Rita Wilkins, Keeper of the Community Conscience
By Desiree Dieste, Fund Drive Co-Chair

In the late 1960’s, the Civil Rights struggle had a powerful effect on campuses across the country. Smith College was no exception. In order to promulgate a spirit of participation between students and the surrounding community, several Smith College chaplains conceived of grouping a number of student organizations into a comprehensive community service program. Thus, in 1968 the Service Organizations of Smith (S.O.S.) was born.

As a response to the rapidly changing needs of the community during this volatile era, students participated in weekly short-term community service and long-term volunteer placements at organizations such as the Northampton State Hospital, the People’s Institute, and other local agencies.

While creating the Service Organizations of Smith was no small task, a bigger task was to come—namely, finding a capable and dedicated director. The college needed someone who was dedicated to community involvement. Student concerns were a top priority of the chaplains from the start of S.O.S. They wanted to create an organization with an active student government component. Luckily, they were able to find just what they needed in a woman who is now referred to simply as "Ms. Rita."

Rita Wilkins grew up during the 1930’s in her grandmother’s home on Fifth and Lennox in Harlem, N.Y. During middle school she moved to Boston, M.A. with her mother. After high school, Wilkins returned to New York City where she worked at a neighborhood YMCA. Even though Ms. Rita was able to enjoy the Harlem Renaissance — segregation in ho-

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...though it had been predestined: “She was just what we needed!”

Wilkins was able to create a strong foundation that allowed S.O.S. to grow. She had a deep understanding of the community’s needs, and she was incredibly enthusiastic and creative. Rabbi Lander speaks very highly of her rich imagination and how she easily transformed ideas into reality. Wilkins was able to engage her students on a personal level that addressed each of their individual interests, even though she admits this was no easy task.

As Wilkins fondly recalls, "I was hired part time, but I can assure you working for S.O.S. and the students is more than a full-time job."

She would often cook dinner at the board’s weekly meetings, and paella was her specialty.

Concerned members of the Northampton community are worried about the recent budget and forthcoming budget cuts to social service agencies throughout Massachusetts. In October, Gov. Jane Swift cut $200 million out of the state budget, $138 million of which revokes state funding for service agencies such as health care, education, and advocacy for the homeless. She also cut $11 million in welfare to needy families.

Swift emphasized that the cuts were necessary because of the state deficit and decreased revenues, but State Senate President Thomas F. Birmingham criticized her decision, saying that it was made based on a “speculative deficit.”

“Last year we had a demonstrable shortfall, our revenues were coming in lower than expected. That’s not the case this year,” he said.

Many feel that prospects worsened for service agencies on Nov. 5, when voters elected Mitt Romney, a Republican businessman famous for organizing the Salt Lake City winter Olympics, to succeed Swift.

The new governor’s first priority will be to bring the state out of the biggest tax revenue plunge in 50 years. In Romney’s campaign, he promised to accomplish this without cutting any more funding for programs. State Rep. Stephen Kulik shared others’ skepticism of this plan, calling it a “Herculean task” to cut spending without cutting aid. Funding cuts have already affected many community agencies, including the Grove Street Inn homeless shelter. Last month, the Grove Street Inn had to close down its services during the day for the first time in twelve years. Other Northampton shelters like the Interfaith Cot Shelter, an emergency homeless shelter and Jessie’s House have also experienced similar crises. The Interfaith Cot Shelter, which usually stays open until early spring, may have to close in February instead of April unless they can fundraise the difference.
Smith Students Get Involved with Local Community
By Susan Chun, Community Outreach Intern

House community is often built over study breaks, house trips, or house events. Another great way that Houses can build community is by volunteering for community service projects. Hopkins House HP, Megan Jamieson, actively helped organize a service project for members of her house. She and 8 other people volunteered at the AIDS CARE Community Garden. They gave a hand in the final harvest and clean up of the garden, and helped get the garden plots ready for winter. The ACHC Community Garden provides freshly grown vegetables and flowers to people living with HIV or AIDS in Hampshire County. Court Cline from AIDS CARE really appreciated the help. Said Cline, “I thought it was going to take at least a couple hours, but we were able to finish earlier.” Hopkins House is looking forward to volunteering in the spring to help with the planting.

