

# STEVEN'S SPIRIT Of Giving



Volume I Spring 2016

## WELCOME TO OUR SPRING NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the Spring Edition of Steven's Spirit of Giving Newsletter! I am happy to report in this our 3rd edition that readership of our newsletter has grown quickly, and surpasses our expectations!



A special thank-you to those who submit articles, and to my graphic designer and copy editor, Darrell Porter. Also, to you the reader we have so much appreciation for

your willingness to let us be part of your busy lives.

Steven's Spirit of Giving began in Spring 2011 as a way to honor Steven Daniels, a Son, Brother, Uncle and Friend to many. If you were one of the people that were blessed to know him, you most likely experienced the kindness he exhibited throughout his time with us. It is his spirit of love that presses us forward as we seek to promote kindness within our community and beyond.

During this glorious season of Spring when nature is being renewed, let us renew our commitment to reach out to one another with loving kindness.

Executive Editor  
Gail M. Daniels

"Resolve to keep happy, and your joy and you shall form an invincible host against difficulties." Helen Keller

## SUNY Mindfulness Conference Sparks Contemplative Community Building Statewide

Public interest in Mindfulness is exploding across all sectors of western society. But what is this thing called Mindfulness and why is it gaining such widespread popularity? Simply put, mindfulness is a purposeful way of focusing attention, of becoming more aware and engaged in every moment. A broad range of activities can encourage a mindful state, from focused thought, time in nature, writing, contemplative arts, contemplative movement and meditation—different people find different kinds of practices useful and meaningful.

Over the past few decades, researchers have examined the impact of Mindfulness in fields such as neuroscience, medicine, psychology, and education, just to name a few. The results suggest that mindfulness-based practices offer far-reaching benefits for health, learning, and well-being, including:

- Easing symptoms of chronic illness
- Managing stress and stress-related disease
- Treating anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder
- Reducing risk factors for cardiovascular disease
- Improving focus, critical thinking, and academic learning
- Enhancing emotional resilience
- Increased compassion and empathy for

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# A Personal View on Foster Parenting

May is national foster parent month. This means that there is a lot of attention focused on foster care awareness and recruitment of potential foster parents. I have been a foster parent within a medium-sized county in New York State for the past 8 years. The experience of having children staying in my home because they were not safe in their own has changed me in ways that I could never have imagined.

The first placement that we had in some ways was the most difficult. It was not unlike having your heart broken for the first time. We had two boys who were fifteen and two years old. I never imagined that I would feel comfortable parenting a fifteen year old boy. The placement lasted for 14 months before a plan was made for the younger child to go to a relative who was not biologically related to the fifteen year old. The fifteen year old was devastated to learn that his younger brother was going to be "taken away" from him and as a result, he ran away. It was the result of a system looking to find a permanent home for one child at the unintended cost of

another. I felt like my heart would never be the same again. I grieved as if I had lost a loved one-- not yet recognizing that I had.

There have been many placements since that first one. There was the toddler who came to us in the middle of the night after a six hour stand-off with the police while his mother threatened to kill herself. The little one had to be wrestled from his mother's arms, and then fell asleep on the way to my house. I spent the night on the couch holding him while he slept, knowing that he would wake up terrified with strangers that he had never seen. He didn't speak for three days.

I have loved all of the children who have been a part of my family for a time. We tell our children that they are a part of our family "for now", knowing that some will stay and some will go.

It has never been easy, but it has always been worth it. Whenever I get the chance I tell people to open up their homes and their hearts to the possibilities of being a foster parent. You will be changed forever. When people learn that I am a foster parent, they often respond with "how do you do that, it must be so difficult". It is so difficult, but it is so worth it.

-Alisha Grant

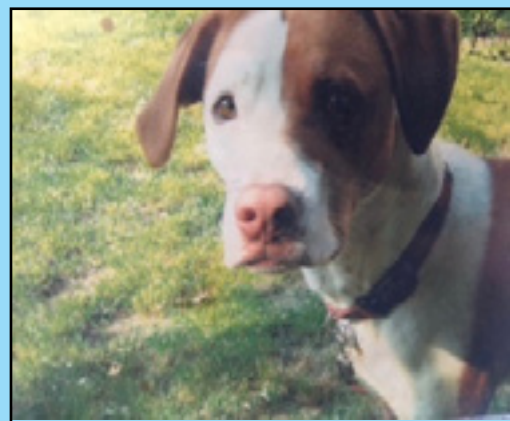
## Man's (and Steven's) Best Friend - Nancy Fredrickson

When Steven past away he left Harley behind. No, not a motorcycle. His beloved dog.

