

spirit

THE MAGAZINE OF VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA®

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Never Too Late: Seniors *Retool* with Technology



There are no limits
to caring.®



on the cover

Eastland Care Center Activities Assistant April Smith coaches resident Estelle Smallwood on a computer game using IN2L technology.

Photo by Greg Sailor

JACK YORK

Founder and CEO,
It's Never 2 Late,
Centennial, Colorado

“WE’VE SEEN THAT ULTIMATE SENSE OF ‘I CAN LEARN SOMETHING NEW...’ DON’T GIVE UP ON PEOPLE WHO MAY BE IN A DIFFERENT PLACE COGNITIVELY. THERE ARE WAYS TO CONNECT WITH THEM.”

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THE MAGAZINE OF VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA®

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president's letter

A GAMUT OF CARE: CHILDREN, SENIORS AND SOLDIERS

In keeping with our founders' vision of going "wherever we are needed" and doing "whatever comes to hand," Volunteers of America prides itself on providing holistic care to a host of vulnerable populations. To simply say we "help those who need us" is a succinct way of incorporating the more than 2 million individuals our programs touched this year.

With this issue of *Spirit*, we celebrate the diversity and the wide spectrum of services we provide. In the covers of this magazine, you'll find us at the cutting edge of technology, inspiring disadvantaged youths to succeed and recovering our country's homeless veterans from the streets and the clutches of addiction.

First, you'll read about the three sites piloting a revolutionary computer system for residents of our nursing facilities. No longer are computers, the Internet and e-mail inaccessible by our seniors. They are surfing and gaming—and getting vital therapies and treatment at the same time. They are proving that truly "It's Never 2 Late" to learn.

Next, get inspired by the work of the LightHouse program run by our North Louisiana office. Founded in the mid-1980s when inner-city Shreveport was an emblem of urban blight, the program now reaches more than 500 children and their families. Through after-school care, a leadership academy, parenting classes—even a diaper program—young people

have reached heights they never imagined. The stories are at once encouraging and awe-inspiring when you consider how simple doses of exposure and caring can turn lives around. The LightHouse's Family Resource Center is a 2007 recipient of the Volunteers of America/Annie E. Casey Family Strengthening Award.

Finally, in November, we joined the rest of the nation in remembering the sacrifices of the 25 million living veterans. In this issue, we pay tribute to those who have proudly served in our armed forces through a feature highlighting how Volunteers of America is serving veterans in need. Homelessness among veterans is a serious problem. Moreover, veterans are in need of more support services—such as substance abuse treatment. Volunteers of America is one of the largest suppliers of transitional housing for veterans. Earlier this year, we secured more than \$2.5 million in U.S. Labor Department grants to grow and develop more job training and placement assistance programs, and substance abuse treatment for homeless veterans. Only months later, the Department of Veterans Affairs awarded Volunteers of America with \$5.3 million in grants—the largest award of any single agency.

Charles W. Gould
National President

Rebuilding Homes, Restoring Hope



Project managers oversee framing construction.

As the Gulf region rebuilds, Volunteers of America is leading the way with a new construction company, Southeast Steel Framing LLC, which has erected 39 homes and other buildings since its March 2007 opening. The venture is a subsidiary wholly owned by Volunteers of America Southeast.

As envisioned by Southeast President and CEO Wallace Davis, the company will help make homes that are safer and more affordable. By constructing

them with lightweight steel instead of traditional wood studs, the homes' frame structure can be put up in a day. It withstands winds up to 150 mph (a category 4 hurricane) and won't mold, rot or be subject to termite infestation. Steel framing is popular in commercial development and has made its way into residential building.

Numerous homeowners, churches and businesses who lost their property in the 2005 storms have sought out the company. In the process, the company provided jobs and training opportunities for some of the victims of the disasters. With its sister company, Ballington Builders, a licensed homebuilder in Mississippi and Alabama, Southeast Steel Framing could complete each building project in its entirety or

provide the steel framing to other contractors and builders.

"I've been interested in creating this company long before Katrina," said Davis. "I wanted to provide affordable housing using cutting-edge technology [that] was environmentally friendly, and our methods of steel framing are the fastest and cost effective way of doing that, without compromising the quality of our products. Constructing framing for a 2,000-square-foot home would take no more than recycling steel from six to eight old cars."

Southeast Steel Framing employs 15 people and the company is in talks on 13 other homes, two churches and a hotel chain project. For more information, visit <http://www.sesframing.com>. ■

Bright New Beginnings

Volunteers of America dedicated Brightway Commons, its first affordable housing community in Delaware in October with Governor Ruth Ann Minner in attendance. More than \$9.3 million was invested to acquire and renovate the 80-unit building in Milford, which is about 18 miles south of Dover.

Formerly known as Banneker Heights, the new community provides 12 efficiency units, 12 one-bedroom, 36 two-bedroom, 12 three-bedroom and 8 four-bedroom units. All units are targeted to residents with income at or below 60 percent of area median income. The renovation process was funded by federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credits and loans from the Delaware State Housing Authority.

Project-based Section 8 from the Department of Housing and Urban Development was another source of development funds.

