

The RETREAT

perspectives

Spring & Summer 2002

Living experience, strength & hope



If it comes from the heart, *it reaches the heart*

Nearly four years ago, The Retreat opened its doors. The impetus for its birth lay in the dramatic changes seen by the chemical dependency treatment field during the past 20 years.

In the field today, much effort is directed toward assessing an individual's "problem" and focusing on the coexisting conditions they bring into their recovery. In large part, this shift in focus has grown out of cost containment pressures put on the residential treatment community by managed care organizations. "To better control costs, these organizations require programs to create and use 'medical necessity' criteria to justify the need for residential treatment," says Retreat President, John Curtiss. "A case must be made to show that an individual's problem meets these criteria and therefore warrants continued residential care."

The unforeseen and unintended result of this approach, however, was that residential treatment became much more focused on identification of "problems" and less focused on teaching the solution. "As the field increasingly moved under the umbrella of psychology and psychiatry," says Curtiss, "less and less emphasis was placed on teaching the spiritual principles embodied in the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and on the basic principles of recovery needed to remain sober."



WE NEED TO VIEW
INDIVIDUALS AS SPIRITUAL BEINGS WHO ARE
IN NEED OF A PROGRAM
FOR LIVING AND A
SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY

Much more attention is placed today on what Curtiss calls the "pathologizing" of the human condition. "The individual is seen primarily as a set of pathological conditions," he says, "and strategies are then developed to address them. There aren't enough clinical staff or treatment strategies to address all the pathological conditions we can find in someone who is only days sober. As a field, we have lost the ability to 'hold

people's hands,' to give them the time they need to clear up. And many of the problems we are so quick to attempt to fix *will* clear up with total abstinence and *active* involvement in Alcoholics Anonymous."

We need services that view people who are seeking recovery as much more than a collection of symptoms and a set of pathological conditions. "Pathology may be present," says Curtiss, "and if it is, of course it must be addressed. But we need to view individuals as spiritual beings who are in need of a *program for living* and a supportive community so that when 'life hits them in the face'—as it eventually will—they will have the guiding principles and help they need to get them through that difficult time."

The growing emphasis on clinical/medical models of care has also meant that counselors spend a significant amount of time on paperwork—preparing reports, treatment plans, and other administrative tasks—leaving them with less time for the people who are actually seeking help. "I would venture to say that as much as 40 percent of staff time is spent on 'treating a file rather than a person,'" says Curtiss. "There's a saying in A. A. that 'if it comes from the heart, it reaches the heart.' We need to create environments

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The Retreat Residences: A supportive bridge

THE RETREAT'S TWO SOBER LIVING RESIDENCES provide the supportive bridge people in early recovery need as they make the transition from living as a guest at The Retreat to life in the larger community. "We believe that a safe residential setting that teaches and practices the principles of recovery embodied in the Twelve Steps and offers a bridge to the recovering community are essential components in helping people recover," says John Curtiss, president of The Retreat. Sadly, however, costs for living in halfway houses has risen so dramatically in recent years that they are out of reach for most people. "One of The Retreat's goals," says Curtiss, who also serves as president of the Association of Halfway House Alcoholism Programs of North America, "was to respond to this situation by providing well run, affordable residences for people recovering from addiction." Residents at The Retreat's Summit Avenue house pay \$400 per month and those at the Grand Avenue house pay \$420 per month (fees include monthly membership or rent, utilities, local phone service, and basic cable).

Both of The Retreat's transitional sober living facilities offer an ideal setting in which to practice the principles of recovery in day-to-day life. Housed separately, men and women work closely with seasoned sponsors to create a safe and supportive environment while establishing a solid foundation for recovery. Located in beautiful homes in a safe and supportive St. Paul, Minnesota, neighborhood, these facilities also provide easy access to public transportation, employment opportunities, and numerous A.A. meetings. The Retreat recently completed the purchase of the residence on Summit Avenue.

"There is a wonderful relationship between the greater A.A. community and our residences," says Curtiss. "These volunteers are incredibly enthusiastic about carrying the A.A. message. For example, they bring Big Book study to residents, introduce them to great A.A. meetings, and help them become an active part of the recovering community. They exemplify living the Twelve Steps."

People who live in The Retreat residences have agreed to live by certain principles which support recovery. They must:

- become active in Alcoholics Anonymous and attend at least four A.A. meetings a week
- fulfill a service commitment at least once a week
- work closely with their A.A. sponsor
- have a full-time job within two weeks of moving into the residence
- pay all bills on time
- be committed to helping develop a healthy, sober living environment



The Retreat's Sober Living Residences

(top) Summit Avenue house.

