



ST. JOSEPH HOUSE OF HOSPITALITY

# FROM the PORCH

Easter 2013 Newsletter

St. Joseph House of Hospitality

A program of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Pittsburgh

## Remembering Otis: “It’s all good, Tom.”

*Tom Kneier, Administrator*

I saw Otis on a Wednesday. He was in a nursing home awaiting surgery to remove a mass on his bladder. The previous months of chemotherapy had taken their toll. His breathing was labored. Sleep was impossible because of the back pain where the cancer had travelled. But his spirit was strong, as it had been all along. Whenever I passed him at St. Joe’s and asked how the treatments were going, he never once complained. “It’s all good, Tom. Doin’ good today.” But on this particular day, he focused on something else. “I really miss the guys, Tom. Can’t wait till I get home.” And by “home,” he meant St. Joe’s where both he and his brother had been living.

On Thursday night, after our monthly House Meeting, I took a group picture of the guys, framed it and gave it to his brother who took it to him on Friday to lift his spirits. On Saturday morning, I got a call at home. Otis had died. My first reaction was an involuntary protest—“No! It’s too soon. I didn’t get to pray with him or say goodbye.” Then I remembered his last words to me on Wednesday. “I’m a fighter, Tom. I’m goin’ to go down fightin’.” Maybe he knew his time was near. More to the point, God knew his time was soon, and had answered his prayer to go home. Otis would never be homeless again.

Still, I felt the days ahead would be difficult for the community at St. Joe’s—especially for Otis’ brother. Otis’ absence would loom large; his smile would be dearly missed; his room would be empty. But then I remembered the message of Easter. It’s precisely the empty tomb and the absence of Jesus that are the very reasons for hope. Death is not the end, but a passage to a new beginning. So Otis’ absence would be a reminder to all of us that another home awaits us.

The final irony was this. The day I got the news about Otis was also my birthday. The day I was celebrating the beginning of my life on earth, Otis was celebrating his birth to eternal life. Otis was right: “It’s all good, Tom.”



good people.” Whenever he had a problem, he would seek out Sr. Harriet for advice. In turn, whenever she needed something done at the house, Tyrone never refused, and has worked off and on through the years in the kitchen or at the front desk.

Chef Lonnie Jackson says he is personally grateful to Sr. Harriet for seeing something in him that allowed him to grow personally as well as professionally. “She taught me that when things got tough, just be calm and patient, things are not that bad.”

She also put a lot of care and time into providing a homey and joyful Christmas for every resident. She would ask for their gift wish lists and coordinate their requests with churches and organizations interested in donating. Former Director Paul Dvorchak recalled, “Inevitably, there would be a few presents unaccounted for, and she would use her own money and time to purchase them.”

One of the things that staff member Linda Lasenburg will miss about Sr. Harriet is her love of nature and sharing the photos she would take. “She would return from vacations, jaunts around the town or just from out in St. Joe’s yard with countless pictures. She would make you feel like you were a part of the picture even though you were miles or days from being anywhere near there.”

While Sr. Harriet is undecided about her future plans, she does know that as a religious woman she will continue to work for the Church and says that she will “go wherever there is a need to serve God’s people.”



## Sister Harriet Retires

As March ended, Sister Harriet Seton Newman retired as Operations Manager at St. Joseph’s, ending more than 20 years of dedicated service to the men and the ministry. “Most definitely I will miss the residents I was privileged to live among, and the kind and dedicated staff I worked with everyday,” said Sr. Harriet. Just as she will miss St. Joe’s, St. Joe’s will miss her.



Tyrone, a long-term resident, was one of the first to learn of Sr. Harriet’s retirement. “I was pretty down about it,” he said. “She is

## Stories from the Residents...

### “Carl’s” Turn

*Sr. Mary Nolan, SC*

“Carl,” a resident at St. Joe’s, remembers Paul Scullo, a name etched in the hearts of Pittsburghers since that tragic day on April 4, 2009 when he and two other Pittsburgh police officers were killed while responding to a domestic dispute.

“Carl” remembers Paul as a little ten-year-old boy that he coached to play hockey in the Bloomfield Hockey League. “He wanted to play because all his friends were playing, but actually, he was afraid. He sat on the bench beside me and begged off playing every time I told him to go in. Finally, I said, ‘GO IN!’ and gave him a little push. He did pretty well and came back to the bench wearing a little smile of confidence. After that, tugs on my pant leg signaled he was ready to play!” His love of the game continued through grade school and high school where he captained Central Catholic’s team.