Upgrades and major energy efficiency improvements include the replacement of windows and walls, kitchens and baths, carpet and tile, heating and air conditioning and playground equipment. The renovation also includes a

new community center. New meeting space provides residents with onsite services such as financial literacy workshops, nutrition classes and organized youth programs. The programs are managed by Volunteers of America's Delaware Valley office. A second construction phase, slated for the spring of 2008, will add another 44 units to the site. ■



CEOs Go to Washington

Two Volunteers of America CEOs—Kathy Spearman of Florida and Thomas Bierbaum of Massachusetts—headed to Washington, DC, in September as invited participants to share their programmatic experiences and to offer recommendations on improvements to federal services.

Spearman went before the Health Subcommittee of the House Veterans Committee September 27 to discuss action steps to strengthen the Department of Veterans Affairs Grant and Per Diem program. Florida, along with seven other Volunteers of America local offices garnered \$5.3 million total from the program to provide housing



*Massachusetts
President & CEO
Thomas Bierbaum*

and supportive services to the nation's veterans.

As an expert witness, Spearman told Congress that Florida attracts many homeless veterans and on any given night,

17,000 to 23,000 veterans are living in shelters, encampments, derelict boats or on the streets of Florida. She said few in government realize just how “disengaged and disabled many of the homeless veterans are when they encounter our programs,” specifically citing a rampant need for addiction recovery services. She also said that much of the work of Volunteers of America of Florida has served Vietnam era veterans. Returnees from Iraq, however, are presenting different kinds of service needs, and the program must be equipped to accommodate them.

Above all, flexibility, with an eye to the future, will be fundamental to improvements to the program, Spearman said. She recommended changes to the payment structure to tie grants to outcomes and suggested ways to create effective partnerships among agencies and government.

It was Spearman's second trip to Washington this year. She was previously a panelist at a July White House Compassion in Action Roundtable event

aimed at the Bush administration's plans on ending homelessness.

Bierbaum attended another White House Roundtable event on substance abuse initiatives on September 20. Themed “Expanding the Substance Abuse Treatment Paradigm: Faith-Based and Community Partnerships Toward Recovery Support,” the meeting included a select group of representatives from nonprofits, business and government agencies. Invitees heard presentations of new and promising models of substance abuse treatment, many of which involve grassroots and faith-based organizations. The event coincided with the announcement of \$98 million in “Access to Recovery” grants from the Department of Health and Human Services.

“We've been providing social services in Massachusetts for over 100 years,” Bierbaum said, “and presently operate comprehensive programs for abused and neglected adolescents, adults and youth in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction.” ■

Curbing Abuse of Seniors

An estimated 14,000 cases of elder abuse occur each year in Maine, according to the state's attorney general, and the vast majority of cases go unreported. The new Elder Justice Training Partnership (EJTP), spearheaded by Volunteers of America Northern New England, is working to increase awareness of the issue and stem the tide against the trend of underreporting.

Over the course of the next three years, EJTP will train law enforcement, prosecutors and judges throughout Maine on detecting the signs of abuse and neglect. This includes both physical and emotional harm as well as financial fraud perpetrated against older adults. The project is funded through the Justice Department, Office of Violence Against Women.

Ten sites around the country are piloting the program, and Volunteers of America's Maine program is the only statewide implementation. According to the National Center on Elder Abuse, a division of the Administration on Aging, approximately 1 to 2 million Americans age 65 or older have been injured, exploited or otherwise mistreated by someone on whom they depend for care and protection. ■

Why Did They Stay? Documentary Profiles Direct Support Professionals During Katrina



In the midst of the hurricanes of 2005, administrators at Volunteers of America of Greater New

Orleans took careful note of the heroism of its direct support staff. No life was left unaffected in New Orleans. But when Katrina made landfall, and panicked citizens—even police officers—began a desperate escape, scores of direct support staff and personal care attendants employed by Volunteers of America reported for duty to help move residents of the Community Living and Support Living services and assist those who could not be moved.

Why did they do it? They tell their own stories in a new documentary, *Higher Ground: The Dedication of Direct*

Support Professionals During and After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The 45-minute video, released in September, lets the workers speak of their experiences. Viewers meet, for example, a direct service professional, who had personally attended to a resident for years and did not leave when the storm struck. He and a bevy of others poignantly relate that they stayed because they were needed.

The documentary was an outgrowth of exploratory studies commissioned by Volunteers of America with the University of Minnesota Research and Training Center (RTC) on Community Living, Minneapolis. Support was also extended by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR). In

2006, RTC conducted a series of interviews and focus groups with workers. The data yielded led to three reports, the latest of which, “You Know that It’s Got to Be Dedication that I am Still Here,” was released in March by RTC.

Because the stories elicited from the interviews were so engaging and visual, the local office decided to create a video. It is freely available for internal use by Volunteers of America local offices, and a shorter, 10-minute version is being produced as a companion piece to presentations to lawmakers and public policymakers.

To view clips of the movie, visit <http://www.highergroundthemovie.org>. To purchase a copy, visit the Volunteers of America online store at <http://store.voia.org>. ■

Designing Success

That we strive for excellence in delivering affordable homes and high-quality services to those in need is a well-known fact about Volunteers of America. But, that we seek it in every detail—from the way clients are greeted to how we present the organization—may be taken for granted.

