

At Long Last, Peace

By Ginny Weatherstone

Kathleen Chance was born in Lumberton, North Carolina sixty years ago. By the age of six, she was working on her grandfather's tobacco farm, standing on a wooden crate to strip the stalks. It was a close knit family; they always lived near her father's parents. Kathleen liked school although she missed classes when the farm work demanded her assistance. And then a tragedy distracted her from moving on entirely and she dropped out.

Kathleen was sixteen when it happened. Her mother's habit was to take two of the girls shopping on Saturday, leaving one daughter at home to do the housework. It rotated. And on one particular Saturday, it was Kathleen's turn to stay at home when the house was broken into. Kathleen was brutally raped, mutilated and left for dead. When her family returned, they found Kathleen unconscious. She recovered physically but still had the trial to endure. Her tormenter was sentenced to twenty-five years. But emotional scars have lasted much longer. It was unbearable for her to return to school and face her peers. "I could not get it out of my head for a long time. I couldn't figure out what I did to deserve this."

At 17, Kathleen went to work in a restaurant. She met the man who was to become the father of her first two children. Two months after they were married, her father-in-law committed suicide. One year later, her mother-in-law did the same. It unhinged her husband and he became abusive. Kathleen stayed with him as long as she could and then found the courage to leave with her children. She returned to her parents' home and to restaurant work to support them.

Kathleen met her second husband and gave birth to another daughter. "He was a good man," Kathleen says. "A very good man." He was an accomplished man who had graduated from college and he motivated Kathleen to finish her high school education. When her husband's



Kathleen Chance enjoys her Cagle Terrace apartment

father died, they returned to his hometown to assist his mother with the family businesses. And when his mother died, her husband inherited substantial land. The state wanted to purchase this property for road construction and so Kathleen and her husband sold out. Their daughter was a high school student by this time. The family was united in a desire for some adventure. And after considerable research, they moved with their windfall to Kalispell, Montana. Following their daughter's high school graduation, Kathleen and her husband fulfilled a dream and bought 135 acres of wilderness with a house. With money in the bank from the sale of their property, they allowed themselves this respite from the hard work they had known and to which they planned to return. They hunted and fished and enjoyed nature, solitude and each other. Their health insurance lapsed. Their idyll, never meant to be permanent, was ended quickly when her husband became extremely ill. He required surgery. The three stints inserted into his heart saved his life and wiped out their savings. They were forced to sell their property and their world fell apart.

continued inside



From the Director's Desk

By Ginny Weatherstone

What a time of year this is – late spring to early summer! The air itself seems to hold such promise. We've watched the forsythia bloom, followed by redbud and dogwood. Then the daffodils gave way to hyacinths.

In my garden, roses already blossom.

I am so grateful for this annual renewal that nature provides. It is a metaphor for me after the harsh reality of winter. Truly, there is a time for all things; there is a time to lie fallow and there is a time to bloom. And now it is time to bloom!

There is a story on the cover of this issue that is the story of blooming. As I sat and visited with Kathleen, it became so clear to me how I could have been in her situation; there was a time when circumstances forced me and my husband to live without health insurance.

Fortunately, we remained healthy. Kathleen's husband did not. After a figurative winter of misfortune, Kathleen is now starting to blossom in a new way.

That is the story for the over 350 people who have been helped into permanent supportive housing by VMC. The key to a small apartment is really a key to opportunity to get their life in order and to begin to enjoy it. It is an invitation to bloom.

We are proud of our "retention rate." This is the percentage of people who actually do learn to live a new life when they are helped into housing. You see, we don't consider the simple act of housing placement to be the point of success. Rather, it is when an individual maintains that housing over the long term. And at VMC, 94% of those we work with never return to the streets!

