

THE VIEW

NEWSLETTER OF THE RIDGEVIEW ALUMNI ASSOCIATION STEERING COMMITTEE

RECOVERY, SERVICE, AND UNITY

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**RIDGEVIEW ALUMNI ASSOCIATION
3995 SOUTH COBB DRIVE
SMYRNA GA 30080**



NAMI Walk 2021 Submitted by: Joseph W.



Golf Tournament 2021
Submitted by : Dawn L.



CAN WE GIVE YOU A LIFT

Remember hitting your bottom? Do you remember that moment when you first began to feel some hope? Looking back, can you remember those angels who appeared at that precise moment when you needed help the most? I can. They helped lift me up until I could stand on my own.

I can also remember the abject fear of, "How am I going to pay for this?" No insurance, no real savings, no trust fund, no golden benefactor. Scared, having hit my bottom, finally able to ask for help. I was in a safe place. The rest would just have to take care of itself.

*Treatment costs money, real money. Programs, therapies, prescriptions, food, shelter, and all the while, life continues to go on outside without us. As active members of the Ridgeview Alumni Association our fund-raising focus is the **Ridgeview Alumni Charitable Corporation, a Nonprofit 501c3** to financially help the person currently in treatment. Whether it's more time in treatment, housing, medications, or educational support, we all know how a helping hand at that critical moment can make or break a spirit.*

*The Ridgeview Alumni Charitable Corporation is dedicated to providing that powerful connection.
Won't you make a commitment to help lift someone up?*

Ridgeview Alumni Charitable Corporation (RACC)

Date: _____

_____ **YES**, I wish to contribute to the Ridgeview Alumni Charitable Corporation. As a person in recovery, family member, friend, business owner or corporate representative / sponsor.

Here is my donation of \$_____.

Name: _____ Phone: (____) _____

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The Ridgeview Alumni Charitable Corporation is a nonprofit (501c3) charitable corporation and donations are tax deductible.



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CONNECTION AND NAMIWALKS YOUR WAY 2021

SUBMITTED BY: JOSEPH W.

Connection is one of the cornerstones for my recovery from mental illness.

I learned the importance of the group setting early on. Since I didn't

know any better, I listened and took it to heart the words, "keep coming back, cause it works if you work it and you're worth it." Seemed strange at the time but I kept searching for meaning. I found it.

Joining NAMI (National Alliance for Mental Illness, www.nami.org) in 2020 opened up yet another door in my quest for greater connection. It was organizing the first ever team of walkers at Ridgeview to participate in the NAMIWalks Your Way



2020 campaign. The theme, as presented by NAMI nationwide, was to educate, advocate, and help stamp out the stigma associated with mental illness. And, for me, that was a perfect fit since I loved hiking.

Last year, in October 2020, we ultimately had 23 people on our inaugural walk at the Kennesaw National Battlefield Park. We raised more than \$3,100 in support of NAMI and had a wonderful time.



Then, all of a sudden, here we were in 2021 and time for our SECOND annual NAMIWalks your Way for 2021. This year the



walk occurred the weekend of October 9, 2021 at the Iron Hill Trail located at Red Top Mountain. 32 people showed up to support NAMI and we raised in excess of \$3,470! We had a grand time and the weather was perfect! I can't help but wonder how 2022 will turn out. The key, as always, is to stay together and connected. "Keep coming back, cause it works if you work it and you're worth it."

KEEP TRYING

SUBMITTED BY: TOM N.

Addiction sucks. Relapse sucks. Picking up white chips after relapse seemingly sucks even more. I did it over and over for 30 years because I was miserable and had no idea what else to do. If I could have thought of anything else, I would have done it. The self-imposed shame that comes with walking up to pick up a white chip for the 30 th, 40 th or 100 th time is almost unbearable. I still have to remind myself whenever the white chip is offered, "I don't have to pick up one of those today..." usually followed by a few expletives in my head.

When I was a resident at Ridgeview, I found a passage in As Bill Sees It that is particularly special to me. It feels like it was written for me. It's on page 11 and is an excerpt from a letter sent to someone who had relapsed. My favorite line is, "For some reason or other, [HP] has laid out tougher paths for some of us and I guess you are treading one of them."

I'm not some mega-freak, I'm not hopeless, I'm not a monster, I'm just trying to make my way on the path in front of me.

