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Volunteer Ministry Center

Compassion • Accountability • Results

Happy 25th Anniversary VMC!

September 2012

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The Journey Home

“You Know that Someone Cared...”

Image Cole, at the age of seven, has big brown eyes and the friendliest smile you ever saw. I asked him about his unusual name and his mother answered the question. “His father and I wanted to give him a biblical name but we couldn’t find one we agreed upon. So we decided to call him Image since he is made in the image of God.”

Tianna Cole is an attractive woman who came to the Refuge for assistance with rent. She is quiet and confident, but she has endured circumstances that would give anyone pause. Tianna was proud of her position as a Certified Nursing Assistant. She loved helping people. But when she became pregnant with Image’s brother, she was forced to take an early maternity leave; the baby was not growing as he should. And although he was full term when he was born in April of this year, he had the birth weight of a premie and was hospitalized as the doctors tested him for cystic fibrosis. At last, baby Joel came home to meet his brother, Image.

Tianna and Joel had been home for four days when Mom and Dad agreed that it would be okay for the daddy to travel to a family reunion in Georgia; Tianna would stay in Knoxville to care for the children. It was there that tragedy struck. Michael Cole decided to go out one evening with family members; they unknowingly walked into a bad situation that had been brewing, and a gunfight broke out. Four people were injured, caught in the crossfire. Michael was the only one who died. Tianna received a phone call at 4:00 am telling her of the death of her husband. She remembers the horror of that moment. She went into shock and was briefly hospitalized. To this day, Tianna acknowledges that she can’t make sense out of the fact that her husband was innocently in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Tianna said that they had a small amount of savings and that is what she has been using for living expenses. “We couldn’t afford a big funeral but we had a nice one. I’ve dealt with the bills as they came in. I’ve been getting used to being a single parent.” Tianna is also grateful for the help she has received from her family, especially her



Tianna Cole and her son Image in the Bush Family Refuge

mother. “I’m making it through this bad time.”

Tianna is ready to go back to work. Still, when the rent was due this month, she could not handle it all on her own. She heard of the Bush Family Refuge and made an appointment. “This is the only place I could get help,” she shared. “Even if it’s not a lot, at the end of the day, you know that someone cared. Every little bit helps right now.”

Michael’s death has awakened Tianna to a lot of things. “In a couple of years, I want life to be lot different. I want to go back to school so I can do a good job of supporting my two boys. I’d like to set an example for my kids. In tough times, you can always survive. Even in hard times, you can get the skills to make it through life.”

Throughout our conversation, seven year old Image played quietly by himself. I asked him how he helps his mom take care of Joel. “I get to hold him and give him a bottle. But I don’t change diapers yet!”

And when I asked Image to tell me about his mother, he grew thoughtful. “She always takes time to play with me. She always listens to me.” And then he flashed that killer smile and said, so that she could hear, “She’s a really great mom!”

Celebrating 25 Years of Service!



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Ginny Weatherstone
Chief Executive Officer



Participating Agency

September 2012

Dear Friends of VMC,

I am saddened as I write this. It is always difficult to lose good friends. Many of you knew and appreciated Don Sproles, our beloved Chairman of the Board. I have learned as well of the death of Ben Bush, a former Bush Family Refuge volunteer who touched us all during his time at VMC. Ben made friends of us – and in his warm way, brought us into the fold of his family. I remember so well the first Christmas time that Ben worked at VMC. The most beautiful poinsettia I had ever seen was delivered to me. I opened the card and it simply said, “Thank you for letting me be here. Ben.”

Two people I have loved are gone. And we are left.

As I reflect on their gifts to VMC, my eyes are drawn to a pottery piece I’ve had on my wall for several years. It simply says “All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration. We are the ones we have been waiting for.”

I ask you to join me in celebrating the lives of those you have known and loved and who taught you to care about others. Celebrate those whose examples of generosity you strive to emulate. Memory is a sacred thing, and the commission to go forth and help others is a sacred commission when it springs from memory of those we love. Without a doubt, because of Don and Ben, I am a more committed person.

And yes, when we’ve been gifted with the memory of these precious lives, then the onus is on us to change the world – or our little piece of it. Yes, we are the ones we have been waiting for. It is up to us.

Please be a part of VMC’s mission of preventing and ending homelessness. Give as generously as you can. Truly we – you and I – are the only ones who can do the work before us. We are the ones we have been waiting for.



