

the
60th **DSO**

60th District Service Office

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DIRECTOR SPOTLIGHT: Hometown Girl Returns

The 60th District Service Office welcomes **Edie Smith Trent** as the new director, replacing **Cheri Bell** who left at the beginning of June for a position with Planned Parenthood Mid and South Michigan.

Edie grew up in the Vine neighborhood of Kalamazoo, graduating from Old Central, Kalamazoo College and then WMU for her graduate work in education. You can't be more loyally hometown than that! Edie moved east in 1995 but returned frequently to visit family and friends. She moved back to Kalamazoo last summer. As you can imagine, her re-entry and reorientation to the area happened quickly.

Edie knew Rep. McCann from his work with the Vine Neighborhood Association, and was aware of the DSO through her work in the '70s through the early '80s with Kalamazoo County Head Start and other local organizations. Starting in the late '80s, Edie served as Human Resources Manager for three different local plastics manufacturing companies. "My past jobs have always been about helping people solve problems."

Edie gave an example of a situation she'd been presented with in her first days at the DSO. This is the time of year when Consumers Energy makes the annual calculations on energy use; customers who



are on the budget plan (they pay an average cost each month to prevent high and low seasonal payments) may owe additional money to reconcile their averaged payments with their actual use.

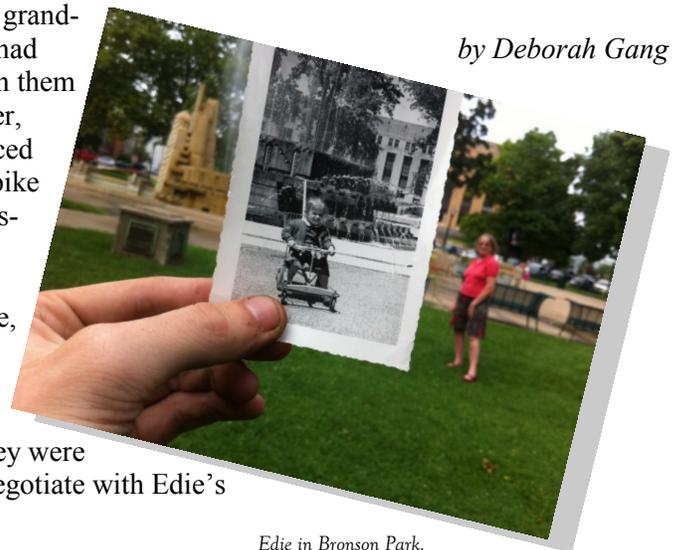
Edie was able to ease one constituent's anxiety that he was NOT being charged for someone else's use or billed in error in some way. She helped him understand that, in fact, the budget plan can be a very useful customer service that our utility company provides. Another retired couple whose teenaged grandchildren had lived with them last winter, experienced quite a spike in their usage, and faced a very large, unexpected bill, which they were able to negotiate with Edie's help.

When asked to think about new issues which may involve the DSO, Edie named communication and technology. How many DHS recipients are able to manage their cases online (which is now increasingly expected)? Are they able to print out necessary documentation? Many people have phones with limited call time available, and it is a financial hardship for them to be placed on hold for long periods.

Edie sees the listening part of communication as an important part of her job—taking the time to hear a person's story and then guiding them through what they can do, with her help or others, to understand and use available resources, both their own and those of our community, in order to—solve problems.

Welcome back home and welcome to the DSO, Edie!

by Deborah Gang



Edie in Bronson Park.
Circa 1952 and 2012.

Cheri L. Bell Assumes Fund Development Role at PP (page 3)

The Flamingos Were Hopping

On a beautiful Sunday in May, over 80 people attended our Spring Brunch, which is held every year to raise funds for the DSO. While the director's salary is paid for out of Rep. McCann's legislative budget, expenses such as rent, supplies, and phone need to be raised privately.



We are indebted to Mitzi DeLuca, Sally Reames and Art Cole who co-hosted at Mitzi's beautiful home in the Winchell neighborhood. Made-to-order omelets were courtesy of Julie and Mike Pioch, our board members and many supporters brought an array of brunch favorites.

A few houses away, Jan and Tom Tiderington opened their wonderful home to us, along with co-hosts Martha Cohen, and Marianne and Jim Houston. Jan and Tom made waffles to order and our many volunteer caterers supplied the rest. It was great fun to wander from house to house trying delicacies and discovering good conversation everywhere.