A loyal family companion has difficulty comprehending that his caretaker isn't coming back. The petowner's family may truly love the dog or cat that now needs a new home, but circumstances prevent them from welcoming the pet permanently into their own home.

Fortunately, Steven's family (who already had 3 dogs) found Harley a wonderful new family. However, if you have a companion animal in your life, please take a few minutes to think about what would happen if you were unable to take care of her because of an extended illness or unexpected death. Plan now to ensure that your beloved pet will continue to receive the same loving care you provided should something unexpected happen to you. Do the following:

- Ask at least two responsible friends or relatives to agree to serve as temporary emergency caregivers in the event that something unexpected happens to you. Make sure they have access to your home and have your veterinarian's information. Any specific feeding and care instructions will relieve anxiety for the caregivers (and pet) as well.
- Make sure your family, friends and neighbors know how many pets you have and the names and contact numbers of the individuals who have agreed to serve as emergency caregivers. Emergency caregivers should also know how to contact each other.
- Put an "alert card" in your wallet and info in your cellphone that lists the names and phone numbers of your emergency pet caregivers.
- Post removable "in case of emergency" information notices on your home windows and/or doors with information on how many and types of pets are inside. This will help first responders in an emergency at your home.
- Give your pet the promise of a good home when you are no longer able to do so. You know that your pet would do the same for you if he could.



# Mindfulness

Contemplatives across western New York are not strangers to this impressive body of work. Over the past few years, faculty and staff in western New York higher education institutions have been coming together around their belief in the importance of mindfulness to foster student success and wellbeing. This inter-institutional collaborative, known as the WNY Contemplative Faculty & Staff group (WNYCFS), includes members from the University at Buffalo, Buffalo State College, Daemen College, Niagara University and many other institutions in the area. This group supports one another in their work and host events to raise awareness of the educational efficacy of mindfulness within the higher education system.

Recently, the WNYCFS group held a groundbreaking event at the University of Buffalo that drew media attention and unprecedented attendance from across the state. Nearly 400 researchers and practitioners from across the 64 campuses and communities of the SUNY system gathered for a one-day sold-out conference examining the relationship between mindfulness-

based practices and health and wellbeing. Launching SUNY Initiatives on Mindfulness & Health, was the first-ever SUNY-funded conference to foster research and education on mindfulness across the disciplines. The sheer volume of interest was overwhelming. More than three times as many people attended as we originally planned. Attendees represented 50 institutions of higher education, 10 K-12 schools, and 69 businesses and organizations across NY State. The excitement and joy of coming together as a mindful community was truly palpable.

Supported by a small grant from the SUNY system's Conversations in the Disciplines Program, the conference soon drew the attention and support of Dr. Steve Harvey, executive director of the WNY Consortium of Higher Education, which connects the region's 21 universities and colleges. SUNY Trustee Joseph Belluck, a prominent Manhattan attorney and advocate for mindfulness practices in higher education across the State, was a constant source of support and

encouragement and gave welcoming remarks at the conference.

Featured speakers included Dr. David Vago (Harvard Medical School); Dr. Daniel Barbezat (Amherst College, Center for Contemplative Mind in Society); and Joseph Belluck, Esq. (SUNY Trustee). Panel discussions examined the evidence for mindfulness-based interventions for health promotion and disease prevention in a variety of populations as well as applied mindfulness research in higher education and postsecondary student wellbeing. More than two-dozen academic poster presentations reflected the variety of ongoing research on mindfulness-based practices across the state.