“Carl”, a hockey fanatic himself, earned MVP honors in that same League. He still remembers an embarrassing moment while playing Pee Wee hockey when he shot the puck into the wrong net!

Leaving school after ninth grade, “Carl” worked delivering newspapers, driving for a beer distributor, as a general handyman, and baking in a kosher bakery for 20 years. While he enjoyed those experiences, he’s hoping his twenty-one-year-old son, a Communications major at Clarion University, will be successful in his chosen field—maybe the next Bill Hillgrove?

When asked what he would like to do for a living, “Carl” said, “I’d like to have my own restaurant.” Look out, Emeril!



## Call Him the Connector! *The Jim Hanna Story*



*Jim Hanna (center) with wife Alice and friend Bob Garrity who also volunteers at St. Joe’s. Photo from St. Joe’s 75th Anniversary picnic.*

Jim Hanna says that he was over 50 years old when he took an online class offered by University of Notre Dame and discovered Catholic social teaching for the very first time.

“Blown away” by this discovery and eager to complete a class research assignment, Jim met with John Hannigan, then Director of the Office for Community Service at the Diocese of Pittsburgh, who suggested that he visit St. Joseph’s.

Jim took a tour of the residence in November 2007 where he met many of the men, and, he’s been volunteering there ever since. “The men are the faces of the mission,” Jim said. “Meeting the men made all the difference. You’re motivated to respond.”

Jim has responded, and then some. He seeks donations for the clothing room where residents “shop” for needed apparel. He has participated in weekly Bible studies, fishing trips and movie outings, and assisted with set-up, tear-down and operating the lights for the annual bluegrass benefit concert. Jim also writes a blog for friends of St. Joe’s where he shares stories and information about events ([www.fosjhoh.blogspot.com](http://www.fosjhoh.blogspot.com)).

What Jim values more than his volunteer service are the connections he’s made with the men. He also introduced his friends to the residents who have made connections of their own.

Jim tells a moving story of one of his friends who attends weekly Bible study. The friend connected with one of the residents from the group and invited him to a couple of men’s spiritual retreats. Later, after learning that the resident’s nephew had been murdered, Jim’s friend and he attended the funeral along with several men from the retreat group who also wanted to be there to offer support.

He recalls the experience of another friend who was driving a carload of residents to see a movie. “One of the guys in his car is very quiet and never really talks,” Jim explains. “My friend was telling the guys about his experience in the Navy, and wouldn’t you know, this resident opens up and starts talking about his Navy service. The next time I was down at St. Joe’s, the resident saw me and shared some really funny stories.”

“It’s a blessing to see what the guys have done for me and what they’ve done for my friends.” Jim said. He uses the imagery of the cross to illustrate the relationships further. “God’s grace descends vertically to us and demands a response. Our response is horizontal, flowing back and forth between me, my friends and the residents. We’re all beneficiaries.”

*For more stories including documents and photos from our archives that chronicle St. Joe’s history, our volunteer archivist, Bryan Fuller, asks that you go to the blog mentioned in Jim’s story.*



## Edible Garden Plan Needs Help

*Sr. Mary Nolan, SC*



Spring is in the air! We know that because a solitary crocus appeared in the side yard recently. Our trio of cats—Midnight, Ma Ma and Tiger—eyed it suspiciously but left it alone, probably because it didn't have feathers! So, we have reason to believe that they will also leave our garden alone.

That vegetable garden will depend on how many volunteers agree to help us participate in the Edible Gardens program of the City of Pittsburgh. It's exciting to think of having fresh vegetables for our residents every day! Tomatoes, lettuce, green beans—yes even broccoli—will provide healthy meals. There will even be enough to share with a children's summer lunch program at the Catholic Charities Susan Zubik Welcome Center downtown.

This program is designed to harvest and distribute nearly one ton of produce to at least 200 families in its first year from 10 to 15 high-yielding vegetable and fruit gardens in low-income neighborhoods. The City's Green Team will provide

site preparation and work closely with stewards to design the gardens. Also, they will provide top soil, tilling, planter boxes, vegetable seeds and seedlings, mulch and signage.

Community garden stewards will be responsible for maintenance, weeding, harvesting and distribution throughout the season. The green team will be available upon request.

Mother Teresa once advised, "There are many people who can do big things, but there are very few who will do the small things." Gardens are small things—volunteer!

If you are interested in gardening and making a difference, call 412-471-0666 x215.