We are grateful to the almost 40 people who sponsored this event and made it so financially successful. About \$5,000 was raised to support the work of the District Service Office. We offer a heartfelt thanks to our sponsors:

- Carolyn G. Alford
- Mary & Don Brown
- David Buskirk
- Bob Cinabro
- Art Cole & Sally Reames
- Leroy Crabtree
- Pat Crowley
- Ken Greschak & Dana DeLuca
- Richard C. Fuller III
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- Sean McCann & Priscilla Lambert
- Barbara H. Miller
- Gary Swanson & Barbara Hammon
- John Taylor
- Linda Teeter
- Laurie Terlesky
- Jack Urban
- Carrie & Bill Venema
- Julie & Bob Vogel

Thanks to everyone who came and made the event so much fun. It was great to see former directors of the office and to honor them.

In attendance were:

- **Bob Ells**, who directed the office when Howard Wolpe first established it, **Drue Kramer**, who succeeded him, **Judy Markusse**, **Mike Pioch**, and **Linda Teeter** from the later years.
- Our immediate past-director, **Cheri Bell**, joined us and accepted a gift of flamingo colored potted impatiens as recognition of past service.

We hope to see our former directors (and former board members) at the next event on Friday, August 17 at 5 p.m. in Mary and Don Brown's backyard.



Cruising the web: <http://www.house.mi.gov/>

From time to time, we will point out a website that can put you directly in touch with the government, starting with the Michigan House of Representatives' site.

This portal is a quick reference to use to find all kinds of useful information about the House, the district boundaries (which will be changing on December 31, 2012.) Try it out. Put your address in.

A word from our former DSO Director: *Cheri Bell*

It is impossible to pinpoint any one constituent, event or issue which defines my years of working at the 60th District Service Office. A typical day might include helping a family get connected with food assistance, informing a constituent of the status of a vote surrounding a particular piece of legislation, and later attending a community forum on economic development on behalf of the Representative. The DSO job description is wide, varied and often changes on the fly. Personally, I always really liked that part. However, the constituents that I encountered while working at the DSO were in fact the greatest part of the job. So many times I watched, right in front of me, the transition of an individual's facial expression go from tense to relaxed. Having the opportunity to turn bureaucratic frustrations into solutions is not only powerful, it is professionally satisfying in a way that is quite remarkable.

Although I am excited as I move forward with my new adventure at Planned Parenthood Mid and South Michigan, there is a long history and legacy of great leadership which has worked to serve the people of the 60th House District and I count myself as lucky to have had the opportunity to participate.

People Helping People



Sometimes, there are unique circumstances which complicate the everyday problems people face.

Such a circumstance, coupled with the associated emotional feelings that come alongside, might make maneuvering through a governmental bureaucracy challenging. They might lack the experience to “connect the dots” and utilize governmental or community resources that could potentially help.

Here are some examples of constituents who have recently sought our assistance.

Through Our Door

Who are we listening to and / or helping this past quarter?

In addition to the two Consumers Energy cases cited in the article on page 1, here are examples of others whom the DSO has assisted recently:

- A woman and her siblings—Tracking a 2010 Michigan income tax return of their deceased father.
- A neighborhood resident—Concerned about major development happening.
- A young college graduate—Looking to find volunteer work experience in environmental issues to add to her resume.
- A woman on disability—Has housing concerns.
- A recent parolee getting back in the labor market—Concerned about how to communicate with his parole officer who was on vacation.
- A family in the Edison neighborhood—Their home has fallen into drastic disrepair, but they state they cannot afford the upkeep.
- A homeowner—His personal checking account was seized for reasons he stated he had nothing to do with.
- The wife of a disabled veteran — He is living out of town and she wants to reestablish contact with him, in order to begin to reunify her family.
- Several individuals—Referred to other House Representatives, based on their residential addresses.
- The wife of a man in a nursing home—She does not feel that he is getting the best of care.
- Someone newly self-employed—He is trying to get himself and his family on their own again. His new income stream isn't easily explained to the Department of Human Services.
- A constituent—Faced with a case of identify fraud.
- A man nearing retirement—How will a specific piece of legislation affect his retirement?
- Sleepless in Kalamazoo—Citizens concerned about quality of life, with recently enacted laws regarding fireworks.

**During the 2Q2012,
We handled 58 individual
constituent cases.**



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60th DSO Board of Directors

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Established in 1973, the 60th District Service Office is a non-profit corporate entity established for the purpose of providing Kalamazoo area residents with direct access to their government and increasing the responsiveness of the government to their needs and concerns. Services are provided without fee on an entirely non-partisan basis. The 60th DSO is sponsored by the State Representative but relies on the contributions of supporters to fund the daily operations.

Upcoming Events

- Aug 7 Primary Election
- Aug 17 Mary Brown's 77th Birthday Bash
- Nov 6 General Election
- Nov / Dec Poinsettia Sale

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