



# Voices from Home

Summer 2008

Published for Friends of Alexian Brothers Bonaventure House & The Harbor

## The Harbor Celebrates Its 10th Anniversary

Ten years ago in July, Alexian Brothers The Harbor opened its doors to its first residents: individuals who had HIV or AIDS, were homeless, and overcoming drug or alcohol addiction. The Harbor was so named because its goal was to provide a safe haven or harbor for these individuals. It was the result of almost a decade of work by community members in Lake County to address the dearth of services available to individuals with HIV/AIDS.

The Lake County Health Department with the help of community organizations such as Catholic Charities and The United Way of Lake County developed the first three-year plan on AIDS prevention and prepared a feasibility study on AIDS housing. In 1997, the Alexian Brothers and CEO, Tim McCormick, joined the community group as advisors on AIDS housing. The Alexian Brothers had almost 10 years of experience in AIDS Housing through Bonaventure House in Chicago, and were well positioned to open a transitional housing facility in Lake County.

By August 1997 the Alexian Brothers had taken over the AIDS housing

project. Early contributions from Abbott Laboratories, the Lake County Health Department and an anonymous donation of \$200,000 gave the Alexian Brothers the necessary support and capital to purchase the 122-year old three-story Georgian home on North Avenue that would eventually become The Harbor.

However, this isn't to say that the opening of The Harbor was smooth. When the project was announced and Rev. Brad Lutz, the project director at the time, held a community meeting at First Congregational Church of Waukegan. There were protests. Many neighbors voiced their concerns about bringing people with AIDS and drug and alcohol problems into their community and this would cause falling property values. These protests echoed those voiced in the Lakeview neighborhood when Bonaventure House was founded in Chicago. Rev. Lutz at the time, said that "it [The Harbor] will be a piece of property on that block that everyone will be proud of."

By the first anniversary, many of the neighbors had embraced The Harbor and its mission. Some even became regular volunteers. One neighbor stated that,

*continued on page 5*

## From the CEO

With the passage of time it is easy to forget that when AIDS first appeared on the scene back in the 1980's, it was a death sentence. People were terrified of it. Families disowned sons and daughters who were stricken with it. Doctors were afraid of it. Even some hospitals would turn people away if they thought they had the virus. It was that frightening.

Here in the Chicago-land area, one of the first groups of people to actually reach out and care for people with HIV/AIDS was the Alexian Brothers. They have their roots in caring for victims of the Black Plague back in the Middle Ages, so caring for people with HIV/AIDS was a natural part of their mission. They opened Bonaventure House in Chicago in 1989. Essentially it was a place where people came to die with some measure of care, dignity and love. With the advent of anti-retroviral drugs in the mid 1990's, Bonaventure House evolved into a transitional supportive housing facility for homeless people living with HIV/AIDS.

*continued on page 2*

What's Inside:	
The Latest from Bonaventure House.....	page 3
Resident Stories.....	page 2-3
Donor Profile.....	page 4
Event Calendar.....	page 4

## The Harbor Timeline:

Catholic Charities & Lake County Health Dept. have growing concerns about the lack of services to individuals with HIV/AIDS.

# Who is a Harbor Resident?

Since 1998 The Harbor has provided a safe place for over 148 homeless men and women with HIV or AIDS from Lake County. Normally this section of *Voices from Home* would have a story from a current or past resident of The Harbor. Instead, we will look back through our success stories.

Using our demographic statistics we can say that the majority of The Harbor residents have been between the age of 35-64 years of age with less than 20% being over the age of 55. Most of the residents are male (around 80%). The vast majority have been at or below the Federal Poverty Level. About 70% of the residents have been African-American and around 20% have been Hispanic. Although, this data is useful, the words and stories from the residents themselves give a clearer picture of the various backgrounds, experiences and successes of Harbor residents.

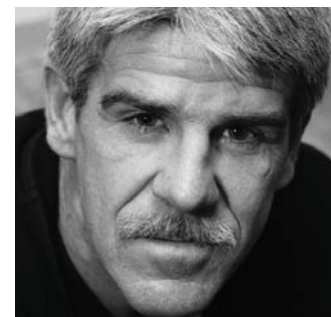
### *Harbor Residents Have Clarity.*

When Dan came to The Harbor he was concerned about surrendering his independence by living in a community environment. He also found dealing with his HIV and substance abuse challenging. Dan says, "with the help and support I received from The Harbor I am beginning to find some clarity and focus in my life." Part of Dan's path included accepting his HIV status and substance abuse. "I've come to a point in my life now where I can share this testimony with others with the hope that another person can be spared the physical and emotional pain that I have endured. I have talked to groups throughout Lake County about my life and process of healing that I have undergone."