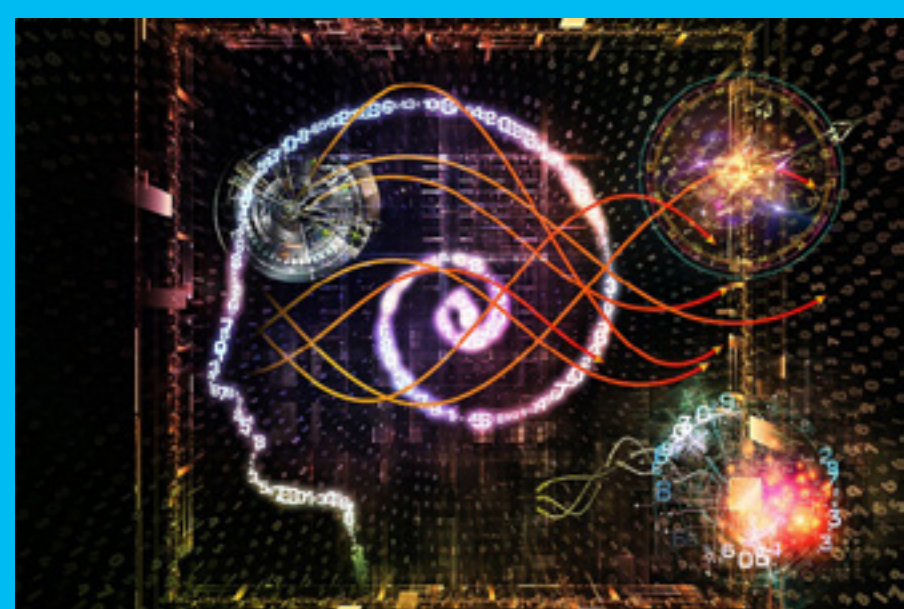
The conference provided a springboard for future collaborative work across New York State. From talking to people before and during the conference and from attendees' overwhelmingly positive evaluations, we have learned so much about our rich local, state, and SUNY contemplative communities. The need for more community building was emphasized, which inspired us to action. We have been hard at work designing a structure to support the broad range of needs and interests of this vibrant mindful community. The group believes that supporting and organizing people within and across sectors, such as colleges/universities, health care providers, businesses, etc., can help to build a sustainable, first-of-its-kind statewide mindfulness network.

But success depends on everyone. The community builds the community. Their voices, their work, and their leadership are the Initiative.

For more information on what's happening in WNY and to view video footage from the conference [click here](#). You can also follow the community building initiatives on Facebook. To get involved in contemplative community building efforts, contact

Lisa Napora at [lnapora@buffalo.edu](mailto:lnapora@buffalo.edu)

Article written by The Western New York Contemplative Faculty & Staff



*Success depends on everyone. The community builds the community. Their voices, their work, and their leadership are the Initiative.*

# Kid's Wellness Corner

## Summer Safety



*The best way to avoid sunburn is to avoid sun exposure completely, especially for those small infants.*

Summer is right around the corner, or so they say! Here in Buffalo, it feels like we are never going to get to the warm weather this year. Summer time is an important time to think about safety. There are so many potentials for harm. Keep your family safe this summer by following some of these tips:

### Fun in the sun

Remember, the best way to avoid sunburn is to avoid sun exposure completely, especially for those small infants. If that is not possible, dress infants in light clothing, use brimmed hats, and if unable to stay in the shade, apply a thin layer of sunscreen. The same goes for older children. If shade is available, limit your exposure to those harmful rays. If not, make sure to use a sunscreen made for children, and reapply every 2 hours.

### Bug safety

We have all heard about mosquitos transmitting the Zika virus recently, and ticks can transmit Lyme disease. Do the best you can to avoid areas of standing water this summer. Avoid dressing your children in bright clothing and scented body lotions, as these can attract certain insects. The best insect repellent is one that has DEET in it. Use one labelled for 'children', and you can be assured the proper amount of DEET will be safe for your child. Avoid all DEET products for infants under 2 months of age. Always remember to wash/bathe at the end of the day to remove all DEET from the skin before bedtime.

### Playground safety

It is best to find a playground with a protective surface such as sand, bark, or shredded rubber. Make sure swings are made of soft materials. Avoid your child from being able to reach moving parts where their fingers can get pinched or body parts trapped. Don't let them play on the playground with anything hanging from their neck, this could get caught and cause choking. Make sure the metal slides are not too hot, as they can cause burns to the skin. Never allow your child on a trampoline, these are a high risk for severe injury. Always supervise your child if you do allow it, and do not get a false sense of safety because there is netting around the trampoline.

### Bicycle safety

Helmets, helmets, helmets! Start your child wearing a helmet as early as possible. Get them in the habit and they will not question you. Helmets protect a child from serious head injury and should always be worn, no matter how close to home you go; down the driveway or down the street. When purchasing a helmet, you are looking for one that meets the CPSC safety standard.

### Pool safety

Never leave a child alone in or near a pool, even for a moment! Close supervision by a responsible adult is the best way to prevent drowning. If you own a pool, make sure the proper fence surrounds it and the lock works to keep the gate closed. Make sure to have rescue equipment nearby such as a safety hook or life preserver. Making sure your child has proper swim training is a must as well.