Sincerely,

Ginny Weatherstone
Chief Executive Officer

Celebrating 25 Years of Service!

From the Director's Desk

By Ginny Weatherstone

Two issues ago, this spot in the VMC newsletter presented the thoughts of the incoming Chairman of the Board, Don Sproles. He talked to us of his pride at being asked to lead this agency through its 25th Anniversary Year. He reviewed briefly the outcomes of the various VMC programs from the previous year. He invited people to volunteer at VMC, even as he and his wife Karen had for years. And he asked for help of all kinds from the community at large. "Please assist us with your time, talents and treasures," he asked.

On August 2, Don Sproles died in his sleep. He had shared with us that he was battling cancer; along with him, we thought he would be here to lead us through a very important year. But it was not to be.

It is amazing to me what a legacy one very unassuming yet dedicated person can leave. At the Board meeting immediately following his death, a number of Board members shared their reflections on the passing of the

leader they loved. It was particularly notable that two Board Members stated that their association with Don, shortened though it was, had inspired them to commit to a higher level of involvement in this community. So Don's legacy is this; he motivated us by his own example to work a bit harder to make the world a bit better.

Don called people "friend." It was not uncommon for him to pick up the phone when I called and answer with "Hello, Friend." When he ran into people on the street,

he would stop to chat and always greet them as "friend." And when our guests passed through the meal line on the evenings when Don brought dinner and came to serve it, he would fill their plates after greeting them with his hearty "Hello, Friend."

Don wanted this to be a better world. He wanted Knoxville to be a better city. And he wanted VMC to be a better agency. He worked so hard to make those things happen. After all, Don would say, isn't that what you do for your friends?



2012 VMC Chairman of the Board Don Sproles

WHAT A CELEBRATION IT WILL BE!!!

There is so much for which VMC is grateful and an Anniversary is a good time to review. But an Anniversary is also the perfect time to have a little fun! Mark your calendars and plan to join us for the following events!

Thursday, October 4 *VMC presents the Don Sproles Memorial Dinner* featuring David Kaczynski, brother of the Unabomber Ted Kaczynski. David's talk is entitled "Values, Responsibility and Community: A Personal Journey." He will share his story of making the decision to approach the FBI about the possibility that the heinous crimes could have been committed by his own brother. And then he had to tell his mother . . . The event will be held at the Crowne Plaza; the \$50 ticket includes both a wonderful dinner and the lecture. Tickets for a pre-dinner reception with Mr. Kaczynski are also available for an additional \$25.00. Contact Karen at 524-3926 for tickets or further information.

Tuesday, October 16 *The timing just couldn't be better!* Capitol Steps, the Washington, DC based comedy troupe will be in town to help VMC celebrate and to make sure that we all find something to laugh about as the national election approaches. Capitol Steps is bi-partisan; they pick on everyone equally! Their performance will be at the Bijou Theatre at 7:30 pm and tickets are available for \$45 and \$35 online at knoxvilletickets.com or by calling 656-4444. A premium ticket is available for \$100 and allows the ticket holder to attend the pre-event reception in the lobby of the First Tennessee Bank and to meet the Capitol Steps cast prior to the performance.



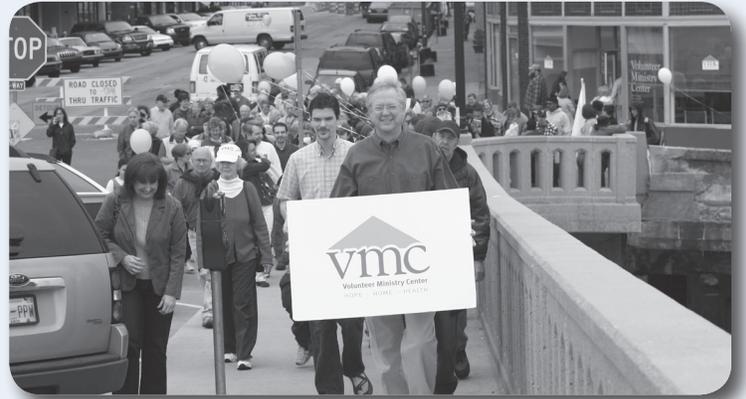
Sunday, October 21 *VMC pauses to give thanks for its 25 years of service* and to recommit itself to its mission of preventing and ending homelessness. Join us at 4:00 pm at St. John's Lutheran Church right across the street from VMC for this thoughtful service. With gratitude for our history and with high hopes for our future, we will sing, pray and worship together. There will be a reception following the service in the church hall. Tours of the VMC building and of Minvilla Manor will be available as well.