(center photos) Dining room and bedroom

from the Grand Avenue house.

(bottom) Grand Avenue house.

The following comments are from individuals currently living in The Retreat's Sober Living Residences.



Since I'm completely new to the Twin Cities, it's been just critical to me to have a place like this. I've never experienced so many people willing to help me. I've gotten assistance before, but nothing like this place where it feels like people really do care. It's even more striking to me because I didn't go through The Retreat for primary care—not only didn't they exclude me, they really opened their arms to me.

Rachael L.

Living at the Residence has provided time and space for me—and for my wife—to let the dust settle a bit. This is a very nice transition because a lot of the principles we talked about at The Retreat we learn to carry over into day-to-day life here.

Frank T.

This has been a very safe, supportive environment. There's enough structure here so that I don't feel like I'm just left hanging in mid-air. The weekly house meeting is particularly helpful because it gives all of us a forum for talking honestly with one another about what's going on in our lives and in our recovery.

Allyssa S.

The Retreat was so different from the other programs I've been to. You'd hear a little about spirituality and the Big Book—like, "here, read this," but there was no emphasis on it. Here in the Residence, we have regular Big Book meetings. Spirituality is a focus, and I can see now that that's really important for me and my recovery.

Jake R.

KATHRINE HILL JOINS THE RETREAT BOARD



THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS of The Retreat recently welcomed its newest member, Kathrine Hill, who brings a broad range of treatment and business knowledge and experience to her position. With a partner, Hill owned and operated a day-treatment center in Dallas, Texas, for adolescents in the 80s and early 90s. "I also have twenty years of sobriety," she notes, "so clearly I have a strong interest in recovery."

Hill says she is pleased and excited by her new appointment. "From personal experience, I know that this is challenging work," said Hill. "As I learned more about The

Retreat, I was impressed by its program, and in particular by the results they are achieving. I was also very impressed by the affordable cost for guests."

Hill serves on the Board of the Glacier Fund (the first fund of its kind to promote private philanthropy for the U.S. National Park System) and Rockwood Capital Management (which manages the Hill family businesses). She also works with Nevada-based Silverthorn Exploration, a company that carries out mineral exploration.

 Sunday, July 28
**The Retreat
 Summer Party**
 to benefit the Retreat
 Scholarship Fund

Rock N' Retreat



WITH A SETTING AND THEME RIGHT OUT OF AMERICAN GRAFFITI, The Retreat's 2002 Summer Party to benefit The Retreat Scholarship Fund is the "don't miss" event of the summer.

The retro-themed Andy's Garage at the corner of University and Fairview Avenue in St. Paul will be the setting for a great evening to benefit a great cause, and the *Rockin' Hollywoods* will provide live music that will make you feel like you're at a sock hop. And, of course, being on University Avenue on a warm summer Friday night means that there will be plenty of vintage roadsters and hot rods cruising the loop to add to the ambiance.

In addition to a great setting and "gotta dance" music, there will also be hamburgers and hot-dogs on the grill, along with root beer floats and Good Humor bars to add to the 50s feel. Add some hula-hoops, the limbo, some fabulous raffle items (including a new Vespa), and you've got all the makings for a memorable night. And you never know what mystery guests may drop by.

What makes the evening even more memorable is the cause that it supports. The Retreat Scholarship Fund makes it possible for people to experience the life-saving miracle of recovery that so many of us are thankful for. Because of The Retreat's operating philosophy of providing accessible, affordable recovery, scholarship donations go a long way in providing assistance to those who otherwise would not be able to afford recovery.

So, put on your Hawaiian shirts and culottes, and bring the kids to a fun evening under the stars on Sunday, July 28 from 4:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Tickets are just \$20 in advance and \$25 at the door.



WHAT: The Rock N' Retreat 2002 Summer Party to benefit The Retreat Scholarship Fund
WHERE: Andy's Garage, corner of University and Fairview Avenue, St. Paul
WHEN: Sunday, July 28 from 4:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
COST: \$20 prepaid, \$25 at the door
TICKETS and/or DONATIONS: 952-446-9283



from the heart

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that enable people who have the heart for carrying the A. A. message of recovery to interact in a meaningful way with those who want to recover. It is through the creation of such ‘caring communities’ that we can best bring the message of hope to those seeking help.”