Not by the City of Rochester’s Committee on Urban Design and Environment (CUDE), however. CUDE has recognized the Homestead at Rochester (Minnesota), for its architectural design and aesthetic appeal. Each year CUDE recognizes projects that maintain and improve the appearance, function and environmental quality of the city of Rochester. The committee presented its prestigious Residential

Development Award to the Homestead at a recent ceremony with the city’s mayor and city council.

Located in an intimate, small-town setting, the Homestead is a premier senior living community. It offers senior apartments, subsidized housing, assisted living and memory care facilities. Thoughtfully planned, it boasts a bevy of convenience and safety features—such as controlled access, walking trails and a pendant/call system—along with amenities—such as a banquet center, chapel, club lounge, fitness center and salon—that make it a sought-after address.

“The Homestead at Rochester is very honored to receive this award from

the City of Rochester,” said Executive Director Rebecca M. Bollig. “It recognizes and promotes the high standard we place into the care we deliver the residents and the surroundings in which they call home. The Homestead at Rochester promotes excellence and innovation in senior living in the Rochester community.” ■



Never Too Late: Seniors *Retool*

IN2L, an innovative technology solution for elders, is being piloted in select Volunteers of America residential care facilities. It makes using the computer, connecting to the Internet and playing games accessible and fun—all while delivering therapies and treatment in the process.

Her broken left wrist comfortably resting in her lap, Elnora Brown reaches up to the computer monitor with her right index finger and touches “start” on the screen. She is now the emcee for the group of residents gathered in the dining area of Volunteers of America’s Eastland Care Center in Columbus, Ohio, for what will become a wildly fun rendition of the popular TV game show “Deal or No Deal.”

“Give me a number. We’ve got to pick our lucky number here,” Elnora shouts to her friends and their family members gathered on this Wednesday evening. They are watching a projection of the computer screen Ms. Brown is working.

“Four,” comes the shout from one resident.

“Wait, what about six?” chimes in a player at the table to the side.

Elnora, the demur Arkansas native, takes charge.

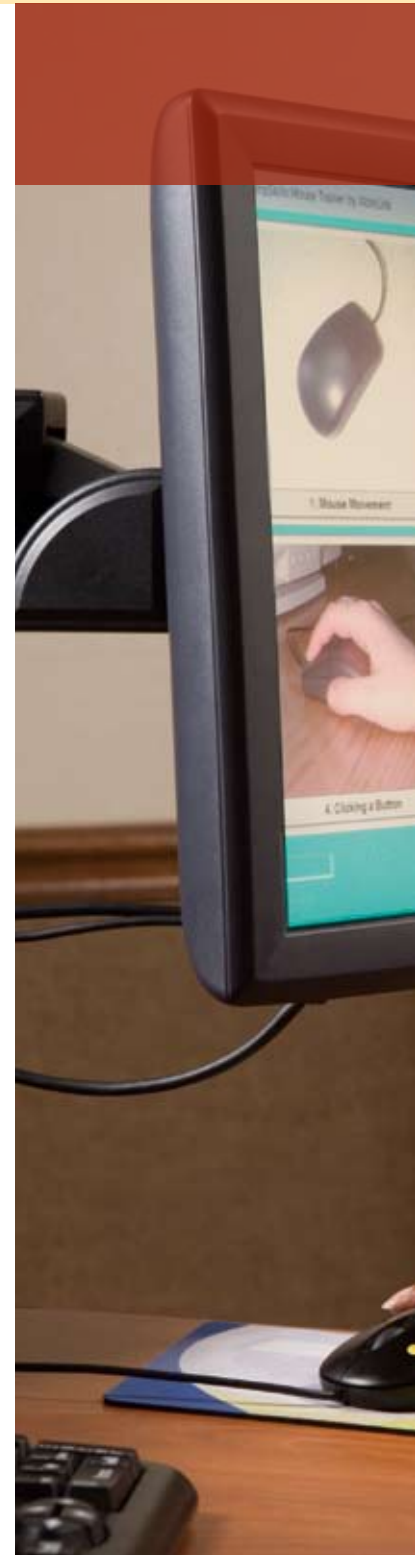
“We’ll do four,” she declares, as she scans the computer monitor showing rows of 26 identical silver suitcases with randomly placed numbers. Elnora needs to find No. 4 on the screen. She scans

the monitor with her forefinger. She spots it, touches the screen and beams as she has just launched a session of wheeling and dealing in which the residents will find out if their suitcase contains a paltry penny or a \$1 million virtual prize.

For the next 25 minutes, the group works through a variety of strategy exercises—evaluating offers of the animated host to sell the No. 4 suitcase and selecting sequences of other suitcases to work through a process of elimination and guess how much virtual money is in the chosen suitcase.

All the while, Elnora is controlling the flow of the game with simple touch screen moves—as the number of each case is called out to her—and with only a few little reminders from nursing and activities assistant Teronda Anderson seated nearby.

The gutsy group holds firm and refuses to sell its suitcase—and eventually discovers just \$100 in the No. 4 case, not the \$1 million prize. Everyone laughs and claps and promises to meet again for another game in a day or two, before retiring for the night.



