

# **A brief history of: Aid for Distressed Families in Appalachian Counties**

**(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on October 2, 2012)**

One of the most rewarding things I do is serve on the ADFAC Board of Directors! It is such a great experience, that I have agreed to serve my second three year term of a second round of six years. One must go off the board after six years for at least one year. I have done that, but anxiously awaited my chance to return.

There are others of us who recycle ourselves in this rewarding duty. One individual who comes to mind is Tim Myrick. He is coming back soon! And another is David Mullins who has served the ADFAC board several times since its inception. Board members seem to enjoy serving here.

The staff of ADFAC is second to none and compassionate beyond belief. They take each case seriously and spend the time needed to assure the help provided is truly beneficial for the long run. They are effective in what they do...**MOVE FAMILIES BEYOND POVERTY TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY!**

I am most pleased to bring the history of this wonderful organization to you in *Historically Speaking*. It is written by Kay Brookshire.

Kathy Stimpson collected clothing, food and money for rent and utilities aid, then filled her car and distributed the donated items to those in need. Kathy was an active member of First United Methodist Church of Oak Ridge. She counseled the unemployed about finding work and helped them plan so that food stamps would keep the cupboards filled for a whole month.

"She was a volunteer, not a paid employee at all, and she worked so hard," recalled Melly Koons, director of United Way of Anderson County when Stimpson nearly singlehandedly filled a service gap, offering emergency services with only a few volunteers to help. Her office was her car, where she kept a file box listing clients and their needs.

"I admired her. Oh, I admired her so much," Koons said. "She had a heart of gold."

Stimpson's work in the 1970s and 1980s laid the groundwork for the formation of Aid to Distressed Families of Appalachian Counties (ADFAC) and inspired ADFAC's founders to continue her work.

Officially in operation as a non-profit agency since January 1987, ADFAC observes its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year with a celebration from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Oct. 8 at the First Presbyterian Church and with construction completed on a 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary house. The family-friendly celebration will feature an auction, raffle, balloon art and music by the Mt. LeConte Jug Band.

At 25, ADFAC addresses the needs of the most vulnerable in society through its Social Services and Affordable Housing Programs. ADFAC provides a range of services, including short-term assistance for basic human needs, affordable solutions for home rehabilitation and new construction, energy conservation, youth services, and education, counseling and referrals.

"ADFAC is one of the greatest organizations that I've ever been involved in," said Jon Soderstrom, ADFAC's first president and among the founders.

His wife Gail, among the volunteers who worked with Stimpson, asked Jon at some point in the 1980s if he knew how old Stimpson was. His guess was early 60s. When Gail told him she was 75, Soderstrom became concerned about how the services would continue when Stimpson was no longer able to provide them. In the mid-1980s, health problems began to slow her down, Soderstrom said.

# **A brief history of: Aid for Distressed Families in Appalachian Counties**

**(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on October 2, 2012)**

He talked with his minister at Kern United Methodist Church, asking "What will our community do about this when Kathy is no longer able?" His answer was, "Jon, what are you going to do about this." Soderstrom recalled saying, "If you help me, maybe we can organize something."

With help from the Oak Ridge Ministerial Association and volunteers who had worked with Stimpson, including his wife Gail and Beverly Bauman, now a teacher at Oak Ridge High School, the building blocks of ADFAC were put into place. Contributions from area churches and individuals resulted in a budget of \$6,000 in 1986, Soderstrom said.

Neil McBride, then director of Rural Legal Services, now the Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland, donated his services to prepare application for non-profit status for the new organization, and in January 1987, ADFAC was official, Soderstrom said. First Presbyterian Church in Oak Ridge offered office space for ADFAC, where its expanded offices are located today.

ADFAC's founders worked with Melly Koons, who was very familiar with Stimpson's work, and United Way funded ADFAC that first year. ADFAC focused on meeting emergency needs, providing rent, utilities assistance and other help to 75 low-income clients in 1987. That program evolved to become the ADFAC's Social Services Program, which, along with the Affordable Housing Program, provides a range of 20 types of aid and receives more than 6,000 requests for assistance annually.

"In the earliest days, if ADFAC didn't have the United Way funding, it wouldn't have existed," said board treasurer Dave Mullins, recruited to the board by Soderstrom in 1988. He served as board president for two years in the early 1990s, and then returned to the board six years ago.

"Now the United Way funding makes up on the order of five percent of the total budget. We still rely on it," Mullins said. Grants, church support and individual donations make up the remainder of the budget, he said.

By 1988, ADFAC's board hired Carol Siemens as executive director and Peggy Meier as assistant director. Church support increased, with 20 churches contributing to ADFAC, compared with seven the year before. Board members also began exploring housing programs.

In 1989, ADFAC applied for and received a \$250,000 grant from the state for home repairs, marking the beginning of the Affordable Housing Program. Liz Herbes, now ADFAC Social Services Program director, was hired part-time that year to work in social services.