The Retreat’s founders, The Community of Recovering People (CORP), shared a fundamental belief about recovery: that there had to be a way to offer effective help at a cost that people struggling with addiction could afford. They envisioned a simple, focused experience set in a safe, nurturing, and accepting environment, one that would teach and emphasize the spiritual principles embodied in the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and connect recovering individuals to the greater AA community. It would exist in a supportive, educational setting rather than in a traditional health care environment. And it would be community-based rather than clinical or medical in nature.

Out of The Retreat’s view of recovery comes a different emphasis. “We looked closely at what worked in the early days of Alcoholics Anonymous,” says Curtiss. “Its founders understood that people need a spiritually-based ‘program of living’ to guide their lives and a network of support to help them on their journey. Recovering alcoholics helped people who were trying to quit drinking—and they did so by carrying a message of hope and by teaching one another how to live a sober life through the daily practice of the Twelve Steps. And that’s what we do at The Retreat.”

Research shows that the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous have been most helpful for the widest range of people wanting to recover from alcoholism. Even though it’s not for everybody, it is what works best for most.

The Retreat is alive with the knowledge, experience, strength, and hope of people who have recovered through Alcoholics Anonymous and the Twelve Steps, and guests experience extensive person-to-person interaction. Ninety percent of their time is spent with peers, volunteers, or staff working on recovery and developing a plan for

sober living. “Everyone connected with The Retreat is living the program, fully engaged in their own spiritual process of growth and recovery,” explains Curtiss. “As such, they are powerful role models for our guests.”

Not everyone seeking recovery needs the breath of services offered by programs that provide a full range of



JOHN CURTISS

counseling and clinical services within one organization. For this reason, The Retreat founders elected to provide an approach in which services were unbundled. “While keeping our program focus on the humanistic spiritual pursuit of recovery in a residential setting,” says Curtiss, “we stripped away the clinical and medical aspects of treatment—not because they’re not useful, but because we believe there is a population who can be served successfully without them.”

By creating access to needed services that are offered in the greater community, and by providing a residential environment that operates outside the healthcare system, while still complementing it, The Retreat can foster recovery at a far lower cost than can most residential programs. Maintaining an openness to new ideas and working together with existing Twelve Step and professional community resources—such as those in the mental health and medical fields—is crucial to The Retreat’s continued success. “As envisioned, The Retreat was to be a viable and essential component in the continuum of addiction recovery care,” says Curtiss, “and we do feel we serve a unique role in that continuum.”

More than 700 men and women have come to The Retreat from the United States and many other countries. There, they shared their experi-

ence, strength, and hope with one another, learning to trust themselves and others, to understand the true nature of their illness, and to take the steps needed to recover. Most are addicted to alcohol, though other addictions, such as cocaine and marijuana, are represented, as well. “By and large, most guests have had at least one, and often more, treatment experiences,” says Curtiss. “They come to us looking for a safe and supportive place to learn the basic principles of recovery—how to *live* the Twelve Steps of AA, to become active in service, to work closely with sponsors. We also have guests who’ve never been to treatment, and they come with the understanding that we are a supportive, educational setting rather than a clinical treatment center. Our guests are also very motivated; they know they have a problem and they are ready to engage in a process that can bring a solution.”

The Retreat has recently received the initial results of an ongoing independent study on guest satisfaction and outcomes which show promising results that are in line with successful programs throughout the country—at a fraction of the cost. (*see article on page 6*) “Because we are in the early stages of our outcome studies,” says Curtiss, “I want to emphasize that these findings, while quite promising, are still preliminary. That said, we are particularly encouraged because our population contains a high percentage of people with poor previous treatment results, often despite numerous treatment experiences with high financial and emotional costs.

Many Retreat guests also spoke of their need for affordable long-term residential recovery support, which is why The Retreat has opened two Sober Living Residences—to help them make this challenging transition. These residences let residents experience living the Twelve Steps in everyday life and help them reconnect to the community at large.

“The Retreat exists only to help people recover,” says Curtiss, “and we firmly believe that our attitude of trusting in our basic concepts, in providence, and in our feeling that this is the ‘right thing to do’ is what has brought us to this point. And we feel that this belief and trust will continue to carry us ahead.”

IMPORTANT MILESTONES REACHED THROUGH PHILANTHROPY

THE COMMUNITY OF RECOVERING PEOPLE (CORP) reached a number of important goals during 2001. The mortgage on The Retreat's facility was paid off, and The Sober Living Residence located on Summit Avenue in St Paul was purchased with a down payment made possible through the generous help of contributors. Also, over \$40,000 was raised and distributed through the scholarship fund to assist sixty-seven men and women in their pursuit of recovery. And finally, the first independent outcome study report—also funded with donor contributions—was completed, helping staff to better monitor program effectiveness. The combined efforts of a dedicated staff, a visionary board, and a generous and committed donor constituency were essential in the attainment of these milestones.