### Fireworks safety

Everyone loves the 4th of July, but leave the fireworks to the experts! Fireworks can result in severe burns, scars, blindness and even death. Even those fun sparklers can reach temperatures above 1000 degrees Fahrenheit.

-Dr. Becky Daniels



# Buffalo Zootique's Animal Ambassador Program To Benefit Woman and Children's Hospital



The Buffalo Zoo holds a special place in the hearts of many of us who grew up in Buffalo. The memories are those to cherish. If you were like I was as a little girl, there were times you just couldn't seem to get enough.

Dreaming about taking one of the animals home is often on the mind of every child, then quickened to reality when mom and dad say, "not possible." But, before they push their way through the turnstile to the parking lot, they circle back to the next best place to find an animal they can indeed take home.

The excitement of owning a zoo animal is the chatter these days at the Buffalo Zoo's main gift shop, the Zootique. My husband, Jeff Blarr, is the General Manager of the Zootique and mentioned a

recent partnership they began with Women & Children's Hospital. In check with Steven's Spirit of Giving, this partnership is well worth the mention. It is an effort that allows children who are not able to make it down to the Buffalo Zoo to see the animals in person, have a "Furry Pal" all their own.

On Saturday, March 19th, Buffalo Zoo visitors were introduced to a new donation program launched by the Zootique Gift Shop. Guests were offered the opportunity to purchase special plush animal toys, affectionately called "Furry Pals," at a discounted price which would then be donated to Buffalo Woman and Children's Hospital on their behalf.

The plush "animal ambassadors" will be delivered to the hospital throughout the year in an effort to put smiles on the faces of young patients. Donors also have the opportunity to fill out a personalized note card at the Zootique with a warm message of love and encouragement for the young patients which is then attached to the plush animal.

To bring added involvement for the children of donating families, the kids are invited to draw a picture for the Oishei Children's Hospital Community Art Mosaic which will be comprised of thousands of smiling self-portraits drawn by patients and members of the Western New York Community. The completed mosaic will form the centerpiece of the lobby area at the new John R. Oshei Children's Hospital, set to open in the fall of 2017.

Children of donor families are invited to create their own special drawings right at the Zootique gift shop, where they are provided crayons, markers, and a table to draw on.

The response from the Buffalo Zoo guests has already been fantastic and the Zootique Iforward donated their first "animal ambassadors" on May 6th. On that day, Women and Children's Hospital held a local "Radiothon" to raise funds for the new hospital under construction. The "Furry Pal" plush was given to children on the air and the program was announced officially to the local listeners!

Allegra Jaros, president of Women & Children's Hospital of Buffalo, stated that, "The Buffalo Zoo's partnership will help to build the foundation and support for our vision of bringing Buffalo's cultural to the children and families in the new Oishei Children's Hospital."

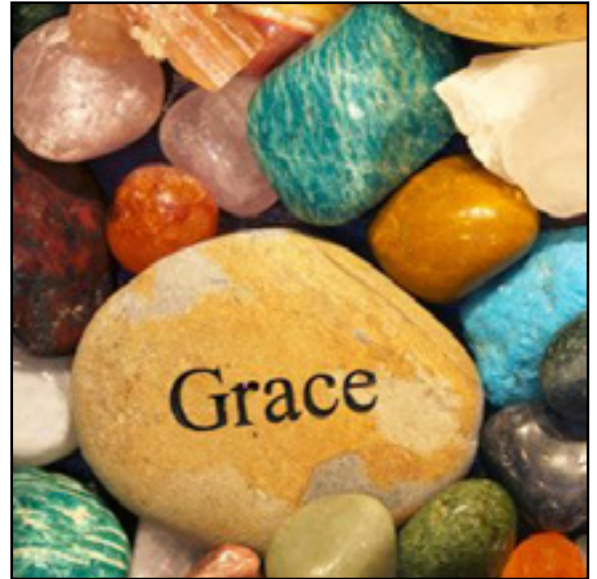
I hope you are as excited as I was to learn of this opportunity. It is an ideal and fun outreach for Moms and Dads to get their children involved in, while at the same time, teaching the lesson of giving. Look for the "animal ambassadors" right inside the door of the Zootique when you visit the Buffalo Zoo and take part in doing something uplifting for hospitalized children in Steven's Spirit of Giving.