BY ROBIN HEPLER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SARA JORDE AND GREG SAILOR

with Technology



(above) Elnora Brown, a resident of Volunteers of America's Eastland Care Center in Columbus, Ohio, demonstrates the use of "It's Never 2 Late" technology with a lesson on mouse clicking.

Lifelong Learning

This combination of cognitive activity, interpersonal engagement, technical skill building and just plain fun is exactly what Jack York had in mind when he started It's Never 2 Late (IN2L) in 1999. The Colorado-based company creates customized computer systems with therapeutic and entertainment content and adapted hardware for use in nursing homes, assisted living communities and adult day programs in 26 states.

Eastland is the pilot site for Volunteers of America's use of IN2L in a skilled nursing facility. Volunteers of America first introduced the technology at its assisted living communities in Minnesota and Nevada three years ago.

"I saw life-changing results in a handful of the first few seniors who connected with family or old friends through e-mail or tracked down a lost relative (via the Web)," says York of his first test of putting computers in a California facility in the 1990s. "But I could tell right away there was no way many of the residents could use a regular computer. They had the right mindset and wanted to learn, but there were physical barriers."

York saw the seniors struggle with keyboards and the mouse, and he also encountered a nursing home industry not yet ready to blend technology, therapy and activities. York was working in Silicon Valley and wanted to donate computers to senior residential facilities. He called seven facilities before he and a friend finally found a facility willing to take four new computers and a volunteer to set up a program.

York then set out to find adaptive technologies and learn more about the nursing home industry. At a conference, he met Wayne Olson, senior vice president of Healthcare Operations and Development, for Volunteers of America National Services. York says Olson saw the potential right away but told him to come back in a year when his company had worked through its start-up process.

"For many, we've seen that ultimate sense of 'I can learn something new. We've seen many people far down the road of dementia interact. That's been one of our biggest findings—don't give up on people who may be in a different place cognitively. There are ways to connect with them.'"

—Jack York, founder and CEO of IN2L

York did just that, and Volunteers of America has moved from being one of the early test sites in 2004 to one of three major investment partners in IN2L, joining Covenant Health Network and Health Resources Alliance.

York and Olson agree the early installations have been successful for residents of all skill levels. Potential applications are limited only by the imagination.

"For many, we've seen that ultimate sense of 'I can learn something new,'" York says. "We've seen many people far down the road of dementia interact. That's been one of our biggest findings—don't give up on people who may be in a different place cognitively. There are ways to connect with them."

Special Memories

Estelle Smallwood touched a computer for the first time at the family night introduction of IN2L at Eastland Care Center. A puzzle exercise designed to teach her to point the mouse revealed a family photo each time she successfully clicked the target boxes. She was thrilled. Using the touch screen, she opened a slide show the staff had created just for her and told the assembled crowd about her grandparents in the opening photo and about her vacation photos from Virginia.

"I'm hooked," said Ms. Smallwood, a resident for the past year. "I've never touched one of these computers before, but I'll be back to learn more."

The staff had a special treat waiting for Estelle. They showed her how to open e-mail and had an inbox already full of notes and photos sent from her family in Ohio and Wisconsin.

The beauty of the system, says Craig Nelson, executive director at Eastland Care Center, is that Estelle can now go back and view her slide show any time she wants. It's a great memory tool and great fun.

Columbus staffers April Smith and Amanda Cerda have already developed new activities to try with IN2L since the system arrived for the pilot in July. Smith wants to start an intergenerational e-mail pen-pal program with the youth and veterans programs run by Volunteers of America of Greater Ohio.

Cerda, who works with memory care residents, says the puzzle therapies, music and photo album applications will be especially helpful. She makes sure there are plenty of photos snapped during the gardening and cooking activities she leads now to serve as memory cues.

"As people go down the path of memory loss, research shows the best prescription is exercising the brain," says Olson. "And this (IN2L) system facilitates engagement of the person's mind with memory exertion."

Constant Content Additions

Music content on the system provides a variety of activity options. Jodi Fopp,

life enrichment coordinator at the Homestead at Maplewood, an assisted living community in Minnesota, says she uses the karaoke sing-alongs twice a week to engage residents in the memory care unit.

Spiritual and meditation music provides a soothing Sunday evening program option for all residents, while the ever-expanding library of concerts can be an attraction for a special event.

Cathy Birkeland, residence director at Maplewood, put the laptop computer playing a classic Liberace performance on top of the piano at her facility. Residents, she says, loved the concert-like atmosphere of the entertainment, and she plans to add more concert nights.

Group and Solo Activities

Maplewood, which has two IN2L systems, has cultivated confidence among residents who use the system independently for their favorite activities, as well as for join-in group options.

Dorothy Leonard, a three-year resident, keeps up with friends in Idaho and Minnesota via e-mail. She uses the system's virtual travel segments to tour Rome and Paris whenever she wants to reminisce. "My husband and I traveled to Europe years ago. I just loved that trip. I like going back now and seeing all the buildings again."

An avid puzzle and game player on the computer, Mrs. Leonard joins group sessions for "Wheel of Fortune" and the weekly meditation sessions. "I didn't have much experience with computers before I came here, but I love it."