Jon Soderstrom, now managing director of the Office of Cooperative Research at Yale University, served as ADFAC president for seven years. His instrumental role in founding and volunteering with ADFAC received national recognition when he received a Points of Light Award in 1990 from President George H.W. Bush for his commitment to the non-profit agency.

"The most obvious change is the growth of the Affordable Housing Program. In the earliest years, it really consisted of volunteers going out to do repairs on people's houses. Now it has evolved really into actually building houses, the largest portion of that program, and the budget that goes along with the," Mullins said. "The mission and focus of the Social Services Program has stayed largely the same. The program itself has grown."

Today, ADFAC is a respected, independent non-profit agency with a mission to serve the basic needs of primarily low-income residents in Anderson and surrounding Appalachian counties. ADFAC aims to help families become stable and self-sufficient through direct assistance services provided by the Social Services and Affordable Housing Programs.

## **A brief history of: Aid for Distressed Families in Appalachian Counties**

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on October 2, 2012)

It's a mission inspired by Kathy Stimpson, who Koons recalled as a small, dark haired woman, feisty and energetic, whose aid, counseling and sometimes tough love was also directed at moving families beyond poverty to self-sufficiency.

That concludes Kay's history of ADFAC. It is a great story and Kay did an excellent job of capturing the essence of ADFAC.

On October 8, 2012, ADFAC celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Executive Director, Annie Cacherio, who has served in this capacity since 2010, invites you to join the celebration on the grounds of the First Presbyterian Church at 1051 Oak Ridge Turnpike. The ADFAC Board of Directors, staff and volunteers will welcome the community to help celebrate 25 years of "Neighbors Helping Neighbors".

The event will be held from 5:30 – 7:30pm and will include live entertainment, Buddy's BBQ, a live auction as well as a raffle to benefit ADFAC's mission. In addition the evening will include recognition of outgoing board members and the election of new board members as part of the agency's Annual Meeting.

For more information about ADFAC or the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, Auction or Raffle, please visit the ADFAC website: [www.adfac.org](http://www.adfac.org)



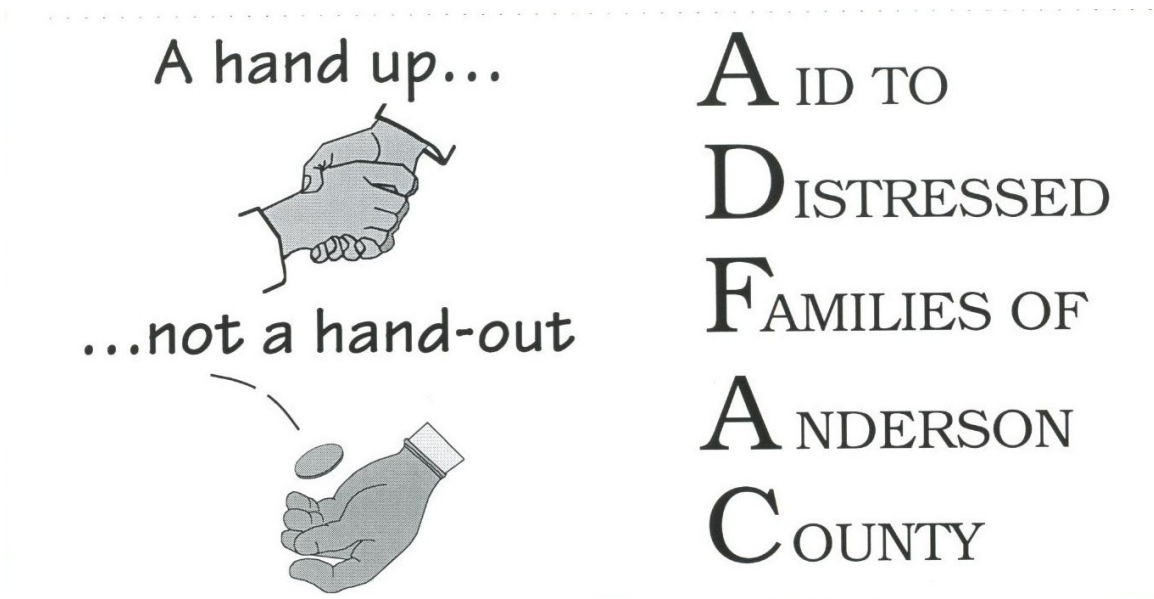
In this 1985 photo from The Oak Ridger's files, Kathy Stimpson — who started ADFAC — is seen removing blankets and bags of items from her car. Melly Koons, former United Way of Anderson County director, said Stimpson's car was her office in the beginning

## A brief history of: Aid for Distressed Families in Appalachian Counties

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on October 2, 2012)



Jon Soderstrom, his wife, Gail, their daughter Rachelle, and younger daughter (unidentified) – Gail worked closely with Kathy Stimpson to help people in the early years and Jon worked to mobilize support to form ADFAC



ADFAC's first logo