Donna Blarr

## The Mysteries of Grace

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Everything is a miracle or nothing is a miracle, said Einstein. I believe in the former: everything, I mean everything, is a miracle. Grace touches us, nudges us, guides us, protects us, saves us, and shows us the way so that our lives have joy and meaning-- even under difficult or unwelcoming circumstances. Our life may or may not look meaningful to others, but if each day our soul and our spirit can find and feel even a tinge of awe and joy in the extraordinary beauty that surrounds us and in the mysteries of serendipity that reminds us of our interconnectedness, then we find purpose and meaning on our terms and Grace becomes our silent companion.



However, accepting Grace into our lives is not always easy. In the midst of a fast-paced, highly demanding, and notoriously fickle world, it is easy to forget about Grace and her many embodiments that fill our lives. We fail to open the door when She knocks with an opportunity for our spiritual growth and development. We fail to allow Grace to guide us because of our misplaced belief that we know what is best for us. We fail to live in the moment, which is precisely where Grace lives. We are bitter about our past or worried about our future or both, knowing fully well that our greatest obligation and responsibility is to live in the moment with authenticity, resilience, courage, and confidence.

But Grace is no wimp. She doesn't back away easily. She is not a pushover. She keeps knocking loudly and is patient and persistent till we open the door - in this life or others to follow, for those who believe in reincarnation. She holds our hands and firmly demands that we deliver on Her wishes and follow Her plan for us, in spite of our doubts, concerns, fears and misgivings. She calls our attention to the present moment, even when we repeatedly reject her. She understands the fictional script and victim stories that we authored about who we are and our past, even as she offers the pen that will help us write a new warm and truthful story about our own power to make meaning in our lives and the lives of others. Grace teaches us to be loving and kind to ourselves, first and foremost, because in spite of our perceived weaknesses, faults, failures, and broken wings, we hold unimaginable power to live a life of purpose and meaning

Gently, yet vigorously, Grace pushes us off the cliff. It is precisely at that moment when we are on a downward spiral, fast crashing to the broken, rocky, thorny ground that we think awaits us, our hidden wings, wings that we never knew we had, opens up at a throttling speed. Our broken wings flutters in slow motion, hesitates, and then suddenly straightens and spreads in a dance form that is mesmerizing and inspiring to those that watch us, even as the music of our own freedom and resolve to live an authentic life in the service of others plays in the background. We soar as Grace propels us forward with Her gentle touch. With immeasurable power and extraordinary beauty, we showcase our talents, inner strength, courage, determination, power and authenticity. We become the shadow of Grace and teach others that when Grace enters our lives, we get unstuck and embark on our journey to lead glorious and fulfilling lives. Our task is therefore simple: to open the door when Grace knocks.

-Uma Gupta

## SPRING LEMON CAKE

### CAKE:

3 ounces lemon Jello  
¾ cup water  
4 eggs  
1 package Lemon Supreme Cake mix  
¾ vegetable oil

### GLAZE:

2 cups confectionary sugar  
3 tablespoons lemon juice  
(lemon rind from the squeezed lemon)  
3 drops yellow food coloring

Beat together first 3 ingredients for 2 minutes

Add remaining ingredients and beat for another 2 minutes

Bake at 350 degrees for 30-45 minutes.  
Poke holes in cake while still hot and spread glaze over the cake

ENJOY!

Marilyn Albrecht

## KINDNESS CRUSADERS

It's Spring time. Flowers are blooming, trees are beginning to unfurl their leaves. Neighbors are emerging for fence-side chats. Spring is also a great time for random acts of kindness! Here are a few that celebrate our return to the outdoors.

- For our four-legged friends, leave a bowl of water at the end of your driveway for thirsty pets enjoying a walk.
- Help a neighbor pull weed or carry clippings to the curb.
- Gather up your tulips and make bouquets for your neighbors. Take those same tulips and leave one on each windshield in your work parking lot.
- Spring cleaning? Host a garage sale and donate a percentage of your profit to a favorite charity.
- Discover a new charity to donate your items to. [Dress for Success](#) provides women with clothing for job interviews. [Harvest House](#) is a charity that provides mothers with equipment and clothing for babies and children. Animal shelters often accept blankets and towels.

- Kristin Fields

## Editor's Book Pick

Setting the Table: The Transforming Power of Hospitality in Business  
By Danny Meyer

A landmark, bestselling business book and a fascinating behind-the-scenes history of the creation of Danny's most famous eating establishments, *Setting the Table* is a treasure trove of valuable, innovative insights applicable to any business or organization.



We are always looking for writers to participate in our newsletter. If you are interested in being a contributor please contact [Gail Daniels](#) for submission guidelines.

Executive Editor- Gail M. Daniels  
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