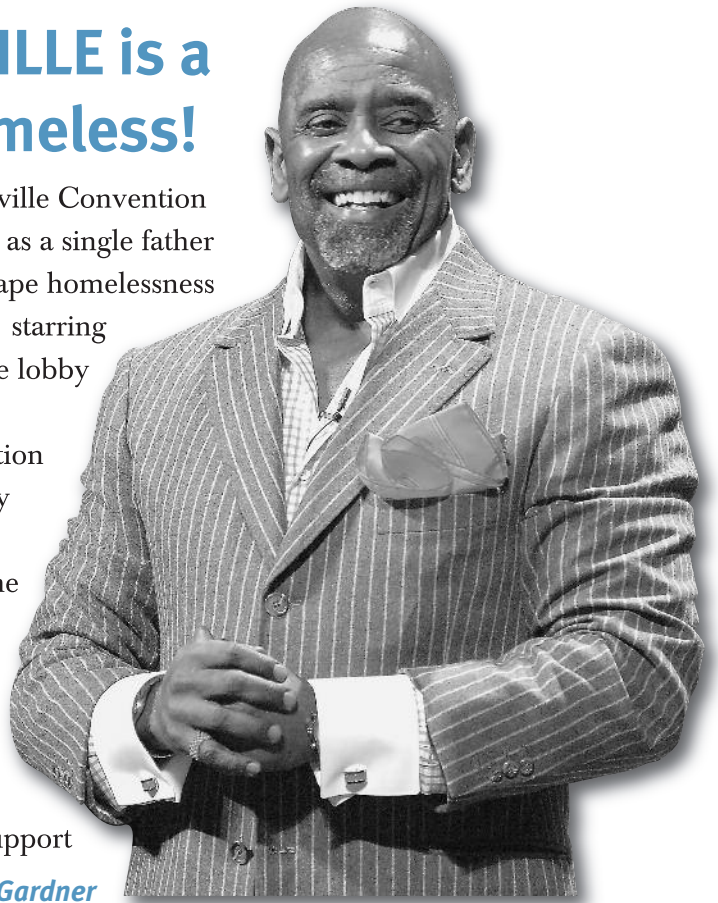
In this season of new growth and blossom, it seems appropriate to pause to appreciate the work we do. It is no less than the cultivation of new life and new beginnings. It is joyous work indeed.

CARRY THE TORCH KNOXVILLE is a success for Knoxville's homeless!

On May 10, over a thousand people gathered at the Knoxville Convention Center to hear author Chris Gardner recount his experiences as a single father raising a child while homeless. Mr. Gardner's struggle to escape homelessness was the subject of the popular movie *The Pursuit of Happyness*, starring Will Smith. The event was preceded by a Mission Fair in the lobby of the Convention Center. Twenty member agencies of the Knoxville/Knox County Homeless Coalition shared information about their organizations and the volunteer opportunities they have available.

Jim and Natalie Haslam were the honorary co-chairs for the event which is a fundraiser for VMC. "We appreciated the opportunity to shine a spotlight on the issue of homelessness, particularly since we now know the strategies that work to end this tragedy. We also recognize that the Volunteer Ministry Center is taking a leadership role in ending the homelessness of so many of our citizens. We are proud to support their work," said Mr. Haslam.

Chris Gardner



Extraordinary Volunteer Efforts!



Operation Inasmuch Work Day Crew

Operation Inasmuch. At day's end, fresh mulch lined the building and budding greenery gave a face lift to our grounds. Our thanks go to the volunteers from Central Baptist of Fountain City, Fountain City Presbyterian and Fountain City United Methodist.

April 29 brought with it 20 volunteers from B&W Y-12 to spend a day sorting toiletries, mulching, building a chair rail in our Dining Hall, serving a meal and numerous other tasks. This was the sixth year of the B&W Y-12 volunteer effort and, as always, they brought unbounded enthusiasm and plenty of donated toiletries and other items. The team was led by Team Captains Elaine Warren and Karen Dixon. Elaine stated that, "Our team is enjoying our hands-on work, but we're also proud of all of our colleagues who have collected items, donated money and done so much to make this day possible. B&W Y-12 is happy to offer this day every year as our contribution to the VMC effort to end homelessness." Karen Dixon added that she feels that it is an honor to participate in this day in thanksgiving for her many blessings. The Team also attended the Friday morning Community Meeting where they rejoiced with three Resource Center members who received silver key chains in celebration of their lease signing. "It makes it clear what this is all about when we see people actually leaving homelessness," said Elaine.

On April 9th, over twenty volunteers donated their time and energy to spruce up the landscaping surrounding the VMC campus. Other lent their hands to various sorting and supplying projects. Serving Knoxville As One (SKA1) is a one-day blitz of the greater Knoxville area by local churches serving people in need and is an expansion of what some know as



*B&W Y-12 Volunteer Work Day at VMC,
Elaine Warren (Left) and
Karen Dixon (Right)*

Did You Know . . .

