



Voices from Home

Winter 2010

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You Say You Want a Resolution?

January is upon us once more, and along with the icy streets and post-holiday sales come something that most of us attempt: New Year's resolutions. Robert Burns, the author of "Auld Lang Syne," might have been referring to New Year's resolutions when he wrote in another poem that "The best laid plans o' mice and men [often go astray]." Of course, making plans and goal setting are not unfamiliar concepts at Alexian Brothers Bonaventure House and The Harbor: they are happening almost every day in case management meetings and therapy groups. So what role does once-a-year-goal-setting play in an organization where self-improvement is so central to the daily mission? Let's allow the residents to tell us the answer in their own words.



were aware of the health risks they faced and hoped to protect themselves from things like high blood pressure and lung cancer. A.J. admitted that "[Smoking] takes a lot from me," and Raynard wrote honestly, "I want to live longer."

Also commonly mentioned were goals of an academic nature. How are these for standards of achievement: "Pass the LSAT with a score in the 90th percentile," "Get my G.E.D.," and "Maintain a 4.0 or higher grade point average in college"? These residents know themselves, and they know they can achieve these goals! Reasons mentioned for making these resolutions revolved around creating better opportunities – for grad school programs, scholarships, jobs, and self-sufficiency.

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From the CEO

January is a month of new beginnings. A time when we reflect, assess, and seek positive change. Perhaps you have made New Year's resolutions. If so, you know how easy it is to drift away from your desire to change.



One of the most impressive things about our residents is their commitment to new beginnings in their lives. For them, change isn't tied to a holiday. They make momentous decisions every day of the year to change their lives and their situations. Each day, they work toward their goals, learn new skills, and look forward to rejoining their communities. At Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry (ABAM), we are privileged to partner with our residents as they embrace new lives.

Their journeys serve as inspiration to all of us that if we truly seek a new beginning, we too can achieve it. As you can see by Sheila's story (page 2)

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Finding Support in Family

For many of us, our parents are people who are always there for us. We look up to them. We attempt to incorporate their values into our lives. Some of us often speak passionately about the influence our parents have had on our lives. Sheila is no exception. After talking to her for 10 minutes, it is clear that her father was the center of her life. She often uses words like responsible, hardworking, patient, active in the community, supportive and committed to describe him. Whether Sheila realizes it or not, these are the traits she has exhibited during her time at Bonaventure House.



She moved into Bonaventure House in November 2007 and was active in all aspects of our program from the beginning. Sheila worked with the Recovery Committee, a group of Bonaventure House residents who plan enriching activities for the residents, had an internship with Sweet Miss Givings bakery, went back to school and volunteers in her recovery program and with other organizations. She admits that she takes the opportunities presented her and is willing to try new things.

But what Sheila really values from her time at Bonaventure House is the chance to live like a normal responsible adult. She says, "Coming here was becoming an adult again. You have to be in and out at a certain time. When I got here I thought I was in heaven. Oh wow, this is just like having my own apartment. I had never lived on my own. My father sheltered me."

Sheila was the youngest of four girls. Her parents were the center of her world until her father died suddenly in 1987, which Sheila witnessed. She attributes her bad behavior and drug use to the trauma of her father's death and her nature to "try anything." Sheila describes her family as always being supportive of her. When she was living on the streets, they would come and look for her and bring her food. Her mother, aunt and sister would help raise her five children. Sheila admits that she didn't take anything material from them but she took their peace of mind.

It wasn't until 23 years after her father's death that Sheila found her peace of mind and has come to terms with her father's death. After a bad overdose, she went into treatment and hasn't looked back. Sheila attributes much of her success to the changes she made at Bonaventure House and the community of caring individuals there. "[From the beginning] these people didn't even know me and they cared about my well-being. It motivated me and inspired me to do better. I'm very thankful and grateful to Bonaventure House."

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Now, as always she has the full support of her family and her new network through Bonaventure House. She says, "I really feel like Bonaventure House has helped me and led to the place where I can succeed

on my own. My time is up here not because it is November but [because] I have gotten what I need here." Sheila now has a full-time job with Sweet Misgivings Bakery, for which she was recently featured in Mary Schmich's column in the Chicago Tribune.

CEO from page 1

and Alvin's story (page 3) residents use their time in the program to embark on significant life changes. I'm pleased to report that in December, Sheila moved into her own apartment and is now living on her own for the first time. She credits our program with offering her a fresh start.

ABAM is also embracing change through several new initiatives. For the first time we will assist twenty "chronically homeless" individuals with HIV/AIDS establish a permanent home through The

Samaritan Housing Program (see page 5). We also expect to open Bettendorf Place on Chicago's South Side by year's end, offering permanent housing to twenty-three residents in brand new studio apartments. We add these new programs to our existing efforts, so that we can offer more types of housing options to those in greatest need.

As we reflect on our lives this New Year, I am inspired by our Board Member, David Reilly (see page 4), who believes, "When

you see someone [without hope] and you have the ability to help, how can you not step forward?" Your support has helped ABAM provide hope and a new beginning for Sheila, Alvin, and so many others, who have found a home, embraced stability, and begun a new life. Here's to new beginnings that change lives! Thank you for all that you do for us!