Allyson Bogie, a senior in Gillett house, organized a house project to the Cambodian Buddhist Temple in Pelham. The monks needed a hand clearing the area near the temple for expansion. Bogie said of that day “It was hard work, but we really enjoyed it.” Sokhen Mao, the coordinator of this project, said “It is very nice of the students to give up their weekend. We really appreciate it.”

Houses were not the only Smith groups that saw community service projects as a great way to bond and get involved. Donielle Sliwa, an intern at the Student Affairs office organized a community service project for Smith Life and Learning, a program directed to the first-years. Sliwa and the first-year volunteers went to Massachusetts Audubon in Arcadia. Sliwa said, “We used shovels to dig out trees. Because it was hard, it was a great bonding experience. Everybody had to cooperate and help each other out.”

S.O.S hopes this spirit continues throughout this year, and that more Smith student groups will feel encouraged to volunteer.

Winter Gifts
By Maia Dauner, Head of House Reps

It is time for the annual Hilltown Food Pantry Winter Gifts collection. The Hilltown Food Pantry is an organization in Ashfield, MA, run by volunteers from three local churches that provide emergency food services to families in need. The majority of families served by the pantry are "working poor" whose wages are insufficient to cover cost of living. Rising costs of health care, transportation, and childcare put these families under an economic strain as they struggle to maintain a decent standard of living.

The Hilltown food pantry sponsors the Winter Gifts program to provide additional help to these families during the holiday season. The Hilltown Food Pantry is non-denominational and the Winter Gifts program is not religiously affiliated. Parents provide the Hilltown Food Pantry with a list of two toys and two clothing items that they want to give their children aged 1-16. The Pantry matches the requests with groups or individuals who want to sponsor a child. When a donation of any amount from an individual is combined with a group, collectively, we are able to make a difference in many children's holiday experience.

S.O.S is one of largest supporters of the program, sponsoring about one third of the children whose families request this service. When a group, such as a house or org, sponsors a child, they will raise between $40-$60 to purchase gifts that parents indicate that the child wants. In the past each house on campus has chosen to sponsor at least one child. To find out more about this program, speak to your SOS House Reps, or for individual or office sponsorship call the S.O.S. Office at 585-4595.

S.O.S. is also a sponsoring agency for the Sydney Smith Toy Fund which has a similar gift program for children under 14 years old whose families live in Hampshire and Franklin counties.
**SOS Spotlight**

**SOS Blood Drive Saves 600 Lives**

By Anna Graseck

The Red Cross blood drive on October 29 and 30 was a great success. Between those scheduled to donate and the many walk-in donors, over 200 people gave one pint of blood. Since each pint may be used for up to three patients, members of the Smith community donated enough blood to save 600 lives — in just twelve hours!

Rachel Shifrin ’05, a nervous, first-time donor discovered there was no need to fear. “I felt like I was doing something really wonderful, and that made me very happy.”

Also vital to the blood drive’s success was the volunteer efforts of both Smith students and Northampton community members. Volunteers registered donors, chatted with the students throughout the blood-giving process, and assisted at the canteen.

The drive’s popularity had one unfortunate consequence — a long line! After the overwhelming turnout on the 29th, the Red Cross staff decided to stay as long as needed on the 30th to accommodate every donor so no one was turned away. The Red Cross staff was so impressed with the number of donors that they plan to bring extra staff for the next major blood drive, in mid-February.

Anyone who was temporarily unable to donate in October, whether due to lack of time, low blood iron, or a cold, is encouraged to donate in December. There will be a small, walk-in bloodmobile sponsored by Mercy Hospital Blood Services on December 9th. For details email Anna Graseck at agraseck@email.smith.edu.

Thank you for your donations!