- ...that the Bush Family Refuge received over 950 requests for assistance during the first quarter of this year? The vast majority of these were for help with utility bills and/or rent by folks who are marginally housed.
- ...that the Refuge was, because of limited resources, only able to assist 150 households?
- ...that 35 individuals moved from the streets to a permanent place of their own during the first quarter?
- ...that the average "wait time" for these individuals between engaging with VMC and actually achieving housing was seven months? During that time, they took advantage of the classes and other services of the Resource Center.
- ...that 94% of those who achieve housing will maintain it over the long term, never returning to the streets?
- ...that 83% of individuals who are experiencing homelessness are from Knox County or the surrounding counties?
- ...that 11% of those served by VMC are military veterans?

Kathleen and her husband moved to Sevierville where their daughter had settled. Jobs were hard to find and her husband, with lingering heart problems, began to work part-time at The Track, a local entertainment in Pigeon Forge. Kathleen, who had always loved children, worked in day care. Kathleen's oldest daughter was killed in a terrible car accident. Kathleen acknowledges that this is when her drinking problem, carefully hidden over the years, began to manifest itself. Kathleen was picked up and charged with DUI. And one night in a restaurant, after having had too much to drink, she was arrested for domestic violence when she hit her husband. Kathleen could no longer work in day care and she was sentenced to a half-way house. "I wouldn't listen to anyone until then," Kathleen remembers. She graduated from the half-way house in April of 2010, having learned and grown. She returned home.

Kathleen's husband was ill. One evening he asked her to take him to the hospital where he collapsed and died. Ironically her husband passed away on the first anniversary of the death of her daughter. Kathleen was devastated. "I realized that I had not asked his forgiveness. I never said I was sorry." Not only had Kathleen lost her beloved husband, she had no income. She sold their truck to pay the funeral expenses and she pawned their television. Kathleen's husband had been drawing social security but it took time to get it transferred to her. And in the meantime, Kathleen could not pay the rent. She was evicted.

Kathleen found herself homeless as she approached her sixtieth birthday. In desperation, she stayed with various relatives but realized that this was not a permanent solution.

One day, Kathleen walked into the Bush Family Refuge at VMC seeking help with obtaining a medication. The Refuge interviewer learned her story and told Kathleen about the Resource Center. And so Kathleen enrolled as a member who was serious about starting over and getting into a place of her own. VMC Case Manager Robbie Horne began to work with Kathleen. "Kathleen is a lovely person," says Robbie. "From the start, I could tell how badly she had been beaten up by life, but also how badly she wanted a fresh start. It was a pleasure to work with her."

Kathleen worked her way through the steps and remembers the day that Robbie called her in to her office. "She asked me if I would like to move in because she had found a place for me. I started to cry and then I started to jump up and down." Kathleen's life of loss—her innocence, her daughter, her husband, her home and all of her belongings—was about to take a turn for the better.

Kathleen's apartment at Cagle Terrace is neat and clean. Best of all, it is hers. She can afford it on her husband's social security. She counts on the emotional support that Robbie offers her. And she is grateful.

"Every part of VMC has helped me," says Kathleen. "The Refuge, the Clinic and the Resource Center. I was so sad and lonely. I felt so deeply hurt by life. And I was so embarrassed. VMC lifted my heart and taught me to have courage. My smile is back. I feel peaceful. I feel blessed."

A Word from Minvilla Manor . . .

By Lisa Hutton, Property Manager

When I started my position as the Property Manager for Minvilla Manor, it never occurred to me that this position would be any different than the other property management positions I had held over the last twenty years. Customer service, vendor negotiations and maximizing the owner's return on their investment had always given me a strong sense of accomplishment.

It was not until I became fully engaged with my residents on a day-to-day basis that I would find a new type of joy and triumph: joy and triumph for my residents who now have a real home. They have a place they can call their own. As they pass my office on their way to the entrance and we exchange heartfelt greetings, it is then that I find a sense of accomplishment. And it humbles me to know that I indirectly impact the quality of life for my residents. I look forward to what each tomorrow brings me.





511 N. Broadway
P.O. Box 325
Knoxville, TN 37901
(865) 524-3926

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May 2011

Dear Friend of VMC,

The other night, I attended one of the Compassion Knoxville community input sessions. The purpose was to gather ideas and thoughts from the attendees about how our community might address the issue of homelessness. The hope is that these sessions will provide some clear direction to those who will decide just how the Ten Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness needs to evolve.