Happy New Year,
Michelle Wetzel, Chief Executive Officer
Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry

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Board Member Profile: A Lifestyle of Generosity

“Life is about hope. When we see someone with none and we have the ability to help, how can you not step forward?” says David Reilly, a Board member, volunteer and supporter of Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry (ABAM).

David’s personal philosophy was shaped by his family, who raised foster children while he was growing up. Their belief was that if you see a problem in the world, you should find a solution. This simple but powerful ideal has led David to become an active supporter not only of ABAM but of several other non-profit organizations as well. And when he saw problems that didn’t have easy solutions, he founded organizations that provided help to those in need.

Upon relocating to Chicago in 2005 from Ann Arbor, Michigan, David sought volunteer opportunities here. The CEO of Faith Catholic Publishing, Patrick O’Brien, referred him to Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry, where former CEO Bart Winters tapped into David’s non-profit expertise.

While David was willing to volunteer for any need, his financial acumen made him a natural fit for the Resource Development Committee and then for the Board of Directors. As a member of the committee that planned the Art for Life event, David sponsored the location and helped make the event an overall success. He also currently chairs the Resource Development Committee, assisting with critical fundraising for ABAM.

In his professional career, David has worked as a Chief Operating Officer as well as a Chief Financial Officer. He is currently the Vice President of Enterprise Development at InnerWorkings, a company which provides print outsourcing services.

Actively civic-minded, David is involved in a number of non-profit organizations that help the homeless and less fortunate individuals. He is a board member of

the Flip Flop Foundation, a group that provides basic necessities, including footwear, clothing, food, school supplies, health and hygiene supplies, mosquito nets, and sporting equipment to help the estimated 1.1 million orphans in Zambia.

He also helped to found a network of domestic violence shelters in the U.S. and Canada.

“People help people,” David points out. Though he has always believed in the power of extending a helping hand, David re-committed himself to this philosophy after surviving cancer. “You realign your priorities and assess what is most important,” he says.

Characteristically modest, he believes that everyone can find time to reach out and help.

“I believe deeply in [ABAM’s] mission,” David says. ABAM succeeds because people like David share their time and talents with our organization. He sums up his thoughts, noting “It’s important to do the right thing because it is the right thing.”



Resolution from page 1

The rest of the 2010 resolutions focused more on improving social, emotional, and spiritual health: “Be happy,” “Keep doing my best,” “Get in contact with my higher power daily,” and “Become an advocate for my community.” Octavius committed to having an open mind, “because a closed mind can’t be fed, just like a closed mouth can’t be fed.” Lawler vowed to put his best foot forward, because “Today is important.” Bill wanted others to know that God is present and accessible, and William wanted a way to give back.

These are no small goals, and anyone who has ever made a New Year’s resolution knows that it’s important not to bite off more than you can chew. Thus, we also asked

Our residents are aware that all aspects of their health are important – physical, mental, spiritual, social and emotional.

the residents to list some of the specific steps they would take to help ground their lofty aspirations in realistic actions. These included: “No late night snacks,” “Set time aside twice a day for prayer and meditation,” and “Attend more outside groups.” Others listed “Rest so I don’t get overwhelmed,” “Just smile,” and “Begin to share my life story with others.”

One clear trend that unites these resolutions is the Alexian Brothers value of holism. Our residents are aware that all aspects of their health are important – physical, mental, spiritual, social and emotional. They also know that by sharing their goals with others, they will garner the support needed to assure that their best laid plans will not “go astray”. Bhuttu sums things up well when he states, “I ignored my well-being for a long time and it is time for me to construct a solid foundation for my life slowly and gradually over the next year.”

World AIDS Day Tribute: One County United

By Bernie Bohlman

On December 1st, the Lake County community gathered together to observe World AIDS Day at First Congregational United Church of Christ in Waukegan. While the group gathered in honor of the millions of people around the world who have been impacted by the AIDS epidemic, they did so with a unique 'spirit of unity' that only a community like Lake County can provide.



Among the organizers of the event were the Director of Alexian Brothers The Harbor, two ABAM staff members, and three former Harbor residents. The planning committee also included members of other Lake County Agencies: The Lake County Health Department, Catholic Charities, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, and First Congregational Church. "Our event was a huge success," said Tim, a former resident who served as Committee Chairperson and point-man for the World AIDS Day tribute. "It was well received, a big success, and we had a larger turnout than usual."

As in past years, events began with an open house at The Harbor, followed by the traditional service at First Congregational United Church of Christ. What made this year's celebration different, however, was the overall theme of 'One County United.' As one committee member explained it, the goals of this year's event were: bringing the community and the various AIDS service organizations together as a whole, focusing in on the youth and their role in the mission of fighting AIDS, and reaching out to the county's Hispanic population.