Jackie Hayne and Carl Berg have each found their niche on IN2L at Maplewood. For Carl, it's chess. He challenges himself against the computer just about any time he can. Jackie, who says her introduction to computers several years ago in the workplace "was not good," has found her confidence with the system, which enables the staff to set up specific folders and activities just for her. "I don't have to worry about making any mistakes," she says.

Keeping Family Connected

Joyce De Haas, director of Homestead at Boulder City in Nevada, says the therapeutic benefits for residents are enhanced by the technology's ability to engage the family.

"Family members can be apprehensive when they visit. Often, they feel there is no hope of interacting with their loved one," De Haas says. "They are in awe when they see the resident respond (with IN2L)."

York, who continues to study the nursing home industry, believes use of technology in residential settings can engage young visitors and make family visits far more interactive.

On the Horizon

Outside of the pilot sites, Olson's team has set up a matching grant system to help local facilities purchase IN2L systems. The newest applications and hardware run \$15,000 per workstation, with the facility responsible for raising 50 percent.

Olson says his primary short-term goals are to have the systems in all of Volunteers of America's nursing homes and assisted living facilities within 18 months and to have a major training initiative he dubbed "the VOA Experience" launched in six months.

Volunteers of America's experience with IN2L so far has demonstrated that it truly is never too late to learn. Staff members at the piloted assisted living and nursing centers have witnessed firsthand the power of introducing technology to elders. The enrichment it brings to their lives is priceless and the therapeutic benefits means users stay mentally and socially active longer, and the system has the power to completely redefine aging in residential care facilities. ■

Robin Hepler is vice president of Paul Werth Associates, a public relations and communications firm in Columbus, Ohio, where she directs media planning and editorial activities for numerous business and not-for-profit clients.

Residents at facilities in the 26 states where IN2L is currently in use can use the system to simulate bicycling, driving, flying and painting. See demonstrations of the system in action at www.in2l.com/labs.php.



(above) Residents of Volunteers of America assisted living facilities in Minnesota demonstrate IN2L at the Pioneer Network National Conference in August.



And Then There

(above) LightHouse kids Chris Baker, Se'Tavion Combs, Hosea Smally, and Terrell Bolden share a hug after being dropped off by the center's van. (right) LightHouse After-School Directors Xavier Small and Tella Henderson.



The LightHouse of Volunteers of America North Louisiana is a beacon of hope for inner-city children in Shreveport and Bossier City. The multifaceted program offers after-school care, mentoring and leadership training, counseling and case management, parenting classes and numerous other family resources.

The name says it all. The Bottoms. That's what they used to call a section of Shreveport, Louisiana, that lays in the shadows of the downtown business district back in the mid-1980s. The usual suspects—drugs, juvenile delinquency and adolescent pregnancy—were hard to check. Then there was the problem of unemployment, shotgun houses and violent crime to boot.

A community name change meant to revitalize and uplift the neighborhood socially and economically met with mixed results. The new Ledbetter Heights still suffers from urban blight, but like a beacon to ships lost at sea, the Volunteers of America's LightHouse program is luring hundreds of Shreveport youths and families into its folds and churning out success stories the likes of which this Southern town has never seen.

The LightHouse is a virtual clearing-house of resources. It provides more than 500 children from Ledbetter Heights, greater Shreveport and neigh-

boring Bossier City with educational and recreational opportunities through after-school care at three standalone centers and six school-based sites. In addition, the LightHouse runs a summer enrichment program, youth mentoring, a teen leadership academy and a host of cultural and character-building service learning projects throughout the community.

In the spring of 2006, after an extensive study on best practices for helping families living in poverty, the LightHouse opened its Family Resource Center. The center aims to strengthen and empower area families with services such as GED preparation, resume writing, budgeting, computer literacy and parenting education. The center conducts family needs assessments to keep services offered in tune with services needed. Case managers work with families and link them with other available community resources. A staff counselor is on hand for individual, family and group sessions. The center also runs the "Diaper Closet" to provide struggling mothers with diapers and wipes for up to a year.

Was *Light*

BY DEQUENDRE NEELEY-BERTRAND
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KATHRYN GAIENNE



Volunteers of America of North Louisiana recently received a \$20,000 Volunteers of America/Annie E. Casey Family Strengthening Award in recognition of the superlative outcomes the LightHouse has achieved and in support of replicating the program throughout the organization. New TANF funding to the tune of \$300,000 has recently been awarded, allowing for some much needed expansion at two low-performing schools. The accolades from media, other local offices and members of the community continue to pour in, but the program's biggest and loudest cheerleaders are its participants: the employees, volunteers and families touched by the program.

Says Sondra Dixon, coordinator and general go-to person for the LightHouse, "I see miracles taking place every day: teens who had never even thought of an education beyond high school enrolling in college, elementary school children cheering as they wave their report cards in the air, a single mother who enjoyed a day of pampering provided by a local supporter, saying, 'I can't believe this is for me.' I could go on and on."

