

## A History of Cedar Hill Enrichment Center

In 1975 Forsyth County was still missionary territory, there was not yet a Catholic Church or parish. The Bishops had just completed the pastoral letter "This Land is Home to me" describing both the beauty and the plight of Appalachia. It was that year that four Adrian Dominican Sisters came to Forsyth County following a call to serve people who were economically poor and whose basic needs were not being met by existing programs. By ministerial design they created programs as the people revealed their greatest needs. Continuous prayerful discernment was conducted through individual client interviews as well as annual community meetings where participants were invited to name needs which were of greatest importance to them and to discuss ways to address these needs. A thrift store, food pantry and emergency fund were quickly in place and running. Programs for elderly, children, parenting skills, Hispanics, assistance to file tax returns, followed as client and volunteer population grew.

Understanding that both the causes and the solutions to problems caused by poverty lie within the community itself, the Sisters expanded the ministry of The Place by inviting the people of Forsyth County to study the conditions of families caught in poverty and to participate in solutions. Good people of all religious denominations and socioeconomic groups responded and cooperated to establish needed agencies and institutions. The Sisters facilitated the development of non-profit corporations and mentored boards of directors for them. As a result of these efforts, there are 7 dynamic free-standing institutions, spin-offs of The Place, involving the services of numerous staff and volunteers responding continuously to human crisis and need:

**Georgia Highlands Medical Services, Inc.** provides services of several physicians with an extensive support staff

**Family Haven, Inc.** offers safe haven for women and children suffering domestic abuse

**Sojourner's House** provides emergency shelter for families

**The Forsyth County Medical Fund** is a donor advised fund administered by the metropolitan Atlanta Community Foundation which provides funds for The Place staff to purchase medications for low-income clients and attends to the needs of families at Thanksgiving and Christmas

**United Way of Forsyth County, Inc.** does the major funding of all these agencies

**Good Shepherd Place** (a development of Catholic Housing Initiative) is a residential building of 48 apartments for elderly.

After nineteen years of poverty work in Forsyth and surrounding counties through Rural Social Services, known locally, as The Place, Kathryn Cliatt and June Racicot were called to create a center of spirituality for women. This call came first through a woman whose prayer group in Atlanta was looking for a safe place to gather for a day of retreat and asked if they could come to the Sisters' goat farm and would the Sisters also guide them through this retreat. It was a profound day.

The call came again from a group of ordained Presbyterian women ministers who needed time, space and nurturing and again the day was prophetic. Then the prayer group returned. The call was real. It was evident that there was a need for a center where women could come to speak freely, be loved, accepted and nurtured; a place where they could pray, sing, dance, laugh and cry; a place where the soul could grow and the sacredness of Earth be celebrated.

In early spring of 1995 June and Kathryn gathered together a group of interested people to begin a feasibility study and soon discovered that there were no retreat centers within a one hundred mile radius of Atlanta that offered programs geared to women's unique spiritual needs. The call was clear and the work began: negotiations with the Archdiocese of Atlanta for the use of the property, application for 501(c)3 non-profit status, and the formation of the first Board of Directors. Cedar Hill Enrichment Center was born.

As more and more women gathered it became evident that the small living room in the Sisters' home was inadequate and a large gathering space was essential. With no financial resources at hand, it was not feasible to build a new center. After some pondering and praying on this situation Kathryn and June called on two friends, one an architect, the other a retired building contractor to consider the possibility of renovating the eighty year old barn that at the time was housing their herd of twelve dairy goats. Both men thought the job was possible so the renovation began in June 1995. The goats were moved to new quarters and by the following spring the work was completed. The old barn now housed a large gathering room, kitchen, bathroom, small library and a massage room, all with carpeting, heat and air-conditioning.

Since the beginning, Cedar Hill has offered a rich variety of programs for the spiritual enrichment of the women who come. As these programs grew so did the staff. Burma Parks began preparing meals for the visitors in the fall of 1996. Kat Stratton joined the community in 1998 as a part-time volunteer in residence. By 2001, she was hired full time as office manager. She has since become a Habitat Stewart with the National Wildlife Federation and a Master Gardener. Through her efforts, Cedar Hill is part of the Adopt-A-Stream Program and is a certified wildlife habitat with the National Wildlife Federation.

As requests for corporate and overnight retreats increased, once again more space was needed. Kathryn and June moved from the farmhouse into their own staff residence on the property in June 2003 and the farmhouse was renovated for guest quarters.

After years of love and devotion to the spiritual and ecological ministry of Cedar Hill, June and Kathryn began considering the longevity of the Center and realized that if Cedar Hill was to live into the future it was time to search for new leadership. Sister Carol Patron, CSJ, came to Cedar Hill as Director in 2003, leaving in early 2006 for health reasons.

In 2006, Cedar Hill Enrichment Center was granted independent 501-c-3 status, continuing to serve the community with a wide range of programs embracing an interfaith philosophy. Kat Stratton is now Executive Director, and continues to build strong relationships within the North Georgia community to ensure the sustainability and longevity of Cedar Hill Enrichment Center.

June and Kathryn, Cedar Hill's Founders, move into semi-retirement with the assurance of their ongoing presence of love, prayer and support. Now is the exciting time of newness. What new programs will emerge in response to the needs of the community and our planet? Who of you, dear friends, will step forward to staff these programs, assume leadership as Board members, committee members and/or tend this sacred space as volunteers?