It's oddly comforting. He follows up with, "God is not asking us to be successful, only that we try to be. That you are surely doing. So, I would not stay away from AA through any feeling of discouragement

I'm not some mega-freak, I'm not hopeless, I'm not a monster, I'm just trying to make my way on the path in front of me.

or shame. It's just the place you should be." I spent a long time beating myself up for failing at recovery, in addition to beating myself up for failing to avoid consequences while drinking and using. I have no shot when I'm thrashing myself doubly on top of dealing with all the wreckage I've caused by my actions.

This passage reminds me to just keep trying no matter what. No matter how I feel, no matter whether I believe in anything, no matter how hopeless it seems. Just do the next right thing. It works in spite of me.

THE VIEW

NEW BEGINNINGS AND GRATITUDE

SUBMITTED BY: ELAINE B.

After postponing a trip 3 times due to the pandemic, I finally took the spiritual retreat/vacation to Arizona that I'd been planning for so long. Leaving on a jet plane that Saturday morning also happened to coincide with my having left my job the day before for a new opportunity to begin after my return.

The entire trip felt like a new beginning. I wasn't stressed about work deadlines looming upon my return; there had been a clear cut with my previous employer, and I looked forward to a new opportunity. I finally felt comfortable enough to get on a plane and take this journey.

Returning to the beautiful red rocks and landscapes of Sedona was idyllic. I'd missed the mountainous terrain and curvy juniper trees.

But the catalyst of my journey was spending a day at the Hopi Indian Reservation about 2 hours away, where I met a Hopi elder who changed my outlook on life. (He also happened to be in recovery, which gave us many things to talk about! It's interesting how the recovery community is united, near and far.)

My first impression upon entering the reservation was how dry and barren the area seemed. A few mountains in the distance, a few villages on top of hills, but the land, air, and sky just "looked" dry. With less than 10 inches of rain per year, water is a precious

resource. I saw the very modest accommodations in the elder's village. The tribe grew corn, peaches, and other crops, but with no guarantee of rain or success. I was about to ask the elder how the tribe lived in such bare conditions, when his soulful eyes looked into mine, and he said, "Do you know what I do, first thing every morning?" I shook my head no, eager to hear what he had to say. "I face the first light of the morning sun in the East, and I say a prayer of gratitude. For my life, for my sobriety, for my ability to help others," he said.

I was ready to fall out of my chair at that point. We all hear how gratitude is important in recovery, and I know this intellectually in my mind. But here was someone who had next to nothing in terms of modern conveniences, and he was grateful every day with the rising sun.

He spoke of gratitude and staying in tune with his Higher Power and how much he had learned in his recovery, but the main takeaway that changed my life was seeing how he could be so



grateful for so little.

I returned home, making a commitment to myself to remember gratitude in everything. For the nearby grocery store. For the nearby medical care. For running, clean water. For rain that helps the crops grow. And gratitude for my recovery. Every day.

TOGETHER IN RECOVERY

SUBMITTED BY: CRYSTAL R.

I am a survivor, survivor of trauma and mental illness. I wake up each morning, and I know the battle roars deep inside myself. The side that wins this battle is the side that I feed through my thoughts and reactions. I feel that I find comfort just knowing that I am not the only one going through this uncomfortable space. Before I came to Ridgeview, I was really struggling with paranoia, depression, and anxiety. I struggled during my program, but I knew this was where I was meant to be. There was a sense of camaraderie on my unit that no one could

understand unless you have been there in the trenches of change. Instead of doing the same repetitive behaviors, I knew that change had to happen. I was disconnected and had no idea of the kind of friendships that I was to forge in each group I have been a

The monster inside became manageable. I was always honest and transparent, almost to a fault.

part of at Ridgeview.

The monster inside became manageable. I was always honest and transparent, almost to a fault. There were days where I couldn't tell or name what I was feeling. I certainly was at a loss to know what I needed in order to feel better. I never realized how far down the rabbit hole I was truly caught in. However, day by day and layer by layer, I was able to use my voice, and I learned new vocabulary to describe

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TOGETHER IN RECOVERY CONT.

