

St. Nicholas art winner announced . . . . . 8  
Golf tournament raises \$52,000 for critical services . . . . . 8

# CATHOLIC CHARITIES Connections

SUPPLEMENT TO ARKANSAS CATHOLIC • CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF ARKANSAS • 2415 N. TYLER ST. • LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS 72207 • DECEMBER 2, 2023

## AT A GLANCE Catholic Charities of Arkansas serves

*Services that offer hope and the light of Christ to people in need*

■ **Adoption Services:** Offers post-adoption support for those who have worked with the agency with an emphasis on search and reunions.

■ **Immigration Services in Springdale and Little Rock:** Provides low-cost immigration assistance.

■ **Refugee resettlement:** Ecumenical effort with sponsor teams to resettle families seeking a new home in the U.S.

■ **Parish outreach:** Assists with developing parish-based ministries that respond to local needs.

■ **Prison ministry:** Responds to the spiritual needs of people who are incarcerated and their families.

■ **Family assistance:** Short-term rent and utilities assistance to families and individuals at risk of becoming homeless.

■ **Catholic Charities Medical Clinic:** Provides free health care services and prescriptions for people 18 years old and older who are unable to afford primary health care.

**FOR INFORMATION**  
Catholic Charities of Arkansas  
2415 N. Tyler St.  
Little Rock, AR 72207  
(501) 664-0340  
dolr.org

### CATHOLIC CHARITIES MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Catholic Charities of Arkansas of the Diocese of Little Rock is rooted in the challenge of the Gospel: To serve persons who are poor or marginalized; to advocate on behalf of the most vulnerable; and to actively promote charity, justice and the sanctity of life in the Church and the community.

## Refugee office earns affiliate status

USCCB connection will increase number and kind of cases

Catholic Charities' Refugee Resettlement Office has been granted affiliate status through the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

After successfully resettling Afghans within the Little Rock area in 2021-2022, the USCCB reached out to immigration services director Jennifer Verkamp-Ruthven and asked her office to apply to become an "affiliate" of its Migration and Refugee Services agency.

"We were excited to learn this past summer that our application was approved, and we have been given the opportunity to grow our ministry," Verkamp-Ruthven said. "As an affiliate, we are required to resettle U.S. tie cases and 'no U.S. tie' cases, which do not have a relative or friend close to where they are being resettled. We also will be resettling many more individuals than in the past several years, and all these cases do require the same set of core services."

The refugee resettlement program at Catholic Charities of Arkansas has a long history of "welcoming the stranger." In the 1970s and 1980s the program was on the frontlines of serving Vietnamese and Cuban refugees.

After the United States Refugee Act of 1980 was passed, the program became a "community



OSV News / Evelyn Hockstein, Reuters

**Afghan refugees embrace** family members after arriving at Dulles International Airport in Dulles, Va., Sept. 2, 2021, before boarding buses that took them to a processing center.

partner" of the USCCB, which is one of the 10 national resettlement agencies. The role of a national resettlement agency is to assist with assigning a refugee with an agency within their network across the country. They also ensure local resettlement agencies are adhering to the policies set by the State Department.

As a community partner, the

program is required to provide "core services" for refugees who have a "U.S. tie," a friend or relative living in Arkansas who is willing to assist with the resettlement process. While there are multiple ongoing services that are provided to the family, core services include enrollment in English as a Second Language (ESL) courses, securing employment, cultural

orientations, school enrollment and housing.

After the fall of the Afghan government to the Taliban in 2021, CCA was asked to assist with the resettlement of Afghans who had to quickly evacuate their country.

"We accepted this request as did many other agencies across

See **Refugees** page 8

## Tornado relief continues in three counties

Long-term recovery is plan as disaster case managers are trained

It's been more than seven months since a widespread tornado hit Arkansas with damage to Pulaski, Lonoke and Cross counties. Catholic Charities of Arkansas immediately began contacting Catholic parishes in communities with tornado damage to identify and contact households that were impacted.

Sarah Alvarez, tornado recovery caseworker for Catholic Charities, led the efforts until a

long-term recovery group could be formed. A new group of disaster case managers will be trained and supervised by Cathy Garcia, regional program manager of the Disaster Services Corporation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul USA.

"Disaster case management is a newer field," Garcia said, "and specific training will be provided."