### *Harbor Residents Have Balance.*

Ernest is a determined survivor. He's lived through homelessness, addiction, a divorce, AIDS, and cancer. He dropped out of school in the 8th grade and earned a living on the streets,

*continued on page 5*



*Over 148 homeless men and women with HIV or AIDS have lived at The Harbor since 1998.*



At the same time a small group of people in Lake County began doing a needs assessment for similar services in that area of the state. It was spearheaded by Rev. Brad Lutz of the First Congregational Church of Waukegan and included people from the Lake County Health Department, Catholic Charities, United Way and other organizations. This group asked the Alexian Brothers to open a place in Waukegan modeled on Bonaventure House. And so The Harbor in Waukegan opened its doors in 1998.

From the very beginning it has been an ecumenical effort, involving people from a wide range of churches, such as United Methodist of Libertyville, First Congregational of Waukegan, First Presbyterian of Lake Forest, Mundelein Seminary and many more. Today our Harbor Advisory Council

includes Leppy Spears, George Aynilian and Jeff Welch of United Methodist of Libertyville and Rev. Chris Fox of First Congregational of Waukegan. It also includes Pastor Reginald Blount of Trinity AME Church in Waukegan. The Drill Team of United Methodist has undertaken many valuable construction projects that have enhanced and beautified our facility. We have many such volunteers, such as our long-time champion, Joan Lodesky, who faithfully support and promote our mission.

Like Bonaventure House in Chicago, The Harbor in Waukegan is a transitional supportive housing facility. That is to say that we serve homeless people with HIV/AIDS who suffer from a wide range of addictions and other mental health issues. When they come to The Harbor we surround

them with supportive services designed to help them get back on their feet so that in the course of 2 years or less they can gain the strength and the tools they need to live with some measure of independence. Though we provide all kinds of social services, it is first and foremost, a ministry. It is Matthew 25 come to life. We serve poor people who have had some pretty tough breaks in life, and we try to address their needs whether body, mind or spirit.

We are grateful to all of you – Methodist, Presbyterian, Catholic, Congregational, and so many more – for being faithful stewards who have allowed The Harbor to continue being a place of transformation and new life. We rely on your continued commitment and support.

*Bart Winters*

Lake County receives grant to create a three-year plan on AIDS prevention.

The Alexian Brothers & Tim McCormick, Bonaventure House CEO, help prepare AIDS housing feasibility study.

The AIDS Committee receives \$5,000 contributions from Abbott Laboratories & Lake County Health Dept. to make AIDS housing a reality.

Alexian Brothers takes over the AIDS Housing project & receive an anonymous \$200,000 donation to establish The Harbor.

## Donor Profile: Volunteering is What I Do!

Louise "Leppy" Spears says she is a volunteer at The Harbor but in reality she is much more than that. She is a tireless supporter, community liason, and advocate of the residents, staff, mission and vision of The Harbor.

Leppy first came to The Harbor in 2000. At that time she was a teacher at Highland Park High School. She was the advisor for a student coalition for awareness about gay and lesbian issues and HIV/AIDS. The students raised money for World AIDS Day and were looking for an organization to donate it to. The students decided to send the money there. But the interaction between Leppy, her students and the residents of The Harbor didn't stop there.

After that she brought the kids over to fix supper for The Harbor residents. Leppy recalls that it was an interesting time because "most of the kids were Jewish and most of the residents were fundamental Christians and it was a good learning experience for both of them." The students and The Harbor residents had a "cultural exchange." They learned a lot about different religions and being around people from different classes. Leppy recalls that both groups adored each other. After she retired many of the students still volunteered or stopped by The Harbor. The interactions with The Harbor residents positively influenced her students' lives.

Since that time, she comes to The Harbor at least once a week and fixes supper for the residents. Leppy wants people to know that "The Harbor is a wonderful, wonderful place. I get more working up there than I give. These are my friends. We've had all sorts of interesting conversations. I fit in at The Harbor. They talk about me like I'm

not different than they are, like I'm not a female and I'm not white." Leppy, her husband, and her family have become members of The Harbor family.

Leppy's interest in and devotion to The Harbor comes from the fact that her son has AIDS and because as she says, "he could be in this situation and I hope that someone would help him." The Harbor residents feel that she understands them because she can talk about T-cell count and viral loads and other aspects of living

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with AIDS.

She has taken this knowledge out into the community and has made more people aware of our work at The Harbor. Leppy has been a champion for The



LeppySpears (center) surrounded by (clockwise from bottom) Sallie Price (House Supervisor), Johnny Wiggins (Case Manager/Recovery Coordinator), Ernest, Ralph, Alvin, Larry, Sidney & Luis

Harbor through her church, United Methodist Church of Libertyville. The church has become an active supporter of The Harbor. They send meals there and distribute Christmas gifts to residents through their Christmas Angels program.

