

## Volunteers of the Month – Fresh Start Pallet Products

It's been over five years since we reported on Fresh Start Pallet Products and volunteering. Then we talked about Dr. Ed Johnson, and we're happy to report that he is still happily engaged there. This month we're featuring Rich Carman, a very active board member and member of the executive committee. Rich and his wife Barbara moved into Asylum Hill nearly 25 years ago when they bought a condominium at Woodland



House, but for quite a while they didn't spend a lot of time there. As a social worker with a penchant for management and an attraction to foreign assignments, Rich and Barbara have been called to countries in Africa and Eastern Europe over the years to assist people with disabilities to help themselves.

But now they are spending more time here in their Asylum Hill home both because of retirement and the pandemic that makes foreign travel so difficult. So Rich is using the skills he has developed since his college degree in Social Work Administration to advance the cause of Fresh Start Pallet Products.

Helping people to be the best version of themselves that they can be is the skill that he applies to every challenge that comes along, and it's become a 40 hour a week offering. He worked with Carlos Mouta who had a vision to create the Parkville Market and with Rich's efforts Fresh Start was able to provide much of the unique outdoor furniture and fixtures for that project. So much so that Carlos came to the Fresh Start Christmas party in 2020 and as the photo above shows, he accepted an award from Fresh Start presented by Rich.

Several other projects have come to Fresh Start including the Swift Factory in the North End of Hartford, where tables and chairs were refurbished and refinished and Soul de Cuba Cafe in New Haven for whom custom designed benches were built. Some of this work was just a variation on products that Fresh Start makes, and others are new projects using salvaged wood not from pallets. All of it has helped to expand the experience and skills of the workers, and increase the awareness of Fresh Start, its mission and its capabilities. In all of this, Rich has taken the lead in managing the project, communicating with the customers and clients and providing the information to the staff and the other Executive committee members. For more information on what Rich and Fresh Start are up to, go to <https://www.freshstartpalletproducts.org>