow as well."

Through these relationships, Regine has gained an appreciation for different cultures and perspectives, learning about the circumstances that shape each family's life.

"When you spend time with families, hear their stories, understand the challenges they face, and see how much they care about their children and communities, you gain a much deeper understanding of their experiences."

Those relationships, along with Santa Maria's caring and supportive work environment, have kept Regine connected to the organization throughout the decades.

The Moments That Stay With You

Some of Regine's favorite memories come from small moments that show how trust grows over time. She recalls a young child who would scream whenever she arrived, believing she was there to give them a shot. With each visit, the child gradually learned that Regine was there to teach, play, and bring fun activities.

"Eventually, instead of being afraid when I arrived, that child greeted me with a hug. Those moments are incredibly rewarding."

Regine also treasures celebrating milestones with parents, from finding the right school for their children to landing a new job or buying a home. Over the years, she has watched children she once knew grow into adults, overcome challenges, and raise families of their own. She is quick to credit those individuals for their accomplishments.

"I would never say that Santa Maria alone is responsible for those successes. The individuals and families themselves deserve that credit, but I hope that Santa Maria was able to play a small role in supporting them along the way."

Today, some of those relationships have come full circle.

"After 35 years at Santa Maria, I am now working with the grandchildren of some of the people I originally worked with. It is really special to see those connections continue across generations."

A Commitment That Hasn't Changed

Despite the many changes Regine has witnessed throughout her career, her approach to serving families has remained rooted in thoughtfulness, integrity, and the belief that families should lead the way in shaping their own futures.

"When I look back on my time at Santa Maria, I am most proud of the way we have always tried to treat individuals with dignity and respect."

"Our role is not to decide what someone's life should look like. We try to listen to people, allow them to identify the goals that are important to them, and then work alongside them as they pursue those goals and improve the lives of themselves, their families, and their communities."

That philosophy has guided Regine through changing programs, responsibilities, and community needs. And after 35 years, she believes Santa Maria's purpose remains the same.

"What has stayed the same is that Santa Maria has always been about helping families and strengthening the community. That has always been the bottom line, regardless of how our programs, job titles, resources, or funding have changed over the years."

From the children she met in Sedamsville decades ago to the families she visits today, Regine's story is one of relationships that have endured across generations. Thirty-five years later, she continues to walk alongside families as they build futures of their own.



Regine congratulating one of her Promoting Our Preschoolers program families at the 2026 graduation celebration

A HISTORIC MILESTONE

This September, Santa Maria Community Services celebrated a milestone years in the making: the groundbreaking of our future home at 1048 Considine Avenue in East Price Hill.

After nearly 130 years of serving Cincinnati families and seven years of planning for this project, seeing shovels finally hit the ground was a meaningful moment. Supporters, partners, funders, community leaders, staff, and friends gathered to celebrate this exciting step forward and what it means for both Santa Maria and the Price Hill community.



President & CEO H.A. Musser, Jr., with Joy Hansbauer (left) and Lisa Schall (right), descendants of Santa Maria's original founders



The Santa Maria team

For decades, Santa Maria has served families from multiple facilities, many of which are aging, limited in space, and located miles apart. As the needs of our community have changed, so has our vision for a space that better serves the families who walk through our doors.

Through our ***One Building, Thriving Families*** capital campaign, our first-ever capital campaign, that vision is becoming a reality. The new community hub will bring most of our services together under one roof, making it easier for families to access programs and support in one welcoming, accessible location. Our Joe Williams Family Center will remain in Lower Price Hill, continuing its important work with youth and families.

This new home represents a lasting investment in Price Hill and the families who call it home. After generations of helping families build stronger futures, we're building a home that reflects that same strength, a home as strong as the families we serve.

We are deeply grateful to the following funders whose belief in our ***One Building, Thriving Families*** capital campaign helped turn this vision into a reality and create a home where Santa Maria can continue walking alongside families for generations to come.

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ATA 50TH ARCHITECTS



Pictured left to right: Jeff Cramerding, City Council Member of Cincinnati; Katie Rademacher, Senior Developer, Model Group; Sisan Cuervo, Board Chair, Santa Maria Community Services; Laura Brunner, President & CEO, The Port; H.A. Musser, Jr., President & CEO, Santa Maria Community Services; Annemarie Henkel, Senior Program Officer, Farmer Family Foundation; Dani Isaacsohn, Ohio House of Representatives Minority Leader; Chris Bochenek, Vice President & Chief Program Officer, Carol Ann and Ralph V. Haile, Jr. Foundation; Amber Kassem, President, East Price Hill Improvement Association; Kelly Clements, Chief Lending Officer, Cincinnati Development Fund.

A CAUSE WORTH PHIGHTING FOR

The First Rule of Phight Club? Give Back!

A group of 17 men calling themselves "Phight Club" might sound a little intimidating, but their mission couldn't be friendlier! Consisting of men in their 40s, 50s, and 60s, this charitable giving circle brings friends together to pool their resources, volunteer their time, and support local nonprofits like Santa Maria Community Services. Its members prefer to remain anonymous, letting their actions speak for themselves, but we recently sat down with one of them to learn what brought them together and why giving back has become such an important part of their lives.

Finding Belonging in a Shared Purpose

Phight Club began when one member learned about a similar giving circle and invited his friends to try it themselves. Today, members contribute money monthly, collectively choose organizations to support, and volunteer at community events.

"We're very lucky to be in the positions that we are in. Because of that luck and privilege, we feel like it's our duty to give back," the anonymous member shared. "We're learning that we're probably even more privileged than we originally thought as we get out into the community and see the need."

Along the way, members have found that working together strengthens their own relationships, too.