The work of Leppy and United Methodist Church has helped reduce the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS in Lake County and Waukegan. When she first started there, she recalls, "there was a tremendous stigma. Some residents wouldn't even go through the front door. Now they are more comfortable and more open with themselves." She attributes this to more understanding about HIV and AIDS

But Leppy knows more can always be done for individuals living with HIV/AIDS. Her greatest wish would be the The Harbor wasn't necessary and AIDS would be gone that we could find a cure. Until that time Leppy's

weekly "volunteer" work will continue to be focused on the residents of The Harbor. She hopes that "they [the residents] will feel good about themselves and get the education that they want, would be able to get jobs. That they could lead a normal life." She says that our residents are able to do that more now than before. They are better equipped to take advantage of what they need. People are also more willing to hire people with AIDS.

Earlier this year, Leppy's work at The Harbor was recognized through a volunteer award from the Senior Council of Libertyville and Senior Citizen Council of Lake County. She has also served as a member of The Harbor Advisory Council since 2004.

*Alexian Brothers Bonaventure House and The Harbor appreciates Leppy's ongoing generosity and the support of all of our donors. For more information about how you can give to Alexian Brothers Bonaventure House and The Harbor, please contact info@abam.org or 773.327.9921 ext. 134.*

Dedication of  
The Harbor

The Harbor  
opens with its  
first residents.

Wanda is the first resident  
to graduate from our  
program at The Harbor.

The Harbor receives funding under a \$2 million Lake  
County grant from the U.S. Dept. of Housing & Urban  
Development to provide housing for the homeless

The Harbor becomes the only recovery home  
in Lake County to be state licensed by the  
Division of Alcoholism & Substance Abuse

### *Harbor Residents from page 2*

embracing drugs and crime to support himself. Ernest began a downward spiral that would take him near death. Then he came to The Harbor and continued his recovery and learned new life skills. For the first time, he has a savings account and a plan for the future. What does he value most about The Harbor? "I have stability," he says. "I keep a balance now--I'm quiet and peaceful."

### *Harbor Residents Have Support.*

Casi, like many of our residents, faced many struggles when she came to The Harbor: dealing with her HIV status, addiction issues, family struggles, and some serious physical challenges. She felt the support she received at The Harbor helped her in maintaining her sobriety. "The Harbor allowed me to get in touch with the true me. Knowing that there are people with me and behind me as I deal with the struggles of life has made all the difference for me." When things became more difficult for Casi, she recalled that "the staff at The Harbor guided me through this time, directing me to places where I could get the help to deal with my feelings. I like that I can come home and talk to staff or another resident and feel supported."

### *Harbor Residents Are Educators.*

Pat was diagnosed with AIDS in 1989 but she was in denial about having the disease until 1996. Before that time she sought no medical treatment. She had stopped drugs and started drinking. Eventually, Pat came to The Harbor. There she received help from various agencies that work with The Harbor such as Catholic Charities, the Lake County Health Department and LaCasa. She learned about her disease. Pat

### *Harbor History from page 1*

"They [the residents] are very helpful around the neighborhood. They do alley cleanups and help people out. I come around and chat sometimes, just because they are nice people." The Harbor family of residents, staff and volunteers slowly began changing attitudes about the facility and HIV/AIDS.

Today, not much has changed about The Harbor. The focus is still on the residents and providing them with more than four walls, three square meals and two years of services. The Transitional Living Program gives them the tools and

a foundation to change their lives. All of our residents have HIV or AIDS and are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Many are dually diagnosed with alcohol or drug dependency and they must have 90 days of sobriety before they are allowed to live at The Harbor. Today's residents enjoy all the original services including on-site recovery services, occupational therapy and spiritual care as well as case management through Catholic Charities of Lake County.

Over the past ten years, The Harbor has become an integral part of the Lake County social services community. One of The Harbor's major achievements was to become the only recovery

home/transitional living program for people with AIDS in Lake County to be licensed by the Illinois Department of Human Services Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse. The Harbor has been recognized by organizations in Waukegan and Lake County for its success and dedication to the homeless population. To date The Harbor has had 148 residents, the majority of whom have graduated from the Transitional Living Program and been a positive influence in their communities.

### *Harbor Residents Give Back to the Community.*

Luis has lived and worked in Waukegan since he was 11. He was a member of a local gang, contracted HIV and was addicted to drugs. During his time at The Harbor Luis changed his life and developed new skills which have allowed him to live independently and work at various non-profit organizations in Waukegan. He is proud of the work he has done with ex-felons, gang members, homeless, and troubled youth. "I'm able to give back to the community that I robbed, stole and cheated."