My guess is that the session I attended was like no other. You see, this session was held at Minvilla Manor. And the attendees were residents of permanent supportive housing. Two staff members, including myself, were there as well, but most of the participants knew a thing or two about homelessness. They had lived it.

It was moving for me to hear what they had to say. Without exception, they endorsed the kind of permanent supportive housing in which they live. One gentleman said that he welcomes the rules, the supervision and the expectations. "I need them," he shared. And indeed, since he moved in, he has not only done well, he is now working and paying his own rent.

Another fellow talked about what it is like to feel looked down upon and disrespected because you are homeless. He suffered that for years. Now he looks out his apartment window and sees others who feel that same way. He sees cars drive by and lock their doors, the passengers frightened by the homeless people they do not know. He has left that all behind. He feels like a respectable person now that he has his own apartment.

The overwhelming message was this: permanent supportive housing works for homeless people who have problems they cannot tackle on their own. It just works. I share this because you are a believer in VMC. You are also a believer in the ability of people to change their behavior and their lives if they are motivated to do so. Helping to effect that change is the work of VMC.

Please know that VMC needs your help. As we head into the busy summer months, money is always tight and the need is always great. Your gift allows others to have a chance at a new life. Your monetary gift is truly the smart way to do the right thing.

And I am grateful.

Thank you,

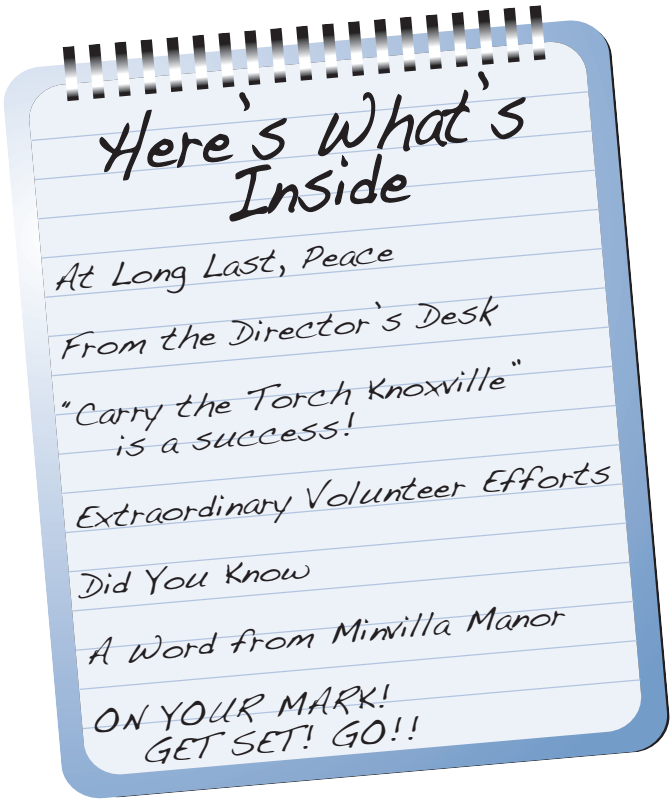
Ginny Weatherstone
Chief Executive Officer

Ending Homelessness – One Person at a Time



P.O. Box 325
Knoxville, TN 37901-0325
865-524-3926

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GET SET! GO!!**

ON YOUR MARK! GET SET! GO!!

VMC announces that the date for the Annual 5K Race and Fun Walk has been set for Saturday, September 24. Once again, the event will headquarter on the beautiful grounds of World's Fair Park. The gun will go off promptly at 9:00 am for serious runners, and walkers will follow at a more leisurely pace. While this is a family-friendly event, it is also being billed as a canine friendly event with special doggie watering stations. In addition to the competition, a variety of children's activities will be offered on the grounds and refreshments will be provided following the race.

VMC encourages the formation of teams and there are a number of prizes for team participation. The Kick-Off Team Captain luncheon will be held on August 3. Contact Karol Harper (524-3926) with questions and to reserve your spot at this lunch.

Pledge prizes will also be awarded to those raising money to support the VMC work. Your effort to find sponsors means that Knoxville's homeless population has an opportunity to move off of the streets and into a place of their own!

Visit our website at www.vmcinc.org for more race details as they emerge!