Garcia will train the case managers for Arkansas who will be contracted for one year. Their focus will be to address the tornado survivors' complex disaster recovery needs.

"Homeowners are still reaching out," Garcia said.

Repairs to habitable homes

are a top priority along with tree removal and replacing damaged vehicles. There are also the emotional issues that come with a natural disaster.

"This situation is causing residents to go into debt," Garcia said, "especially if you live paycheck to paycheck."

Garcia said she is also concerned about Spanish-speaking residents not being found. If residents do not come forward, they will not receive the help they need, she said. Garcia said there is a need for Spanish-speaking volunteers who can assist in finding those who are afraid to ask for assistance.

DSC provides free person-to-

person recovery services to all families impacted by disasters, regardless of their immigration status. They will advocate on their behalf with FEMA, insurance companies and the Small Business Administration, connect them with other community resources and help with navigating the complex systems and services for receiving support.

Arkansas survivors of the March 31 tornado can obtain more information or schedule an appointment by contacting St. Vincent de Paul Disaster Services at (800) 668-0683, by emailing Pulaski-CrossARTornado@sudpdisaster.org, or by visiting www.sudpdisaster.org.



## BRIEFS



Catholic Charities of Arkansas

Art by Waverly Brooks, a sixth-grade student at Our Lady of the Holy Souls School in Little Rock, won first place in the St. Nicholas Partners art contest.

## ART CONTEST WINNER

The St. Nicholas Partners Fund Drive is underway. The campaign allows supporters of Catholic Charities of Arkansas an opportunity to designate their gift for special programs in the organization. A Christmas greeting card and donation envelope were distributed to past donors and in this issue of *Arkansas Catholic*.

The card design is chosen through an art contest conducted through Catholic schools in the state. Cash prizes are awarded for the three best designs and are given to the artist and to the school the young artist attends.

This year's winner is Waverly Brooks, a sixth-grade student at Our Lady of the Holy Souls School in Little Rock. She is the daughter of Ryan and Amanda Brooks. Lucas Fleisch, a 10th grader from Catholic High School in Little Rock, won second place, and Liam Caleb J. Quizon, a first grader from Christ the King School in Fort Smith, won third place. The artwork was judged by Catholic Charities staff. Last year's St. Nicholas Partners raised more than \$15,000 for Catholic Charities of Arkansas programs. For more information, visit [dolr.org/catholiccharities/st-nicholas-partners](http://dolr.org/catholiccharities/st-nicholas-partners) or contact

## Teamwork



Catholic Charities of Arkansas

**The team at Catholic Immigration Services in Springdale are some of the longest-serving employees in Catholic Charities. They are immigration specialist Mariae Acosta-Westbrook (from left), 27 years; immigration specialist Karen Alvarado, 10 years; associate director Laura Awakim, 24 years; administrative assistant Alma Beltra, 23 years; immigration specialist Monica Diaz, 16 years; and immigration specialist Elizabeth Schaeuffler, 13 years.**

Megan Moore, office administrator of Catholic Charities of Arkansas, at (501) 664-0340.

## CAPSTONE PROJECT

Claire Hollenbeck is completing her capstone project with the refugee resettlement office for her master's degree in public service from the Clinton School of Public Service.

The Fort Smith resident spent her summer abroad and then began working this fall semester to help the refugee resettlement program increase capacity to accept and resettle more refugee arrivals.

"In this capacity, I am developing and updating guides, programs and resources," Hollenbeck said. "My interest in public service is deeply tied to my faith.



Hollenbeck

I knew I wanted to complete a project with the Catholic Church if I could. I feel as though God was guiding me to Catholic Charities, a perfect combination of serving the Lord and serving those in my community."

## NEW CASE MANAGER

Seminarian Ethan Harris has been hired as a case manager for the Refugee Resettlement Office while he completes his propaedeutic year at the House of Formation in Little Rock.

Harris, a member of St. Michael Church in Van Buren, said the work for Catholic Charities has helped him see Christ in the poor.

"To look into their eyes of gratitude and love for the blessings that the Father has bestowed on



Harris

them whether they know it or not," he said. "The joy of serving these wonderful people has brought so much peace into my heart that I now know why Christ first called me to love his people many years ago at the start of my discernment ... I thank Catholic Charities for this wonderful opportunity to serve the community and the Church in a fulfilling way."

## IMMIGRATION STAFF

Matthew Phillips recently was hired as an immigration specialist for Catholic Charities.