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*Editor's Note: Information was used from the Chicago Tribune, The News Sun and Daily Herald news articles.*



# The Latest from

# Bonaventure House

## Time to Learn and Grow

Lillian describes herself as a care giver. She has three children and unlike most residents of Bonaventure House she is married. But Lillian decided to live at Bonaventure House (without her husband) because "I needed more time to work on me."

She characterizes her family growing up as dysfunctional, her parents fought and she was always worried about her eight brothers and sisters. Lillian turned to marijuana and ultimately heroin.

Lillian says 2004-2005 was the worst year of her life. She had used drugs again after four years of being clean. Looking back she says that she was trying to do everything herself: to be a wife, a mother, and active in the church. During this year she was also diagnosed with HIV. Her father and her son's father both died of AIDS. Eventually she lost her job, her apartment and her car. During this time she also turned away from God.

*"I am still learning about myself and I'm still growing. I guess you never stop learning and growing. We all move from one phase to another"*

At this point she chose to go into treatment. Her husband was supposed to go with her but he chose not to. She began to take things one day at a time. She finished the first month of treatment and then went for another month. Lillian says, "it's hard to stop when your partner or husband is using because you are falling back into the same pattern." She started to

concentrate on herself for the first time in her life.

During her time at Bonaventure House Lillian has learned to spend quality time by herself and she enjoys it. Sometimes she even tells her husband not to come and see her. Lillian reads the bible and prays for God's guidance. She believes one of our



program's strengths is that it is very spiritual. Overall, Bonaventure House has been a haven for her to work on herself. "I am still learning about myself and I'm still growing. I guess you never stop learning and growing. We all move from one phase to another. We never stop until we die."

Lillian chairs Narcotics Anonymous meetings and works as a nursing assistant in a residential home with people diagnosed with schizophrenia. She was a source of support for many residents and shares her experiences especially regarding relationships. Lillian completed our program in May and lives in her own apartment. Now she says, "First God, then sobriety, then me."

## Founder's Day Festival

On Saturday June 14th, 2008, Alexian Brothers Bonaventure House held their annual Founder's Day Festival. We honored some of our many supporters. We would like to thank the following sponsors of this year's festival:



The Irving  
Harris  
Foundation

## Upcoming Events

**Garden Party** (Saturday, August 23rd, 2008 at The Harbor)

**Dining at Home at Maya Del Sol** hosted by Drs. Shaku & Gregory Teas (Tuesday, September 16th, 2008)

**AIDS Run/Walk** (Saturday, September 20th, 2008 at Grant Park)

**Benefit Concert with Dick Holliday and the Bamboo Gang** (Friday, October 10th, 2008 at Grant Park)

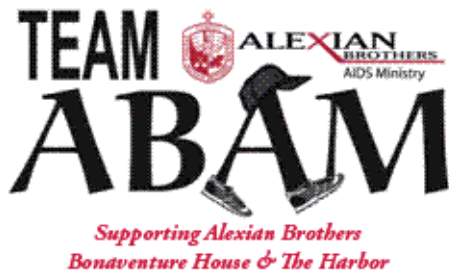
Please see our website for complete details. RSVP appreciated for all events.

Join Us for the  
**AIDS Run & Walk**  
on  
*Saturday September 20th, 2008*  
*in Grant Park, Chicago*



**The AIDS Run & Walk is right around the corner and it is time to get moving!**

Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry is once again participating in the AIDS Run & Walk through Team ABAM. We need our supporters, like you, to participate by running, walking, forming a team under ours, or making a donation. Participating is easy. Simply go to <http://www.aidschicago.org/runwalk/index.php> to register as part of Team ABAM.



As a Community Direct Partner our ministry will receive 100% of all registration fees, donations and pledges. So EVERY dollar you raise will come back to Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry and help us in our vision to transform the lives of people with HIV/AIDS within a compassionate, supportive community by providing a home, comprehensive services, and spiritual care.

Contact the Development Department at 773.327.9921 ext. 132 or [kkowal@abam.org](mailto:kkowal@abam.org) if you have any questions or would like to form a team to support Team ABAM.

Would you like to receive this newsletter in electronic form?

E-mail us at [info@abam.org](mailto:info@abam.org)



Alexian Brothers Bonaventure House  
825 W. Wellington Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60657  
773.327.9921  
773.327.9113 (fax)

Alexian Brothers The Harbor  
826 North Avenue  
Waukegan, IL 60085  
847.782.8015  
847.782.0822 (fax)

<http://www.abam.org>