



THANKS FOR CARING AWARD

honoring outstanding commitment to neighborhood, grassroots community philanthropy
Ophelia Bass, Theresa Bass & LaToya Myers of Kennett Square

The East Linden Neighborhood of Kennett Square has a rich history. Once a station on the Underground Railroad, it became a center of the African-American community in southern Chester County. Over time, though, the neighborhood deteriorated: street crime, trash, dilapidated housing, and a sense of hopelessness victimized neighbors, many of them vulnerable families with limited financial resources. It was a place to leave, and many did.

Ophelia Bass has raised seven children on East Linden Street, and she simply refused to leave. She and her daughter, Theresa Bass, took a stand. “We have the right to live in peace!” they insisted. They spoke up to those causing trouble in the community, at countless community meetings, and to any who would listen. And, remarkably, people began to listen.

As a motivated group of leaders came together, Theresa led the effort to make change. Her plan was as simple as it was powerful: where she saw need, she found a way to meet it. Homes were falling apart, so the group cooperated with a nonprofit to implement an ambitious façade improvement and home repair program. Children were missing meals, so Theresa and Mrs. Ophelia found a source for meals and invited children in after school and during the summer to eat together. Students were struggling in school, so the group took on a Study Buddies tutoring program.

The Historic East Linden Project grew. It would be nice to say that progress became easier, but it often seemed that too many obstacles would end the Bass’ vision for a better neighborhood. People who promised help instead brought conflict, pledged resources failed to materialize, and meetings seemed to be more about airing grievances than about finding solutions. But, strengthened by faith, prayer, and the support of many who believed in them, Theresa and Mrs. Ophelia wouldn’t give up.

Theresa’s daughter, LaToya Myers, joined the effort, organizing the neighbors to undertake all kinds of things: successful block parties, planting a Rain Garden, cleaning the block every

spring, and helping children get to summer camps. Gradually, the spirit of the neighborhood shifted.

There are many measures of philanthropy. One, perhaps, is the degree of success; another is the scope of the philanthropist's dedication. Inspiring others to join in the work makes philanthropy last, and creating connections between diverse people opens incredible possibilities. Smart strategies and a moral vision are hugely important. Mrs. Ophelia, Theresa and LaToya are exemplary philanthropists by all of these measures.

There is still much to be done in the Historic East Linden Neighborhood. Families still struggle; crime still threatens; homes still need repair. But the future is in the hands of three good women, and it is a bright one.