"It's a good way to connect, to get ourselves out and around like-minded people, and to be part of a community," he explained. "We get out and work together, but when the work's done, we also hang out together. It's definitely good for the organizations, but it's good for us, too."

In 2025, Phight Club was searching for organizations supporting immigrant families and came across Santa Maria. Several members attended one of our Price Hill Bus Tours, gaining a deeper understanding of our work and the families we serve, and leaving them inspired to get involved.

As they began to think of ways to offer support, their next inspiration came in the form of a social media post requesting hygiene supplies on Santa Maria's Instagram page. For many families, hygiene supplies can be among the first necessities sacrificed during times of financial hardship, sometimes considered a luxury in the budget when compared to essentials like food and housing costs. Phight Club jumped into action, organizing a drive that collected two truckloads of diapers, feminine hygiene products, paper towels, and toilet paper for Price Hill families.



The Phight Club member dropping off stacks of hygiene supplies.

The drive provided much-needed support to families during a difficult time, but Phight Club's generosity was just getting started.

The following year, members rallied an even larger network of supporters to collect socks and laundry supplies, helping families begin the school year with clean clothing and confidence.

Phight Club didn't stop there; they continued supporting Santa Maria in whatever various deliberate ways they could think of, from sponsorship of our annual Passport to Success fundraiser to donation drives and volunteering.

The group has also provided pizza at Santa Maria's back-to-school events, which have become some of its most meaningful experiences.

"A lot of times, you get to see the whole family at the events. You see the smiling faces," the anonymous member shared. "Seeing them get a good start to the school year, that feels good."

These experiences have also strengthened the group's respect for the families they meet, particularly those navigating language barriers, adjusting to new schools, and building their lives in a new community.

"That's got to be intimidating, and yet they're doing it," he said. "I have a lot of respect for the families, especially the young kids who are pulling that off."



Phight Club members giving out pizza at Santa Maria's 2025 Back-to-School Fest

The Impact of Everyday Generosity

Despite their growing involvement, Phight Club's members prefer to remain anonymous, focusing on the work rather than recognition. For the purposes of this newsletter, they agreed to share their story in hopes of encouraging others to create positive change in their communities. For anyone unsure where to begin, their advice is to find a cause that matters to them and become someone an organization can count on.

"You just have to keep trying until you find a place that's right for you, and then stick with it. When you show up consistently and become someone an organization can rely on, you really do get that feeling you're looking for, knowing you're making a difference."

He emphasized that making a difference doesn't require a large financial contribution and that giving your time can be just as valuable.

"You see people making donations in the millions, and you think, 'Wow, that's really making a difference,' and it is," he explained. "But having enough volunteers at an event makes a big difference, too. Without volunteers, the event doesn't happen. And if the event doesn't happen, people aren't served, and the mission isn't accomplished."

For the men of Phight Club, giving back has brought unexpected rewards, from stronger friendships to meaningful connections with families across Cincinnati. Now, they hope their story will inspire others to take that first step, whether volunteering, supporting a local nonprofit, or bringing friends together for a shared cause.

BACK-TO-SCHOOL FEST

More than 400 people gathered at ARCO Cincy in August for Santa Maria's Back-to-School Fest. Children received backpacks and school supplies, while families picked up food and fresh produce and got help with Cincinnati Public Schools registration.

Thank you to our volunteers and to Apartment Association Outreach, Inc., Cincy-Cinco, and Humana for making the day possible. By bringing these resources together in one place, families could take care of several back-to-school needs at once and head into the new year with a little less stress.





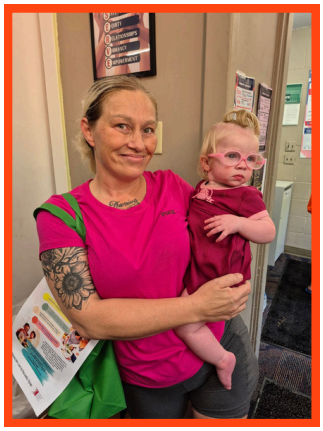












BACK-TO-SCHOOL BASH

Later that month, families in Lower Price Hill gathered at the Joe Williams Family Center for our Back to School Bash, where children and teens could choose from socks, undershirts, hygiene items, hair products, and other self-care supplies. Having the right essentials can make a big difference in how a student steps into the classroom, and we were glad to create a space where families could choose what they needed.

Thank you to our volunteers, partners, and The Charles H. Dater Foundation for helping students begin the year feeling prepared and confident.

PASSPORT TO SUCCESS: BELONGING

Santa Maria Community Services' annual Passport to Success fundraiser brought supporters, partners, volunteers, and friends together at Western Hills Country Club on September 26 for a morning centered on belonging. This year's theme reflected something we believe to our cores: everyone deserves to feel seen, valued, connected, and accepted.

WCPO's Lauren Minor returned for her third year as emcee, while guest speaker Teddy Kremer shared a heartfelt message about kindness, acceptance, and making space for everyone to belong. His words brought laughter, emotion, and tender moments throughout the room.

Santa Maria also honored two special award recipients. The Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, who founded Santa Maria in 1897, received the Partner in Purpose Award, recognizing leaders and advocates who strengthen the community through connection and collaboration. Longtime volunteer Steve Giessler received the Sister Blandina Champion of Hope Award, honoring his years of leadership, advocacy, service, and hands-on involvement.

Thank you to everyone who attended, donated, volunteered, sponsored the event, or supported Passport to Success: Belonging. You helped fill the room with the spirit of belonging we set out to celebrate, helping us raise nearly $100,000 while supporting Santa Maria's work alongside Greater Price Hill families.

Thank you to this year's Passport to Success sponsors!

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