(below) *LightHouse Kid Kavonna Smally.*



Bright Beginnings

The LightHouse started with a group of women in the early 1980s who were working in the Bottoms and just felt things should be better than they were, says Brandy McNeill, vice president of family, children, and senior services of Volunteers of America of North Louisiana. With space provided by a local church and the spiritual and leadership guidance of its interim pastor, Dr. Donald Webb, Volunteers of America assumed the program in 1985. At the time it was operating as a child development center, offering tutoring and mentoring programs. Today it is one of the local office's flagship programs.

"The LightHouse is so great because it has great roots," says McNeill. She referred to two of the program's first employees, Dr. Melissa Flournoy, whose work as executive director at the LightHouse served her well when she went on to serve as a Louisiana state representative, and Cedric Glover, a young activist who came aboard as center program director. Today, he stands elected as the first African American mayor of Shreveport. As

the saying goes around Ledbetter Heights, once a LightHouse kid, always a LightHouse kid. That's been the saving grace of more than a few.

"Crack cocaine had made its initial appearance in Shreveport," Mayor Glover tells *Spirit*. "There were lots of challenges. Young people were really stressed for positive and constructive things to do. I was certainly interested in being a part of something new and innovative to turn things around."

Under his direction, the program developed its after-school, weekend and summer enrichment components. Adult basic education, scouting and sporting events were also added.

"We were very successful," Glover says. "Young folks have gone on and managed to finish school, get good paying jobs, take care of their families and their responsibilities. Now they look me in the eye and say thank you for providing me with a better opportunity. Even a couple who've taken the wrong path, it's encouraging to hear them say 'I know there is a better way,' because of their involvement with the LightHouse."

"I see miracles taking place every day: teens who had never even thought of an education beyond high school enrolling in college, elementary school children cheering as they wave their report cards in the air, a single mother who enjoyed a day of pampering provided by a local supporter, saying, 'I can't believe this is for me.' I could go on and on."

—Sondra Dixon, coordinator, The LightHouse, Volunteers of America of North Louisiana, Shreveport, Louisiana

His own LightHouse roots serving as inspiration, Glover campaigned and declared his objective as mayor to provide every Shreveport child with access to a quality after-school program.

“If we’re going to keep young people from getting involved in negative activities,” he says, “the crucial time of day is after school when they have left the school house, are at home, in the neighborhood or on the street. Instead of being at home alone . . . they need to be engaged with something, to have their cultural horizons broadened and expanded.”

Shining Lights

Perhaps one of the most remarkable examples of that truth is Michael D. Jackson. He was 12 years old when friends told him about the LightHouse. He tagged along on a summer field trip and was hooked. His younger siblings soon joined him as official LightHouse kids. The neighborhood being what it was, he still routinely had to consciously resist the temptations of the streets.

He calls a single decision he made at age 16 his “renaissance moment” and credits the LightHouse with reinforcing the values that helped him make the right choice. It was a Friday night. He was hanging out with friends, 10 altogether. The group decided to hit a party in the city. Jackson knew the element that would be there and decided not to go—not the easiest decision for an adolescent, but because of it, he was around to enjoy his Saturday. An altercation broke out at the party, and someone was murdered. Six of his friends were implicated; they were arrested and are still in prison.

“I remember that night like it was yesterday,” Jackson recalls. “If I hadn’t made the decision not to go, my life would not be the same. I probably wouldn’t be here.”

Jackson went on to graduate from Grambling State University in 1999. He returned to the LightHouse as a coordinator of the after-school programs. He then went on to Southern University Law and received his JD in 2005. A case manager for Katrina Aid Today, Jackson is awaiting the results of his bar exam. His brother, also a Grambling alum, went on to obtain his master’s degree in public health from Tulane University and is planning to go to medical school.

“We were raised right in the shadows of downtown, and I didn’t know anything else but my neighborhood. . . I grew up in the midst of drugs, gangs, prostitution, anything negative—you name it,” Jackson says. “The LightHouse was a sight for sore eyes. God knew it was time for me. When I started going to the LightHouse, going on trips to the zoo, out of town, it got me so motivated. It taught me that, hey, there is more to the world than this little neighborhood. It gave me a reason to say, hey, I don’t wanna go this way. I wanna do something better.”

His story is one of many. Dr. Webb, for whom the LightHouse’s leadership academy is named, proudly boasts of the children he’s come in to contact over the years. The 81-year-old Wales-born scholar remembers them all by name.

“The two sisters, Lamertis O’Neal, captain in the U.S. Army and Erica O’Neal, a junior at Northwestern State University,” he goes as he rattles through memories of LightHouse graduates. “Another marvelous girl, Marian Claville, came through the system and got a degree in social work. C. J. Thomas, he came through and now he’s planning to be a dentist and has chosen to serve in Shreveport to be near his mother who is on dialysis. The list goes on and on.”

Dixon, whom McNeill says is the backbone of the LightHouse, keeps a book she calls “Live in Progress,” which

chronicles all the children who come into contact with the LightHouse. As an example of how extensive her archive is, McNeill shared how a police officer once brought a child who had missed the school bus into the LightHouse. The officer looked at Miss Dixon. She instantly recognized the officer as a LightHouse kid, and she told him who he was, brought out her notebook and began telling him some of the things he did as a child attending the LightHouse.