SUBMITTED BY: CRYSTAL R.

the intensity of the pain that I was feeling. I knew I was not alone in this fight. I knew that I was surrounded by others who fight similar battles – each one perfect in his imperfections. It was as if they were helping me stay strong and courageous. The similar stories were awe inspiring and helped us to know that we are all survivors. We were all at Ridgeview for one common goal: to gain a level of awareness and insight. We learned new, positive coping skills. I learned how to trust myself, and I learned how to sit still with my pain and sadness. I found myself learning how to

reach out when I felt out of control. I also found myself leaning on others who understood where I was at in my thoughts and feelings. Today, it's a beautiful day full of its challenges. I just know that in my recovery, I have those that walked through the fire on this journey with me. We were all fighting similar battles, and I know I will never be alone again. Together we can put the baggage down that we carry so close to our hearts. We can find peace on earth, if only just for today, day by day!

SAM ANDERS SCRAMBLE 2021

SUBMITTED BY: STAN D.

It was a great day for golf at Bentwater Golf Club in Acworth, Georgia. We had 45 golfers compete in the 11th Sam Anders Serenity Scramble benefiting the



Ridgeview Alumni Charitable Corporation. The tournament champion was the team comprising of Fred Banks, Herb Christopher, Horace King, and Arthur Culbreath.

After the tournament, there was a

four person shoot-out for \$50,000.00 if there was a hole in one. We had a great lunch and raffle with plenty of food, fellowship, and fun! We would like to thank all of



by the other former NFL players and professional athletes for their participation and support. All funds raised will allow the Ridgeview Alumni Charitable Corporation to continue to help those in need. We look forward to seeing an even a larger turnout next year!

the participants and our sponsors. And a special thanks to Evan Ogles-

and all the

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BENEFITS OF BOUNDARIES

SUBMITTED BY: JEFF W.

My therapist is outstanding, and I hope that yours is as well! Each week since I left Ridgeview in January 2017, therapy has been “a given” for me. One of the most beneficial tools that I have learned from Ellen B is setting boundaries. While we studied and discussed this in IOP, I never understood nor tried to apply the concept in my daily life until I learned that setting boundaries could control my anger.

I was always slow to anger and would internalize these feelings until I could not

take it anymore, and then I would explode like a nuclear bomb! Growing up in a military household where my father – may he rest in peace – was a General in the Army National Guard and had the “General’s Complex” and was always ordering, leading and then evaluating his troops. This carried over into our home with my younger brother – may he rest in peace – and myself. Whatever my father said, everyone was to respond “yes, sir” and then do it!

I dealt with this by not only “doing my

own thing” but exceeding at it. I did not apply for West Point as my father wanted; I went to UGA and was accepted into the Honors Program. I did not join ROTC at UGA; instead, I studied hard and graduated Phi Beta Kappa. I did not know it at that time, but I was setting boundaries in terms of my life and my father’s plans for my life. As time went on and I began my career, I soon developed and refined my technique of deeply burying my anger and then exploding

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BENEFITS OF BOUNDARIES CONT.

SUBMITTED BY: JEFF W.

once I had had enough, when I felt that I was being backed into a corner. Therapy with Ellen B. introduced me to boundaries, and I would like to share these lessons with you!

Lessons Learned

For me, boundaries establish what behavior I will accept from others, and it establishes what other people can expect from me. It is important that I describe the kinds of behavior that I want from the other person and not what I don't want. In some of my Ridgeview worksheets, I came across this quote: "we need to learn to communicate honestly without blaming." I also learned that setting a boundary is not a threat but merely clear communication with others. It allows the other party to know in advance that if this is said or done, then I will react in this fashion. No more surprises from others when these situations arise again. No more,

"OMG, Jeff just exploded in anger for no reason."

While I may have certain boundaries in my work life in terms of responsibilities and time commitments, I can have others at home with family and friends. Terri, my lovely wife of thirty-five years, and I communicate very well, and the concept of boundaries is not a major issue. As for certain family members, boundaries are probably the most difficult challenge for me. As Mark Twain is attributed to having said, "you can pick your friends, but you can't pick your family."

Ellen also shared that boundaries have two parts, (1) setting the boundary and (2) the consequences. "If you ..., I will" She shared several boundary-setting sentences with me that I would like to share:

"I can't do that, but I can help find you someone who can."

- "I can't take on additional responsibilities right now."
- "Thanks for your concern, but I can handle this."
- "I can't attend, but I appreciate the invitation."
- "I can't do (x), but I am open to trying (y)."
- "I'm allowed to change my mind."
- "Thanks, but I am not interested."
- "I wish I could, but I can't." (My favorite)

In addition to helping to control anger, proportioning time between doing for others and doing for oneself, and setting boundaries, according to research the "PsychCentral" website, "limits your exposure to stress and the body's production of adrenaline and cortisol (the stress hormone)." Like everything else, this tool takes practice to learn and to use, but it is well-worth the effort!

