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The Journey Home

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February 2010

A Pinch of This, a Dash of That...

By Ginny Weatherstone

David (Da-veed) Bocangel (Bo-kahn-hell) comes to us from Bolivia. He met his wife Jessica when she was doing mission work in his country, working with the Bolivian homeless that he worked with too. Their relationship blossomed and grew, and at the end of Jessica's second trip to Bolivia, they knew that they had something special. So David moved to Knoxville where they were married in 2006.

Jessica accepted a position as the Coordinator for Circles of Support through the Compassion Coalition. David, well, he struggled to find his niche. Having always worked in social services and, in particular, with the homeless, David ended up writing mortgage loans, a job for which he was ill suited. It helped that David became a member of one of the Circles of Support which Jessica supervised; as such, he mentored a formerly homeless man who had recently moved into housing. Finally, his experience with the homeless won him new employment as a Resource Assistant at VMC. But it is his competence and imagination that make him shine.

In his mentoring position, David had noticed that his mentoree frequently ran out of food stamps "before he ran out of month." He knew that VMC members were all working towards the attainment of housing and feared that they would find themselves in similar situations. Even though they would have odds and ends stored in their cupboards, they wouldn't know how to use them creatively to stretch their food dollars. So David started a Monday program that teaches people how to use leftovers, how to get creative in the kitchen and how to eat nutritiously "on the cheap."

Over the weekend, he supervises the group of members who explore the contents of the VMC kitchen. "Here's a pound of cheese," one of them might call from the refrigerator. "Wow, look at all these potatoes" cries another. And someone discovers a turkey in the freezer. Then David helps them decide what they can fix with their finds as the basis, purchasing only a few groceries to round out the meal. Viola! Cream of Potato soup with a side of turkey salad!

David takes the participating members to the grocery store to buy the few necessities. "We have a great time," says David.

And upon the return, they all get busy. "Everyone has a different idea about the soup. I encourage them to try new things, try new seasonings. Someone chops the onions, someone else debones the turkey. Everybody is busy. It is a time to laugh and a time to learn." David orchestrates the activity, observing who works well with others, who needs help following directions, etc. The atmosphere is therapeutic.

I asked David how he decides who gets to participate in his popular Monday cooking class. "First of all, they must be healthy – no sniffles or coughs. Then I pick people who have not done it before. The point is for everyone to have a chance to learn about getting creative in the kitchen. And I really want people to learn how to fix good meals that are inexpensive."

People learn those very things every Monday in David's class. Leftover brown rice is turned into jambalaya. Leftover ham is stretched into a delicious casserole. Yesterday's rolls are brushed with butter and take a quick trip through the oven for browning. And by the time the Dining Hall doors open to admit the rest of the Resource Center members, good smells are wafting through the building. Another fine meal is being served by David Bocangel and his troupe of smiling, budget-conscious helpers.



David Bocangel, VMC's new Resource Assistant, enjoys teaching members how to make the most of every meal.

February, 2010

Dear Friend of VMC,

Oh, my goodness! It looks as though spring may finally arrive after all! And while I've yet to see my first forsythia, I did hear birds chirping gaily this morning as I left for work.

Perhaps I suffer from seasonal affective disorder. This prolonged winter with its cold temperatures and cloudy skies has gotten me down. As I walked to my car at the end of the day yesterday, my gloomy face must have revealed my mood. One of the members of our Resource Center came up to me. "Cheer up, Miss Ginny," he said. As I bemoaned the long winter, he countered by telling me that there were so many things to be happy about. "How ironic," I told myself. "I, who am going home to a loving husband and a warm home, am being cheered by a homeless man." I asked him to tell me what was making him happy. "I'm here at VMC," he said. "And that means that I will eventually have a place of my own. Every day I move up on the list a little bit, and one of these days..." He let his dream hang there in the air but I knew what he meant.

Even an endless winter cannot dampen hope. I realized that what VMC does best is help people keep their hope alive. VMC provides the place for people to learn how to do better. It offers support, friendship and a tough love approach. It provides the gateway to a better life. My friend knew that, and after talking to him, I realized it anew.

Your financial support is so important to us. Without it, we simply cannot keep the hope alive within the heart of each person who comes to us. Your gift keeps our doors open. More importantly, it provides an exceptional staff. It allows clients to learn to cook and to do their laundry. Your gift means that our clients can dream of "home" with the knowledge that their dream will really come true. We cannot do this work without your help. Please give as generously as you can to keep the hope alive.