The committee felt that drawing attention to several diverse groups within Lake County was key to combating the problems

HIV/AIDS brings to the community. For example, African Americans have disproportionately more HIV diagnoses each year than any other racial group. Latinos are 20% of the Lake County population and three times as likely as Caucasians to be infected with HIV. Additionally, the youth are an important part of the Lake County community and the overall mission of fighting HIV/AIDS. Young people, whether infected or affected by HIV, are at the center of the global pandemic and are the world's greatest hope in the struggle against this disease.

With over 120 guests in attendance, the church was filled to its capacity. The evening's events included an Invocation by Reverend Chris Fox, choir music, an inspirational reading, guest speakers, and refreshments. Probably the highlight of the night was a wonderful and inspiring speech by Nadege Claude from the Lake County Health Department. Drawing from her diverse background and experiences of working in the field of HIV prevention and promoting overall health, Nadege used her knowledge to stress the importance of communication. She said she envisions the future as everyone coming together, united as one Lake County, to have an open and honest conversation about HIV. If we know more about the disease, our children will know more about it, and there will be hope of ridding it from the community.

In keeping with the traditions of the early days of the epidemic, Lake County became stronger and more united on World AIDS Day 2009 because of the efforts of those who planned and participated in this event. The future became brighter because we were reminded that we can make tomorrow better by uniting and working together.

A Call for Good Samaritans

'Tis the season of giving, and Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry is looking for people willing to reach out to the neediest group in our community: the chronically homeless. As part of a new project funded in part by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and facilitated by the AIDS Foundation of Chicago, 195 chronically homeless men and women will be given housing and wraparound supportive services this year. The Samaritan



Housing Program, as this project is called, is looking for community partners – schools, churches, clubs, businesses, bowling leagues, etc. – to help these individuals convert their new, empty housing units into real homes. From beds to baking pans to mop buckets, furnishing an apartment from scratch costs about \$4700. If you know of a group that might be willing to sponsor the resettlement of a Samaritan Program participant, please contact the Development Department for more information at 773-327-9921 or dparish@abam.org.



Happenings at The Harbor

Back in Service Again

Today, Alvin is one class away from a degree in Social Work and Addiction Counseling, has a 3.4 GPA, and has been accepted into the Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society. He is a proud grandfather and is one month away from moving out of The Harbor to live independently. Just a few years ago, however, his future was not nearly so bright. Like a surprising number of the veterans that have proudly served our country, he found himself homeless and unsupported in the face of trauma.



As a young man, Alvin was in the U.S. Air Force for 6 years. His stations included Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas and Maguire Air Force Base in New Jersey, where he worked primarily as a shipping and receiving clerk. During his time of service, Alvin's wife was in a fatal car accident. To relieve the pain of his loss, Alvin turned to drugs and alcohol. Depression and anxiety became constant struggles for him, and this kept him tied in a cycle of addiction.

Alvin moved to Chicago, where he was employed as a U.S. Postal Worker for 23 years. In June of 1985, he was diagnosed

From January to October of 2009, 13.5% of the 59 residents served at Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry have been veterans.

with HIV. This simply added to Alvin's anxiety, and he continued to turn to drugs for relief. Eventually his addiction got the better of him, and he took an early retirement from the post office to enter a recovery program. From there, Alvin came to The Harbor in hope of rebuilding his life.

He attributes his success to the discipline he learned in the military and the community of support he found at The Harbor. He describes The Harbor as a place where "No one is given special treatment, but everyone's dignity is honored and everyone's personality is valued." Alvin, like many

of the residents that have gone before him, is now transforming the lessons of his own life into an opportunity to help others. Thanks to the encouraging environment of The Harbor, his commitment to service has come full circle, and he no longer belongs in the homeless veteran statistic.

"Everyone's dignity is honored and everyone's personality is valued."

Upcoming Events

MLK Day of Service

Monday, January 18, 2010 at Bonaventure House

Art for Life

Thursday, March 25, 2010 at The University Club in Chicago

Founder's Day

Saturday, June 12, 2010 at Bonaventure House

Sober & Proud

Saturday, July 26, 2010 at Bonaventure House

Garden Party

Saturday, August 21, 2010 at The Harbor

AIDS Run/Walk

Saturday, October 2, 2010 at Grant Park in Chicago

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

Thank you to these Waukegan area sponsors of the 2009 World AIDS Day Tribute: One County United. You helped to make this annual event a great success!



Fresh Appetizers by Chef Paul Catering -
3900 Washington St., Gurnee
Joplin's Java - 114 S. Genessee St., Waukegan
Jewel-Osco - 3124 N. Lewis Ave., Waukegan
Starbuck's Coffee - 780 Lakehurst Rd., Waukegan

Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry and friends
celebrate life, art and community in a colorful event

Art for Life

Thursday, March 25, 2010

The University Club

76 E. Monroe St.

Michigan Room, 2nd Floor

6:30 pm till 9:00 pm

Tickets \$ 100

To donate artwork, purchase tickets, or find out
more information, see our website at:
http://www.bonaventurehouse.org/art_for_life
or call 773.327.9921



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