## Photo Gallery

Every year for the last 30 years, high school students in the **Youth Group from State College Presbyterian Church** take a Spring Break mission trip to serve others and learn from those they serve. This year they came to Pittsburgh and some of them spent three days in March painting, cleaning, and interacting with the men of St. Joseph House of Hospitality.



**Dana Williams**, who hails from the Hill District of Pittsburgh, is a U.S. Marine Corps veteran who has been cutting hair for 45 years. He has been offering his volunteer barber services to the men of St. Joe's for the last three years. **Bill** looks like another satisfied customer!



**Neal and Susie Shipley** from Huntington Bank and co-chairs of the 2013 Bishop's Dinner to benefit Catholic Charities, recently visited St. Joe's. The Shipleys spent quite a bit of time with the men and learned more about our program. Before leaving, Neal said he expected to encounter men with depressing stories. To his surprise, he found the men to be upbeat and optimistic, and their stories encouraging!

**Maureen Hanley** joined the staff as a caseworker in November and has made herself a "regular" on the porch with the guys. A Pittsburgh native, Maureen spent many years in San Diego working with homeless veterans outreaches before returning here last year to be closer to family.



**Mike and Christine Spisak** (center) helped the men dispel the winter blues with their lively variety show of juggling, dancing, and balancing to upbeat music using hula hoops, jump ropes, and even a unicycle!



## How You Can Help. Let me count the ways!

In our last newsletter, we asked for volunteer seamstresses, and three women who answered the call have begun mending and tailoring clothes for our men. Three others responded to the request for dishes and silverware. And, an anonymous donor gave us 9-volt batteries for some of the smoke detectors in the bedrooms. Encouraged by such acts of kindness, I've decided to cast my nets even more widely! Here are more ways you can help to support St. Joe's mission:

### You can VOLUNTEER as:

**Podiatrist.** We have a volunteer nurse and barber, but foot care is one of the most common needs among the men, especially those who are managing the condition of diabetes.

**Social Worker.** One full-time caseworker on staff could greatly expand her impact with some assistance from experienced social workers.

**Gardener.** We have been awarded a grant by the City of Pittsburgh to fund the construction of a raised garden in a nearby neighborhood lot. We will need volunteers to work side by side with some of our residents with green thumbs to weed, water and harvest.

### You can DONATE items:

**Coffee.** It's one of the most coveted items at St. Joe's and there never seems to be enough. Cans of regular ground roast coffee.

**Bath towels, hand towels, washcloths.** New or gently used items would be greatly appreciated.

**Extra large shirts, pants, jeans, shoes.** We're always looking for hard-to-find extra large clothes sizes 3X and 4X, and shoes sizes 12, 13, and 14.

**TVs and converter boxes.** When requested, we like to be able to provide a small television (19-21 inch) and digital converter box to residents for their rooms.

If you or someone you know can help with any of these requests, please contact our caseworker, Maureen Hanley, at 412-471-0666 x215, or [mhanle@ccpgh.org](mailto:mhanle@ccpgh.org).



## Remembering St. Joe's When You Make Your Estate Plans

As those of you who read this publication are well aware, the work at St. Joe's is vital to our community, a necessity for those men who would otherwise be neglected and forgotten. Our work can only continue with the generous support of donors like you.

A popular and successful means of giving is to remember St. Joe's in your will. It can be as simple as including the following language: "I give to St. Joseph House of Hospitality the sum of \$\_\_\_\_\_ to be used for the work and mission of St. Joseph House of Hospitality whose address is 1635 Bedford Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15219."

To learn more about other giving options, please contact Administrator Tom Kneier at 412-471-0666 x227.



Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, rooted in the Gospel and social teachings of the Church, is the primary social service agency of the Diocese. Our mission is to serve with excellence, professionalism, integrity and compassion, the human needs of individuals and families, regardless of their religious affiliation, and to provide leadership in mobilizing the resources of parishes and the wider community in addressing these needs.

Susan Rauscher  
Executive Director

St. Joseph House of Hospitality  
Thomas L. Kneier, LPC  
Administrator

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## St. Joe's 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Bluegrass Benefit Concert

★ Fern Hollow Boys  
with Paul Dvorchak  
Allegheny Drifters  
Mountain Therapy  
Mac Martin &  
The Dixie Travelers  
Mon River Ramblers

EMCEE  
Bruce Mountjoy



April 26, 2013  
7:30 pm  
Synod Hall, Oakland  
125 N. Craig Street  
Festival Seating  
Ticket Donation: \$20 each  
At the door or in advance at  
412-471-0666 x227 or  
[tkneier@ccpgh.org](mailto:tkneier@ccpgh.org).