Sincerely,

Ginny Weatherstone

Ginny Weatherstone
Chief Executive Officer

Wish List...

- Travel Size Toothpaste
- Feminine Hygiene Products
- Reading Glasses
- Bathroom Tissue
- Pine-Sol
- Detergent (Laundry & Dish)
- AA Batteries

The Bush Family Refuge

By Mary Beth Ramey

The sight of the two infants and a very young mother caught my eye as I was walking back to my office. Curiosity and the love of children beckoned me to take a peek at the two very tiny bundles of joy asleep in their carriers. My heart melted when I gazed upon the twins. Both Alonzo, a very hungry baby boy, and Kashar, a petite and calm little girl, were born seven weeks early to mom, Heaven Hickson. So, why was this single mom seeking assistance in the Refuge? Like so many other young single mothers, Heaven needed help with necessities for her babies. She shared that she was working full time until the babies came. Now, with caring for the babies, she could no longer work. She had previously contacted the Refuge for help with her utility bill; now she needed help for her babies.

Heaven Hickson is just one of many individuals in our community seeking help at the Bush Family Refuge. It is here where volunteer counselors and families in need connect. For some it is the last place to seek help before ending up on the streets. It is here where hope and help



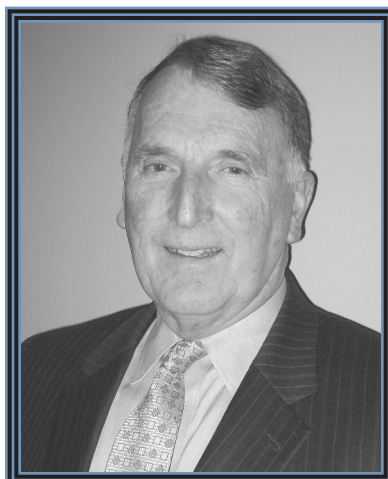
Mother of twins, Heaven (on left) holding her son Alonzo and Bush Family Refuge Director, Audrey Connor (on right), holding Heaven's daughter Kashar.

become synonymous. It is here where love and compassion are transformed into life saving graces.

For more information about the Bush Family Refuge, please contact Audrey Connor at 524-3926.

From the Chairman of the Board

By Frank Maples



My first interaction with anyone representing Volunteer Ministry Center was several years ago when I was serving as chairman of the Endowment Committee for St. John's Episcopal Cathedral. I had the opportunity of hearing Ginny Weatherstone make a wonderful appeal to the committee for a donation to VMC. I was not only impressed with the presentation, but with the work of VMC. In 2008, I was invited to serve on the Board of Directors of VMC, an opportunity that I gladly accepted.

So many extraordinary events have come about during the past two years. We now have a beautiful new building for our neighbors and staff, a wonderful new association with Cherokee Health Systems, and the exciting acquisition of the dilapidated Fifth Avenue Motel, whose name has been changed to Minvilla Manor. It is currently being refurbished to become a much needed housing facility. When the long anticipated Minvilla opens later this year it will be occupied by 57 of our neighbors.

All of these projects have come about as a direct result of the devoted work of the tireless staff of VMC and its energetic volunteers. Together they planned three extremely successful fundraisers. The first was the fun-filled Bruce Pearl Roast. The second was a luncheon featuring the co-authors of *Same Kind of Different as Me*, Ron Hall and Denver Moore. The third was a dinner during which we heard from Greg Mortenson, author of *Three Cups of Tea*. These functions provided much needed funding for the work of VMC and also offered the Knoxville community a chance to hear some remarkable and inspirational speakers. What great occasions! Each of these people, whether close to home or on the other side of the world, told a story of what one person can accomplish and the impact they can have when the help of others is enlisted. Such is the story of VMC! Mary Beth Ramey, our new Development Director, along with the Board's Development Committee, is working diligently to have a similar year of events in 2010 and beyond.

In November, Ginny Weatherstone, David Rausch, and I attended a very informative conference in Orlando. The topic of the conference was fundraising in this tough economy and we came back quite inspired and ready to share what we learned with our Board. We have a diverse Board of Directors working with our very capable staff to form a strong, enthusiastic, and dedicated partnership and we are excited about the future of VMC. Many thanks for all the work each of you do to make our organization great.