CLOSE THE GAP

SUBMITTED BY: TOM N.

When I stopped drinking and using, I felt great. I was finally doing the right thing, I felt the weight of sneaking, scheming, lying, and constant fear subside. I didn't have to be careful about what I said, because I wasn't trying to maintain consistency with some garbage I'd told my wife or boss or whoever. Physically I started to feel better- heck, just the lack of constant mental pressure to do what I needed to do and get away with it was a massive relief.

During that first period, meetings are good because I hear people saying things I relate to, and I see that folks who know what I'm going through are living good lives. Things look bright. Wow...why did I take so long to quit that crap!? Life is GREAT.

Over time, though, doubt creeps in.

I start hearing the dumbest shares in meetings. "Big Book Thumpers" drive me nuts. My sponsor isn't hearing what I'm telling him about my situation- he's focused on what he wants me to do without trying to understand the unique situation I'm in. My wife doesn't trust me. She won't give me credit for the amazing change I've made in just days! I feel so much better!

If she, my sponsor and work would just understand where I'm at and get off my back about petty BS, things would be fine. I QUIT, for goodness' sake. Back off!

I start thinking about how they're all just waiting for me to fall off the wagon- they don't have my back, they don't try to understand what I need and I've just about

had enough. What's the point of staying sober if all the people around me keep pushing me around?

Then, I end up somewhere alone for an afternoon- I see a bar- man, I'd love a beer. I've got 2 hours. I can have a couple of beers, chew some gum and go home. That's it. Maybe pick up a pint on the way home and put it in my coke.

Three days later, I've spent all my money on liquor, crack, and other stuff. I am wondering how I thought it was a good idea to go do this again.

Rinse and repeat. I lived the scenes above, in one form or another, for 30 years. What I've come to realize is that there's a gap between when I stop drinking/using and

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TUESDAYS WITH SAM

SUBMITTED BY: JASON R.



on with Sam stories and how he has impacted my life. However, one memory that stands out occurred in 2010. I had six years of sobriety and I was “living the dream” but I was very unhappy with my career. I have a building science degree from Auburn, and I was working in commercial construction. Six years of being sober taught me that I was in the wrong

regardless.” At that moment it became clear, and I made a decision that has altered the course of my and my family’s life.

I will always be grateful for that impromptu lunch meeting that Sam and I had in 2010. I will always be grateful for having a chance to watch and observe Sam work with the patients at RVI.

I first met Sam on Cottage C. It was a cold winter day, and I was spending my first day navigating the inpatient unit. My anxiety was high, and I was scared to death. It was a Monday morning, and I was sitting alone in Cottage C asking myself, “What have I done, and why did I check myself into this place?” This place is crazy, I thought, but I was assured by my peers that I was in the right place and that I would fit right in. Fit right in? What?

While sitting there, I was approached by this older gentleman who was wearing shades and a dapper golf shirt. He walked up and gave me a huge “War Eagle!” I was wearing my favorite Auburn shirt hoping to bring a little bit of home into this bizarre new world. We hit it off instantly, and I immediately started to feel at ease. He assured me that I had made the right decision and that I was exactly where I needed to be. As he walked away, he told me that his name is Sam, and to let him know if I needed anything at all.

After meeting Sam, I continued to look for him while in treatment. Every time I saw him, my heart felt more secure. I saw something in him that I was attracted to. At the time I wasn’t sure what it was, but I couldn’t wait to run into him on the Ridgeview campus. He exuded confidence, strength, and care. He was the face of recovery.

“Boy, how old will you be if you don’t go back to school?”

Like so many, I could go on and

line of work. I was sober, and ready to take on a new adventure. I hired a career coach to help me figure out my strengths and potential new career options. I worked with the career coach for about three months, but it wasn’t until I talked to Sam that it all started to fall into place.

I was getting impatient and had been mulling over the career change for about five months. I had come to really dislike my job at that point. Once you know you are in the wrong place, it is hard to hide it. My program has taught me to be true to thine own self.