CORP is ever grateful and often overwhelmed by the outpouring of support it has received over the past three years, we are especially appreciative of those close friends who have donated generously on numerous occasions to further the CORP mission. One such benefactor is the Conley Family Foundation. When asked about supporting The Retreat, Mike Conley, President of the Foundation commented, "The Retreat is an affordable and highly effective program that serves an important niche by complimenting the continuum of services offered to chemically dependent men and women. During the three years of contributing to this organization, we have admired the great stewardship exhibited by the staff and board in the use of our contributions. These folks make the donated dollar go a long way."

At the end of last year, \$1.55 million had been raised toward the \$1.7 million goal. The \$150,000 still needed is earmarked for the much-needed expansion of The Retreat



BRUCE BINGER

facility. Construction cannot begin until these funds have been raised or pledged. "Although our donor constituency has grown," said Bruce Binger, Vice President of Development, "we must continue reaching out to communities both locally and nationwide to familiarize them with CORP and the wonderful work being carried out by this organization."

Looking ahead, we expect 2002 and 2003 to be critical transition years for CORP. In addition to the expansion project, the board recently approved plans to replicate the program in another region of the country. Identifying philanthropic partners will be vital, since this initiative will cost in the range of \$500,000. "This initiative is very exciting," said Binger, "because the replication of The Retreat model makes our vision a reality and moves this important program to the national stage."

Binger further noted that contributions for scholarships (\$50,000) and research (\$15,000) are still needed in 2002 to maintain the quality of service that has become synonymous with The Retreat name. "In conclusion," Binger said, "our contributors and volunteers can derive great satisfaction from the knowledge that they have helped this worthy project germinate and grow into an important recovery service—and we hope they will elect to continue the journey with us."

Please detach here and mail

THE RETREAT APPEAL

- Guest Scholarship Fund
 Program Research
 Facility Expansion
 Unrestricted
 Fellow (\$5,000)
 Associate (\$1,000 – \$4,999)
 Peer (\$500 – \$999)
 Advocate (\$250 – \$499)
 Friend (\$25 – \$249)

My/our gift/pledge to The Retreat is \$ _____

Please charge my gift to: VISA MASTERCARD Account number _____ Exp. ____ / ____

Signature _____

My matching gift company is: _____ . (matching gift enclosed I will send form).

Name(s) _____ (as you would like it to appear in the Annual Report)

I/we prefer this gift to remain anonymous.

Home address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone () _____ email _____

Please make checks payable to: The Community of Recovering People. Your gift/pledge is tax deductible to the full extent permitted under law. If you wish to give securities, please call The Retreat office at 952-446-9283.



“How are we doing?”

Results of a guest satisfaction/outcomes survey

TO HELP US BETTER MEET THE NEEDS OF OUR GUESTS, we have been carrying out ongoing independent follow-up research on guest satisfaction. In early 2001, The Retreat commissioned Herbert & Louis, L.L.C., to undertake a study to document the outcomes of guests visiting The Retreat. “Prior to this effort,” says The Retreat’s president, John Curtiss, “we had been collecting consumer satisfaction and general demographic information from guests at the time of their departure as part of our ongoing quality improvement efforts. This new study was designed to build on our own research.”

Guests at The Retreat say that they have been very satisfied with their experiences. For example, 96 percent of our guests said they would highly or very highly recommend The Retreat to others. Nearly 90 percent said that the problems that brought them to The Retreat had greatly improved, that the assistance they received from staff was very valuable, and that it was clear that staff were very concerned about them as individuals.

Guests also said that The Retreat’s orientation toward a spiritual approach to recovery (especially meditation and chapel) and the Twelve Step program (especially Big Book study), as well as the support received from other guests were very valuable. They frequently commented on how helpful staff had been, especially in one-on-one conversations. Services were also highly rated; 86.7 percent agreed that food services were very satisfactory.

“We are very pleased to see that this study confirms what we have been hearing informally—that our guests are very pleased with their experience at The Retreat,” says Curtiss.

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 Art Director/Designer: Theresa C. Gedig, dig design
 For comments or information about The Retreat,
 call 952-446-9283.

7665 Valley Creek Drive, Excelsior, MN 55331



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