(above) *LightHouse Kid Korleontai Combs.*

“If we’re going to keep young people from getting involved in negative activities, the crucial time of day is after school when they have left the school house, are at home, in the neighborhood, or on the street.” —Cedric B. Glover, mayor, Shreveport, Louisiana



(above) *The LightHouse After School group at the Travis Street Center.* (right) *LightHouse Graduate C. J. Thomas.*

Caring Touch

It’s said that people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care. That is part of the attraction that keeps LightHouse youths and their families coming back. McNeill says every employee and volunteers of the LightHouse—about 60 full and part-time altogether—treat “every child with a lot of deference and with respect.” Parents know with certainty, “They are not going to be there to judge me.”

Courtney Dawson, whose five-year-old son attends the LightHouse, said the program has been helping her since her son was six months old.

“It’s been a big burden lifted,” she said of the Diaper Closet. “I was living from paycheck to paycheck. I’m a single

parent. I try to do the best that I can, but it’s hard. The LightHouse is really a blessing.”

Youths also know that the LightHouse is a passport beyond Ledbetter Heights, a place in which they will learn lessons that they can apply at home and meet people whose paths they might not otherwise cross. For example, the teen leadership academy last month was engaged in a study of the Holocaust. Dr. Webb’s family of origin happens to have adopted three children who were put on a train from Germany to escape the slaughter. Shreveport resident Rose Van Thym, a survivor, visited the teens October 12 and told the harrowing tale of her times in concentration camps before losing her father, mother and first husband at Auschwitz.

The students read *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* and watched the movies *Schindler’s List* and *Paper Clips*, which documented the project of a Tennessee after-school program that collected 6 million clips to symbolize the Jews who lost their lives. The leadership students at the LightHouse also heard a talk at a local Shreveport temple and participated in an essay contest with a theme of comparing Nazis to modern-day gangs.

“My exposure to different things made all the difference in the world,” says Jackson. “It is such a place of positivity. There’s so many people there that I owe my life to. God placed all these people in my life to cause me to be the person I am today. People say things move full circle. My circle continues moving, and Volunteers of America has been there all the way. I’m so proud of that.”



(above) *LightHouse Kids Angel and Shaleria Dominique.*

Looking Ahead

As part of the Family Strengthening Award, the LightHouse has presented its programs to about a dozen other Volunteers of America local offices. Representatives interested in repeating North Louisiana's success saw demonstrations of LightHouse programs in action. They got down on the floor with family advocates who were showing neighborhood moms various activities they can do with their children as they develop. They also took note of the collaborations with community organizations and schools for assistance with transportation, use of space and programming.

"We are extremely willing to open up and share our experience," says McNeill.

Program staff members are also committed to continual improvement.

Along with assessments of families and students that ensure specific needs are being met, McNeill says the LightHouse is striving to increase its pool of mentors. In addition, the program is working to create new channels of parental involvement as a key ingredient to academic success.

To ensure its success perpetuates, Dr. Webb has bequeathed the LightHouse a special endowment. It benefits from the proceeds of his two published works, *The Best Year Yet: A Kaleidograph* and *Deep Calls to Deep: How Christ Empowers Lives of Service*, in which he explores the power of the church as a servant and chronicles Volunteers of America's ministry of service.

He describes the LightHouse as "an oyster with a pearl in it." In the midst of its somewhat desolate surroundings, "you see these shining faces, children doing incredible things."

"I came to Volunteers of America late in life, and I am in a sense ending it in service," says Webb. "Volunteers of America is a true church, a very hardworking church and that was the intent—to be of service. This is what I understand Jesus was all about and that's partly why I am involved and why I so strongly support the LightHouse." ■

DeQuendre Neeley-Bertrand is Senior Writer/Editor at Volunteers of America.

Help for *Homeless*

Forecasts call for growing homelessness among the nation's veterans—and more complex demands from those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. With services in housing, mental and physical health care, job training and partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the U.S. Department of Labor, however, Volunteers of America is leading the way to meet the demands and stemming the tide against chronic homelessness.

When you see a homeless man sleeping in the hollow of an office building, on the porch of a church, or in a box under an overpass, there is a one in three chance that the man has served this country in the military.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimates that nearly 400,000 veterans experience homelessness over the course of a year. On any given night, as many as 200,000 veterans sleep without a permanent home. According to the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients, sponsored by the federal Interagency Council on Homelessness, veterans account for 23 percent of all homeless people in the United States and one-third of all homeless men. With record-breaking funding from the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Labor this year, Volunteers of America has been a catalyst for change in the area of chronic homeless. In addition to transitional housing, local offices are offering innovative programming to meet the unique needs of our nation's veterans.

Moreover, Volunteers of America CEOs have been leaders in advocacy on behalf of veterans on Capitol Hill and at the White House, and still others are mentoring growing programs within the organization—all with the goal of magnifying Volunteers of America's coverage of the issue and routing the specter of homelessness in this population.

Going back as far as World War I and continuing throughout each period of conflict in American history, Volunteers of America's involvement with aid to service men and women has blossomed. The organization operated canteens, housing and care for children of soldiers and even national campaigns to increase the awareness of and respect for veterans.