Celebrating Our 25th Anniversary!

A VMC History Lesson: A Clarified Mission and a New Home!

In 1999, Ginny Weatherstone began talking with then Board Chair Randy Gibson about the exorbitant amount of money that was being spent on repairs and maintenance of the old building at the corner of Jackson Avenue and Gay Street. As well, new programming in the Day Room was awkwardly jerry-rigged into the space available. Perhaps, they thought together, it was time for a new building. Multiple conversations later, the search for a new location began. Years later, the Board settled on a property on the corner of Fifth and Broadway which had been the location of the Knox Area Rescue Ministries. The Board of Directors commissioned Bo Shafer and Sam Furrow as Co-Chairs of the Capital Campaign that would make a new building possible. Construction began. On March 7, 2009, Chairman of the Board Jerry Askew led the parade of VMC Directors, clients, volunteers and staff across the Gay Street viaduct to their new home. On hand to welcome the group and to provide the first meal were Don and Karen Sproles, owners of the Lunchbox and longtime VMC volunteers.

Simultaneously, the City of Knoxville and Knox



Crossing the Gay Street Bridge to our new home.

County introduced their Ten Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness. This document outlined the strategies which our community would adopt to address the concerns about the growing number of homeless. VMC became a significant partner in this effort, springing from its belief that permanent solutions were called for rather than the perpetual offering of emergency services. Further, the Ten Year Plan and VMC agreed that assistance into housing was the best option for ending homelessness.

The move to the new building represented the transformation of VMC programming so that it no longer provided a traditional shelter model but rather offered “the Resource Center.” In this part of the new building, all of the resources required for a person to work their way out of homelessness were centered. The professional case management staff worked one-on-one with committed clients to assist them into housing as soon as possible. The success of this approach was immediately apparent.

The Refuge, described in earlier articles, continued its work of preventing homelessness. Renamed the



Present day VMC Resource Center

Did you know:

- That VMC has no janitor? Why would it, when we have healthy able bodied people who come here for help? Pitching in with the chores is part of their program. And it works! Our building looks terrific! And our people are proud of what they do to help!
- That making a meal out of leftover bits and pieces is what we teach people in the Resource Center on Mondays? It's a skill that's good to have when you have a place of your own and a limited grocery budget.
- That VMC Board members provide a birthday lunch at Minvilla Manor once a month? Our Board is a hands-on group, stirring the pot of chili, dishing up the salad and cutting the cake. And the Minvilla residents love it!
- That 11 formerly homeless people were helped into housing in August; 8 were housed in July; 16 moved into their new homes in June? One by one, we can end homelessness as we know it!
- That VMC enjoys a 94% housing retention rate? This means that 94% of the people we help into housing will still be there a year later. And just so you know, the national average is 85%.
- All VMC programs are informed by national best practices and are supervised by a Licensed Clinical Social Worker? Good intentions are important but they are not enough. Clinical expertise is required.

Bush Family Refuge, the program offered one-on-one interviews with trained volunteers who helped their visitor address the root causes of their current crises. A small amount of financial assistance was available and often made it possible for families to avoid the downward spiral into homelessness.

VMC had established a part-time Clinic at its old location and intended to operate a similar venture in the new building. Before the move was effected, however, VMC was approached by Cherokee Health Systems which had received a grant to offer primary care and mental health services to the homeless. VMC agreed to lease the Clinic space to them and they have served the homeless on a full time basis within the confines of our building since March of 2009. Since Cherokee Health does not offer dental care, VMC continues to provide dental services to the indigent on a part-time basis in the Clinic space. All dental clinicians are volunteers.

The move to the new building presented the dilemma of how best to provide housing to the sixteen residents of the apartment program which had been located on the third floor of the Jackson Avenue building. In June of 2006, VMC purchased the former Fifth Avenue Motel with the idea of converting it into permanent supportive housing for the formerly homeless. Amidst great controversy, construction began and the original name of this historic structure, Minvilla, was modified to Minvilla Manor and proudly placed upon this project.



Minvilla Manor opened in November 2010 replacing the old and dilapidated Fifth Avenue Motel

In November of 2010, the first residents were assisted in their move to their new Minvilla Manor apartment from their former home on Jackson Avenue. During the following year, Minvilla Manor reached 100% capacity.