It was a normal weekday, but my anxiety was running wild. I called Sam and asked him if I could come over at lunch to talk. As we met, it all started to become clear. I was contemplating going back to school for a Masters degree in Mental Health Counseling. This would be a huge undertaking and sacrifice. I was 37 years old at the time, and one of the biggest roadblocks was me thinking that I was too old for a career change. I would be 40 by the time I graduate, and 43 by the time I could get my counseling license. The anxiety started to melt away when Sam looked me in the eyes and asked me, “Boy, how old will you be if you don’t go back to school?” I sat there thinking about this question, and before I could answer, he said, “You will be 40

ended up working with Sam from 2010-2016 at Ridgeview. As soon as I went back to school, I took a job as a CA on Cottage C. Talk about coming full circle! Sam was such a huge part of my development as a counselor. From 2013-2016, I had the privilege of giving Sam a ride to work every other Friday. We spent lots of time talking about sobriety, God, family, work, and most importantly, Auburn football.

I will always be grateful for that impromptu lunch meeting that Sam and I had in 2010. I will always be grateful for having a chance to watch and observe Sam work with the patients at RVI. I will always be grateful for making that difficult decision to



enter treatment on that cold winter day. Most of all I will always be grateful to Sam and

the Alumni (the Jeans, Paul, Dawn, Stan, Jeff, Eddie, Danny, Sean, and so many more!) for taking me in as family and showing me the way to sobriety and a much better life. I would not be where I am today without Ridgeview, Sam, the Alumni, and God. I will continue to pass it on. I love you Sam and the Alumni.

CLOSE THE GAP CONT.

SUBMITTED BY: TOM N.

start getting relief from recovery. I don't get instant gratification from recovery, and recovery requires me to do things that I don't want to do, and that, frankly, seem stupid and pointless in a lot of cases.

The reason, in my opinion, is that I have fallen into the gap that exists between stopping one failing solution for living and picking up another solution that is infinitely better, but completely foreign to me.

I've read the big book. I've put up chairs. I've chaired meetings. I've led discussions. All of that is good, but if

it's not accompanied by a willingness to take the actions my sponsor suggests that I DO NOT WANT TO DO, I fail.

I have fallen into the gap that exists between stopping one failing solution for living and picking up another solution that is infinitely better, but completely foreign to me.

I've had to adopt what I've heard described as "belligerent willingness," pretty much sure that the actions I'm taking are not helping me, but doing them anyway (mostly to prove that they're worthless).

CONNECTION AND RECOVERY

SUBMITTED BY: EDDIE C.

More than one person has said to me over the past year and a half, "this must be a hard time to get sober." I am not sure if there is such a thing as an easy time to get sober or treat a mental illness, but this recent health crisis has shown me the real power of connection in recovery. The world has obviously changed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. I am a witness to the impact this virus and its accompanying restrictions has had on those struggling with mental health and substance use disorders. It has been challenging for them at best and devastating for them at worst. Isolation, fear, grief, boredom, and loneliness are just a few of the virus-connected triggers fueling depression, anxiety, and addiction.

However, I am more convinced today than ever before that recovery is a "we" program, and that love and compassion for others can, and does, thrive during a global crisis. As a Ridgeview Alumni Association member and the Ridgeview Alumni Coordinator, I get to spend time with patients on the addiction inpatient unit and at the outpatient programs at Ridgeview. This has allowed me to see the spark return to the eyes of those on the verge of giving up hope. This flicker of optimism is often ignited by the mere fact that after isolating for so long, simply sharing a space with others who are experiencing similar unmanageability is inspir-

However, I am more convinced today than ever before that recovery is a "we" program, and that love and compassion for others can, and does, thrive during a global crisis.

ing. Medication education, nutrition, rest, and group therapy surely contribute to the dramatic lifestyle turn-around that can slowly begin in a matter of days. However, I am convinced that the personal connection and honest sharing with other patients and contact with former patients (alumni volunteers) are the special ingredients that often allow the recipe for recovery to really take shape.

I believe now, more than ever, it is imperative to let others know that they're not alone and they never have to be alone again. The recovery world has expanded greatly since early last century, from Alcoholics Anonymous to numerous twelve-step and support groups, sober living residences, and online communities. But for me, it is the dedicated band of brothers and sisters in the Ridgeview Alumni Association that truly

set an example for the importance of connection and giving back in recovery.