"My duties include assisting clients to renew their permanent residence cards, DACAs and temporary protected status," he said "I also help Afghan refugees with their immigration paperwork."

Phillips said he was first exposed to immigration and refugee resettlement work while attending Catholic Charities Summer Institute.

"While there, an immigration specialist gave a presentation on her work, and I distinctly remember thinking, 'Huh, that seems like a pretty neat job;' after which, I never gave it a second thought."

After graduating from high school, he attended Benedictine College in Atchison, Kan., where he double majored in history and foreign languages with an emphasis in Spanish, Latin and Greek. He spent a semester studying in Spain.

After graduation, he taught five years in Catholic schools, including one year at Immaculate Heart of Mary in North Little Rock and four years at North Little Rock Catholic Academy.



Phillips

## YOU CAN HELP REFUGEES

The Refugee Resettlement Office is collecting necessities for refugees when they arrive in the Little Rock area. Donations can be dropped off or mailed to Catholic Charities, 2415 N. Tyler St., Little Rock, AR 72207.

- napkins, paper towels and toilet paper
- dish towels and dish soap
- freezer bags
- large trash bags
- aluminum foil
- shampoo and conditioner
- toothbrush and toothpaste
- deodorant
- socks
- cleaning supplies

## Refugees

Continued from page 7

the country," Verkamp-Ruthven said. "Within less than six months, our small program resettled 88 Afghans. None of those individuals had a U.S. tie in the area, so the resettlement process was even more challenging. Thankfully, we had multiple 'sponsor teams' from local faith communities who have assisted the Afghans with their transition for over two years now to their new community. Since then, other Afghans have moved to the area, and we have serviced a total of 104 individuals."

Verkamp-Ruthven said residents in Central Arkansas made it possible to resettle that many Afghans.

"They have suffered great loss, which can include the loss of their livelihoods, homes, relatives/friends and other possessions," she said of the refugees. "When they begin their new life in this country, there are many initial needs upon arrival and now with the growth of the CCA refugee resettlement program, we need more assistance from the community."

Catholic Charities is accepting donations to help cover intensive ESL courses, transportation, legal immigration services and dental care.

Volunteers are also needed.

"As we plan for more refugee arrivals, we need more volunteers," Verkamp-Ruthven said. "Volunteers can form a group to create a sponsor team to walk alongside a refugee family or can help with other areas, such as an English tutor or assistance with job placement. Other major needs are for local businesses to recruit and hire refugees and for landlords to rent a safe and affordable place for newcomers to call home."

Anyone interested in donating or volunteering with the refugee resettlement program should contact Jennifer Verkamp-Ruthven at [jverkampruthven@dolr.org](mailto:jverkampruthven@dolr.org).

## Golfers tee off for Catholic Charities

Twenty-eight golf teams came together Oct. 2 to raise more than \$52,000 for Catholic Charities.

Players included seven priests and three deacons for the 28th annual Catholic Charities of Arkansas Golf Tournament at the Granada Golf Course in Hot Springs Village.

More than 45 organizations and individuals sponsored the fundraising event.

The winning teams for the first flight were Father Bill Elser, Bob Baker, Jay Lester and Mark Hittner, first place, 52; Ryan Beck, Luke Beck, Father Joe Friend and Father Jon Miskin, second place, 54; and Scott Krantz, Danny

Murphy, Robert Pinson and Michael Mason, third place, 55.

For the second flight, the winners were Father John Marconi, Joe Justus, Larkus Pesnell and Jimmy Blake, first place, 63; Gary Wolfer, Jim Bergstrom, Jim Dixon and Ike Eisenhauer, second place, 63; and Jeff Pracht, John Burgess, Brian Marsh and Trent Wunstel, third place, 63.

The third flight winners were Phillip Isgrig, David Warren, Deacon B.J. Bowen and Richard Frederick, first place, 67; Father Paul Worm, Mike Prince, Keith Gray and Lance Gray, second place, 68; and Greg Wolfe, Kelley Renard, John Airola and Adam Smith, third place, 68.



Catholic Charities of Arkansas

**Playing to win first place in the first flight of the Catholic Charities Golf Tournament Oct. 2, with a score of 53, are Father Bill Elser of Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Hot Springs Village with teammates Bob Baker, Jay Lester and Mark Hittner.**