



The Wilmots and Daughters

At the 2013 Night Out with NAMI celebration on Nov. 2, we paid tribute to Phyllis and Bill Wilmot. They received our organization's highest honor—the NAMI Mercer 2013 Pillar Award—in recognition of their extraordinary 18-year contribution to our mission through volunteerism, leadership, advocacy, and charitable giving.

Phyllis and Bill grew up in Pittsburgh, PA, where they married in 1960. Phyllis is a graduate of Smith College, where she earned an undergraduate degree in English and art history. After graduating with a BA from Cornell, Bill served in the U.S. Army and then completed his PhD in physical chemistry at Carnegie Mellon University. A job opportunity for Bill in research and development for a chemical company in Trenton brought the Wilmots to New Jersey, where they have lived since 1973. They have three daughters (Lauren, Kris, and Elise) and four grandchildren (Trevor, Dylan, Will, and Emma).

Like so many others, Phyllis and Bill first came to NAMI Mercer during a family crisis. Their youngest daughter Elise had suffered a psychotic break. According to Phyllis, “we have not been alone since that day in 1995 when we began NAMI's ‘Journey of Hope’ (the precursor of Family to Family). Knowledge brought better understanding, and we learned ways to come together and cope. Most important of all, we learned to empathize.”

The Wilmots are enormously grateful to NAMI Mercer pioneers Tom and Chomy Garces, who encouraged and mentored them through an exceedingly difficult period and made sure that they didn't “cut and run” when the crisis was over.

“As important as NAMI’s help is in a crisis situation, the ongoing connection is what really sustains us,” explains Phyllis. Bill believes that NAMI was a “god-send” for his family, especially for Elise, who has participated in every consumer activity. Over the years, she has moved from disability to recovery and full-time employment.

Likewise, the Wilmots’ long-term contribution has enabled NAMI to flourish and grow. Their strong belief in the possibility of recovery has inspired all of us.

Bill’s volunteer work for NAMI began in 1996, when he trained to teach the Journey of Hope course. He served as a Board member from 1996 to 2006 and as president from 1998 to 2002. During his tenure, NAMI Mercer:

- grew more than 50 percent;
- received the “2001 Affiliate of the Year Award” from NAMI National;
- committed to hiring a paid executive director;
- raised sufficient funds through individual and business contributions, foundation grants (especially Robert Wood Johnson), and the proceeds from the first fund raising event (2001), which honored John Forbes Nash, Jr. with a special showing of " A Beautiful Mind" and a dinner underwritten by Janssen Pharmaceutica;
- launched “Visions for Tomorrow,” the precursor of NAMI Basics;
- initiated a successful campaign for involuntary outpatient commitment.

Phyllis’ volunteer work for NAMI Mercer is equally impressive. She served on the Board for four years, on the Intensive Family Support Services (IFSS) Oversight Committee for six years, on the NAMI State Family Support Plan Committee for five years, and on the Walk Committee for two years. With 20-years of experience working as a counselor for Planned Parenthood and 10 years for CONTACT, Phyllis has been a valuable asset to our Helpline. She also is a long-term member of the Just Friends Committee, where she is pleased that consumers have assumed most of the leadership responsibilities.

In recognition of their volunteerism and advocacy for the rights of persons with mental illness, the Wilmots received the 2009 Mary Jo Codey Award sponsored by Family Guidance Center/Family and Children’s Services (FGC/FACS).

With all the time and energy that they have devoted to NAMI Mercer, it is hard to believe that Phyllis and Bill also have been active volunteers for many other organizations. They have served as deacons and trustees of the Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville and volunteered in various capacities at the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen for more than 20 years. Bill was a two-term member of the Board of Greater Trenton Behavioral Healthcare and tutored at the Haitian Center of the Diocese of Trenton for nearly two decades. In addition to her volunteer work at Planned Parenthood and

CONTACT, Phyllis sat on the Board of the Benjamin Temple House and the Lawrence Arts Council.

Phyllis still finds time for hobbies including visiting art galleries and museums with Bill and collecting all manner of frogs. The Wilmots love seeing their grandkids and watching Emma compete in equestrian events.

Over so many years, the Wilmots have used every opportunity to reach out as ambassadors for NAMI Mercer. At the Helpline, Phyllis' goal is to impart the immense help that NAMI has provided to her family. "My hope is that the caller will become connected to our programs of support and education and begin to feel the hopelessness fade. I just want this for every caller!"