A healthier lifestyle, a new attitude, and the freedom from the grip of addiction and mental illness are coming true for many despite this pandemic. I concede that ZOOM has truly helped many of us connect and meet others virtually throughout the world. But that convenience and easy access is nothing like the gift of face to face interaction. Connecting while putting on a big recovery event or simply sitting with someone and listening while giving them undivided attention is just what drives the alumni members. Tears and laughter, challenges and opportunities, losses and celebrations are all shared together. Through the ups and downs of life, the alumni stay focused on being of service and letting newcomers know that not only is recovery possible... fun in recovery is a must!

One of my favorite authors and speakers, Brene Brown, says the following:

"Connection: the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgement; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship."

THREE LEGACIES

SUBMITTED BY: STEVE F.

The AA logo is a circle around a triangle. The circle stands for AA's 3 legacies: Recovery, Unity, and Service.

Recovery certainly speaks for itself. We arrive to treatment centers and AA meetings as broken people. We're not sure about recovery but we sure want something to change for the better. Relationships are shattered, jobs are lost, homelessness, divorce, the list goes on and on. One thing I know is that addiction doesn't last forever. I will either get clean or I will die. I must start somewhere and getting some help is the first step. Seeking and wanting recovery more than I want to use or drink is how it all began for me.

Unity "in the rooms" is the fellowship, the comradery of all involved in the recovery process. The Big Book states that we will see a fellowship grow up about us.

To have a host of friends – this is an experience you must not miss. Before recovery, I didn't have a host of anything but misery and pain. The old saying, "There's strength in numbers" plays a vital role in our recovery.

The Big Book states that practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as AA's intensive work with other alcoholics.

It's the unity that binds us. I can honestly say that the network I've developed, in the fellowship of AA, has never let me down. Through tragedy and triumph, they are present. Right by my side.

Service. There's a lot to be said about service. Whether I'm washing coffee cups, chairing a meeting, sponsoring a new guy, service keeps me busy and out of my head. Sam Anders used to say that my brain ain't always a reliable source for information!

Staying active in service provides a number of positive traits in our recovery.

Trusted servants from the home group, district, area (state), GSO in New York and AA World Services are all run by trusted servants in service positions. From conventions to an evening meeting at my home group, service is being performed everywhere you look. The Big Book states that practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as AA's intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail. This is our 12th suggestion: carry this message to other alcoholics.

The three legacies always complement one another and keep the wheels of recovery in motion. A car would be pretty much useless without a steering wheel, a motor, and some tires. Like the three legacies, they work extremely well when combined to run like a well-oiled machine.

May you find recovery amidst the three legacies of AA and dwell there. We'll be most happy to help you as you develop your journey to a happy, joyous, and free life!

This issue, as well as archival copies, are available on our website at www.ridgeviewalumni.com. The Newsletter will be in an Adobe PDF format, our website will link to download the FREE Adobe Reader, allowing you to read and print the Newsletter at your leisure.

If you would like to be notified by e-mail when a new Newsletter is placed on the site, E-mail us at sysadmin@ridgeviewalumni.com or contact us thru the Website at sysadmin@ridgeviewalumni.com. Please put "newsletter" in the subject line.

Thank you to those who submitted articles for this edition of the Newsletter, if we have learned anything in recovery it is that We cannot keep what we have if we do not give it away!

If you would like to submit an article for the next Newsletter, please email it to Elaine B. at ehb216@yahoo.com or Crystal R. at crsmart2006@yahoo.com using "Newsletter" in the subject line.

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RECOVERY, UNITY, AND SERVICE

SUBMITTED BY: TOM S.

On Recovery:

I checked into Ridgeview on February 6, 1990, after being in Smyrna Hospital which was right next door, for five days in IV detox. I had no idea how to live without alcohol but knew this was my chance to try a new way of life. I had been drinking daily for 25 plus years, and my alcoholic brain had me convinced that was the only way to live. Ridgeview introduced me to Alcoholics Anonymous, and by following the simple suggestions made by others, applying the principals of the 12 Steps in my life, and trusting in something outside of myself, I have a life far beyond my greatest dreams.

On Unity:

When discharged from Ridgeview, I was given the chance to continue treatment by returning for Continuing Care meetings three times a week and attending Alumni Steering Committee meetings. One afternoon I got on campus early and was sitting by the coffee pots waiting for

one of the continuing care meetings when one of the older Alumni (he had 95 days



clean and sober) asked what I was doing. I told him I was waiting and he asked why I was not in the Steering Committee meeting, and I said I had not been invited. He gave me one of those looks that you never forget and said, "You're invited NOW". That was the beginning of the end of my isolation from other people. There were only about a dozen of us at the time, and I

have seen many changes within the Steering Committee over the years, but the core essence has not changed. We still do a lot of good for the recovering community by working together.