Carry the Torch Knoxville 2010

It is with great excitement and anticipation that we announce our featured speaker for this year's Carry the Torch event. Steve Lopez, nationally known author of the best selling book, *The Soloist*, will be here on May 11 for a benefit luncheon at the Knoxville Convention Center to raise awareness of the issues of mental illness and homelessness.

In his book, Steve Lopez shares the story of his encounter with a mentally ill homeless man whom he befriended and

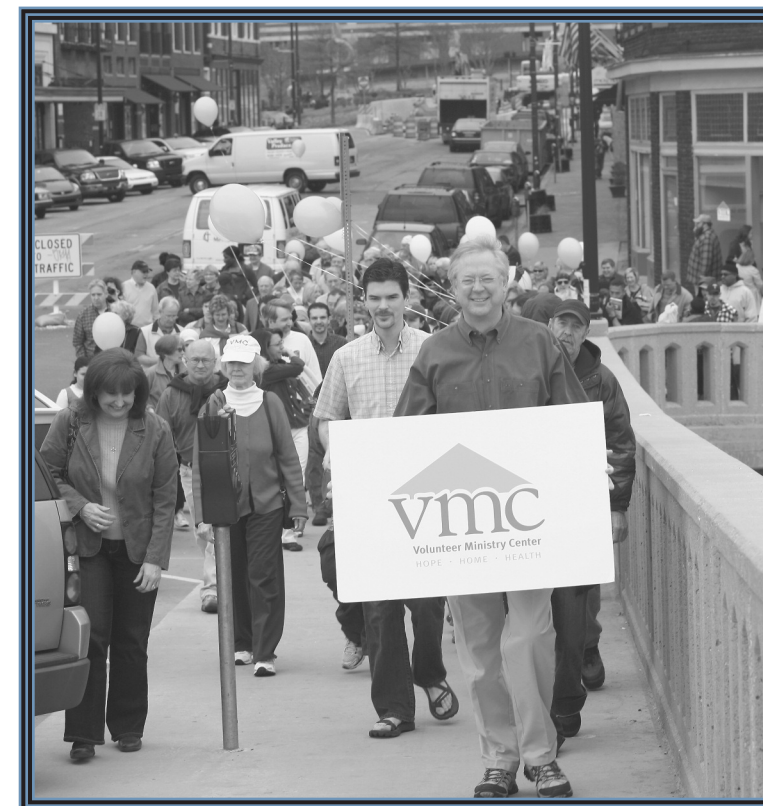
wrote about in his *Los Angeles Times* column. He also shares about the power of music and the incredible talent of this homeless man, which is why we are thrilled to be partnering with the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra in presenting this event. Maestro Lucas Richman is serving as Honorary Chair.

It is our hope that you will consider being a part of this event. For additional information, please visit our website at www.vmcinc.org or call Mary Beth Ramey at 524-3926.

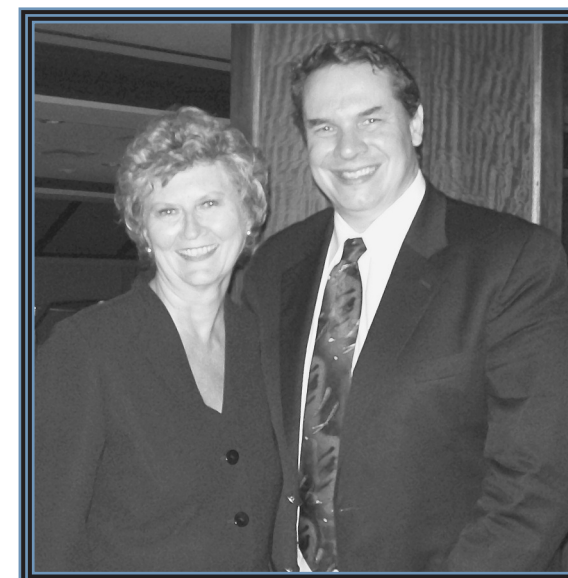
2009 In Review

The past year was eventful for VMC. Here's a brief review:

- 90 individuals were assisted into housing! All of them were provided with ongoing case management services to ensure their success.
- Of all the clients placed in housing by VMC a year ago or longer, 89% are still there! This far exceeds the national average of 85%.
- 44,301 meals were served in the Resource Center, all by volunteers!
- The Bush Family Refuge saw a total of 4,262 individuals and families for issues ranging from assistance with rent and utilities to help with procuring eyeglasses, prescriptions, etc. Almost \$40,000 was spent in direct assistance, many times ensuring that someone did not fall into homelessness. The Bush Family Refuge is operated by volunteers who donated 4,607 hours in 2009. Audrey Connor was hired as the new Refuge Director in June of 2009.
- In January, VMC signed a lease with Cherokee Health Systems allowing Cherokee to provide a full time medical and mental health clinic within the new VMC building.
- The VMC Dental Clinic, using volunteer clinicians, saw 563 patients in 2009, performing a total of 1,028 procedures.
- On March 7, a group of Board members, staff, volunteers and clients gathered to lock the door on our old building at the corner of Jackson Avenue and Gay Street and to walk to our new building at 511 North Broadway. Don and Karen Sproles of the LunchBox had our first meal waiting for us! We have operated out of our new building since that date.
- April 30 saw the dedication of our new home. Board Chairman Jerry Askew presided and Capital Campaign Co-Chairs Bo Shafer and Sam Furrow spoke.
- On May 12, VMC sponsored a premier event called Carry the Torch Knoxville. It featured Ron Hall and Denver Moore, authors of the *New York Times* best seller *Same Kind of Different as Me* who spoke at a community lunch to 1,100 people held at the Convention Center.
- On September 2, Greg Mortenson, author of *Three Cups of Tea*, was the featured speaker at a dinner event at the Crowne Plaza in Knoxville.
- On September 8, VMC broke ground on Minvilla Manor, the former Fifth Avenue Motel which will provide 57 units for permanent supportive housing. Projected move in date will be October 2010.
- The VMC Holiday Store served almost 400 families in need in 2009. The economy sent more needy families than ever before.



Jerry Askew leads the walk from the old building to the new.



Ginny Weatherstone and Greg Mortenson.

Leftover Turkey Soup by David Bocangel—Serves 8*

2 T butter	4 c. water	4 c. shredded cooked turkey	1 (14 oz) can black beans, drain and rinse
½ c. onion, chopped	1 (10.75 oz) can condensed tomato soup	1 T dried parsley	2 c. frozen corn
3 cloves garlic, minced	1 (28 oz) can diced tomato	3 chicken bouillon cubes	2 T sour cream
2 tsp chili powder			¼ c. chopped fresh cilantro
½ tsp cumin			
½ tsp oregano	1 c. salsa		

Melt butter in large pot. Add onion and cook until soft, about 3 minutes. Add garlic, chili powder, cumin, and oregano. Cook for about one minute. Add all ingredients from water to bouillon cubes and bring to a boil. Then add in black beans, corn, sour cream, and cilantro. Simmer for 20-30 minutes.

Optional Toppings:

- shredded cheese
- sour cream
- chopped green onion
- tortilla strips

*This recipe was adjusted to serve 85 people using allrecipes.com



Volunteer Spotlight

The second Tuesday of each month has been a special time for Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church high school students for nearly two decades. That has been our slot for serving at VMC over the years. It has become a very special part of our monthly routine for which we are very thankful to be partnering with VMC in this way. We love the quiet opportunity it is to serve in our own backyard and to both share time with members of our community as well as allow our students to learn about caring in our home town. In our most recent visit to VMC in the midst of ladling chili, making grilled cheese sandwiches and preparing apple pie for dessert, we asked some of our leaders and students why they participate on these second Tuesdays of the month at VMC. Here are some of their thoughts:

"I serve overseas, but I want to serve at home too. VMC gives me that chance. I realize that I feel lonely and hopeless at times and that these folks can understand that too." — *Tanner Franklin, Junior*

"I like serving people by serving the drinks." — *Trey Kelly, 9 years old*

"I have wanted to get more involved in my community and I like seeing Knoxville and talking to cool people." — *Calvin Cummings, Junior*

"I really enjoy cooking and helping people and I like the relationships that go along with it." — *Elizabeth Gonzalez, Junior*

"I appreciate the blessings that I have and it feels really good to serve other people. I feel called to do this." — *Eloise Concannon, Freshman*

"I can tell that it helps others and brings joy to them. I feel called to help making other peoples lives better." — *Jeff Concannon, Senior*

"I love giving and helping. God has given me so much that I take it for granted. I don't want to under-appreciate." — *Johnny Belcastro, Junior*

"This has become a part of our routine each month. We want to serve others and it is great to develop relationships with students while we are doing it." — *Matthew and Kelly Rogers, Volunteer Leaders*



Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church Meal Group