Minvilla Manor has won significant recognition for the successful historic renovation of the century old building. Most significant was the National Trust/HUD Secretary's Award for Excellence in Historic Preservation which was presented in Buffalo, NY in October of 2011. The building remains a beacon of hope to the formerly homeless who agree to work with a case manager to achieve their highest level of self-sufficiency within their new homes. The remarkable transformation of the building is symbolic of the transformation of lives which takes place within its walls.

Sunshine Studio is Born!

For several years, the women of VMC have been producing earrings which they create out of hand rolled paper beads and crystals. These elements, set on a sterling silver wire, comprise a wonderful piece of wearable art. The earrings have been sold at various church bazaars and other venues with the proceeds being deposited into a special fund to provide the start-up costs for a participating woman who is moving into housing.

But something new has been added! Fashion scarves made of a variety of yarns and ribbons are the latest offering of the women who devote Sunday afternoons to this endeavor. These scarves were introduced at the May VMC fundraiser known as Carry the Torch – and sold like the proverbial hotcakes. One woman commented that these handmade scarves make the perfect Christmas gift for those who live far away. They are attractive, unique, light and easy to mail. And they help someone who is working to help themselves.

As the women have formalized their efforts to produce these quality items, they have adopted the title of "Sunshine Studio" for their workroom. Sunshine, they decided, is



VMC member Doris Ingram proudly displays the hand-made scarves in Sunshine Studio

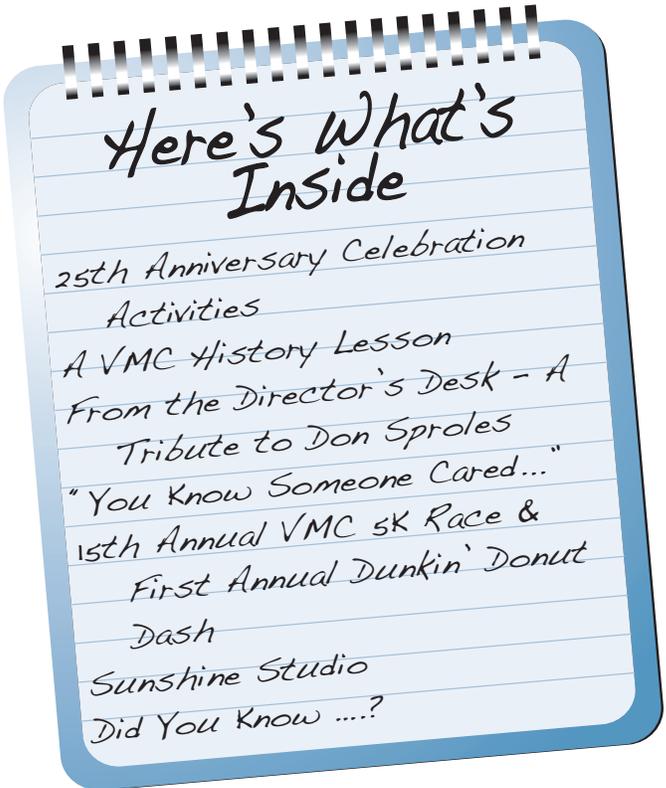
what calls the seed into full blossom just as productive work calls forth the sense of satisfaction at a job well done.

Watch for more news about Sunshine Studio and its lovely products as the holidays approach. We will be happy to help you with your Christmas shopping list. And your shopping list will help the women we serve as well.



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RUN! RUN! RUN! OR RUN! EAT! RUN!

The 15th Annual Volunteer Ministry Center 5K Race and Fun Walk will be held on the Festival Lawn of the World's Fair Park on Saturday, September 29. Registration is in progress and can be done online (vmcinc.org), or come early on race day and register on-site. Come early though! The Race begins promptly at 9:00 am.



And there is something new this year as well. The first ever Dunkin' Donut Dash will commence at 10:30 am, following the same route as our traditional 5K Race. But here is the twist: participants will run half of the 5K and then stop at Fiji Island on the UT Campus to consume a full box of Dunkin' Donuts Munchkins before they run the return leg of the 5K! This is a competitive event, although you can also join us just for the fun of it and not compete. Up for something fun and different – and maybe just a bit crazy? We'll see you there! Registration online or at the Park on the morning of the Dash.