On Service:

"We cannot give away what we do not have." That is what Sam A. told me in early recovery. It takes time to learn a new way of living after, "...living in that strange world of alcoholism where everything is distorted and exaggerated," (pg. 108, Alcoholics Anonymous). I slowly started to give back by taking meetings into the cottages, chairing Alumni meetings, showing up for work parties, and helping with the decorating of all of the events we put on. Even today, I think it is important to show up whenever I can to help and be of service to others.

RECOVERY, SERVICE, AND UNITY

SUBMITTED BY: SEAN C.

Recovery, unity, and service. These are the three legs of the stool that keep my stool upright. These three essentials can be taken in any order but must stay joined together in order for Alcoholics Anonymous to work. Through these three components, I have maintained my sobriety for over two decades.

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When I came into Alcoholics Anonymous, I had no idea what I was getting into. First of all, I didn't know anything about recovery. I thought I knew how to beat alcoholism by doing things my way. I was going to find the shortcuts to your program and being the nice guy that I thought I was, I was going to come back and share these neat secrets with you. I spent ten years proving to myself (and to others who watched me) that my ideas were useless and ineffective.

Unity was another concept that I was unfamiliar with. I could see that the people in AA were a band of merry men and women. That observation on my part made me different and not a part of any group. Most of the AA members I encountered seemed to have a

confidence that they wouldn't drink again, whereas I was always waiting for the shoe to drop. Everyone seemed to enjoy the meetings and I just loathed being there. One thing I knew for sure, however, was that if I stayed with my new friends, I wouldn't drink. It frightened me to be alone, because I knew that I would make bad decisions and end up drunk.

Service, on the other hand, was something I got involved with from Day One, unbeknownst to me! After my first meeting, my new sponsor told me to clean and wash the ashtrays. I argued that I didn't smoke and therefore, it didn't make any sense. How could washing ashtrays help me to stay away from a drink?

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RECOVERY, UNITY, AND SERVICE CONT.

SUBMITTED BY: SEAN C.

He just shrugged his shoulders and said “Well, it worked for me.” So I started cleaning the ashtrays. This was different from anything I had ever done before. By getting into action, I had a sense that maybe I could stay sober.

The next night, Wes (my sponsor) told me to “give Old Man Henderson a ride home.” So I did. Thus followed a newfound regimen of doing service work that I try to abide by each and every day. I found many opportunities in the halls of AA as well as at Ridgeview where I could avail myself to be of service to those around me who needed my help. Whether it be welcoming people at the door, sharing at a meeting, making coffee, or picking up cigarette butts from the parking lot. I continue to be able to beat my disease as long as I am willing to put myself out there. When I think of someone else rather than me, I am in less danger of relapsing.

Recently, I was at a meeting regarding Step 7. It made me reflect on how Step 7 correlates with service work. When I place my emphasis on self-reliance and cen-

ter all my thoughts on me, then I can hardly depend upon a power greater than myself. Bill Wilson, a co-founder of AA said “Humility is the desire to seek and to do God’s will.” This also incorporates Step 3 throughout my day. As I continue to be of service to others around me (AA as well as non-AA), I lose focus on my egotistical ways. I then have room to be of service to someone else.

The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous states at the end of Step 11, that “there is action and more action. ‘Faith without works is dead.’” Having incorporated the steps into my life as well as becoming part of the union of fellow alcoholics, I need to be of service to stay sober. This is a process that will continue for the rest of my life. It states in our preamble: “Our primary purpose is to stay sober and to help others to achieve sobriety.”

I love the life I have found in Alcoholics Anonymous. By practicing the three legacies of AA (Recovery, Unity and Service) I have discovered a peace and a joy that I never anticipated. My expectation of sobriety was that I would be miserable for the rest of my life. Instead, I am pleasantly surprised every day at the lessons and the blessings.

Please join us as we continue to give back to others. That is what God’s plan has been for me so far. Peace & Love!

The Big Book Alcoholics Anonymous states of at the end of Step 11, that “there is action and more action. “Faith without works is dead.”

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