In the 1980s, care for veterans took a dramatic turn. Homeless veterans—scores of whom served during the Vietnam war—turned up in increasing numbers in Volunteers of America shelters. With winning advocacy and activism, Volunteers of America began



Veterans

BY SHERRI ALMS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
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OF AMERICA OF GREATER
OHIO, AND VOLUNTEERS
OF AMERICA FLORIDA





A Grateful Soldier and Survivor

Venus George, an Army veteran who served in the mid-1980s, came to Volunteers of America of Florida's Bailey Village Transitional Housing for Veterans program in May 2006. She had completed a 90-day residential drug and alcohol program at Wisteria in Gainesville.

"After I got through there, I didn't have anywhere else to go," she says. "The drugs had wiped out my whole life." She had been a restaurant manager and PTA mom, but she was married to an addict. She tried crack, thinking she could "hit it once and put it down." Instead, her life "spiraled to the bottom."

George received a treatment plan, consisting of Narcotics Anonymous meetings and individual counseling through the VA. She also received training on coping with health issues such as bipolar disorder, PTSD, and diabetes.

George again was dealt a tragic blow when she found out she had breast cancer. Staff helped get her contact with the American Cancer Society and support groups and assisted her with applying for short-term disability. Staff also helped arrange transportation to radiation treatment.

A year and a half later, after a lumpectomy and mastectomy, her cancer went into remission. George enrolled in Santa Fe Community College for a degree in child development and education, "I want to own a child care center one day." She is celebrating 21 months clean.

"If it wasn't for the staff of VOA, I have no clue what my life would be like. In not even two years, my life has turned 180 degrees to the better... this program really works. I'm living and enjoying the moment right now."

"Over the next three to five years, the need will change significantly. We didn't see homeless Vietnam veterans for 10 to 15 years after the war and then there were droves. With Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Iraqi Strength, veterans are accessing services much sooner. These veterans have much longer tours of duty and experience higher level of combat fatigue and much higher disruption in employment and education as a result. The housing market is also significantly different than it was in the Vietnam era."

—Nancy Hughes, president and CEO, Volunteers of America of Illinois

partnering with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to offer new housing and support services for veterans. Just three months ago, the VA awarded \$5.3 million to Volunteers of America through its Grant and Per Diem program for housing veterans without a place to call home. Last summer, the U.S. Department of Labor granted the organization more than \$2.5 million through its Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP), which helps with employment and training and numerous other supportive services that put the country's veterans back on their feet and set on a path toward reaching their full potential.

Both were record-breaking awards, with Volunteers of America receiving the lion's share of all the funding both agencies doled out. The money went to local offices throughout the country with renowned veterans programs including Florida, Kentucky, Los Angeles and Ohio, as well as to programs where programs are just getting established but where need has been great. These include Illinois and the Carolinas. The

funding is expected to help thousands of veterans, a great proportion of whom are being served within the Volunteers of America fold.

"Our service to veterans is based on excellent partnerships and common goals to support the needs of homeless veterans," Florida President and CEO Kathryn Spearman told Congress in a September hearing on the grant and per diem program. She said the continued funding adds more beds, strengthens Volunteers of America's veterans' service centers and allows the organization to help veterans "live in and be a part of the community."

The grants are testament to the commitment Volunteers of America has made to veterans and a clarion call to once again prepare to meet new demands from the veterans who are coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan. Each conflict has presented a different kind of need, but what is certain is that we will be ready for the challenge.

"Most of the veterans in our programs in Columbus, Dayton and Cleveland are



400,000

DID YOU KNOW?

Nearly 400,000 veterans experience homelessness over the course of a year according to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Another federal agency reports that veterans account for 23 percent of all homeless people in the United States and one-third of all homeless men.

from the Vietnam era,” says Dennis Kresak, president and CEO of Volunteers of America of Greater Ohio. “In 2007, we’re still working with Vietnam veterans who have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health and substance abuse issues. I expect that we will see those same issues among returning Iraq war veterans in the coming years.”

That is why he, along with Spearman and other CEOs, has been a coach for other Volunteers of America local offices around the country, helping them write grants and obtain funding as well as advising them on how to create residential-based and other kinds of programs to support veterans.

Large Awards for A Growing Need

Their mentoring work and the work of many other Volunteers of America staff paid off this year with the combined \$7.7 million in funding from two federal agencies for veterans services. The HVRP money will support employment programs for veterans programs in Los Angeles, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky,

Ohio, Tennessee and West Virginia. The award to Volunteers of America—in ten different grants to the eight offices—is the largest amount received by any single nonprofit applicant. VA funding—an historical 32 percent of which went to Volunteers of America—is going to Bay Area, Florida, Illinois, Greater New Orleans, Michigan, Ohio River Valley, the Carolinas and Eastern Washington.

That funding, explains Kresak, can be used to house and create and operate programs to assist homeless veterans find and keep employment. The HVRP program uses a case management approach that directly assists homeless veterans as well as helps them locate community services. Those services can include job placement, education and training, career counseling and other employment-related services as well as housing and medical and substance abuse treatment. The VA grant and per diem program provides money to build or renovate an existing building for use as a residential program for homeless veterans, along with money for operating support.

“If you become homeless as a result of attendant problems picked up while you were in the military,” explains Kresak, “you’re thrown in with larger homeless population.”

But including homeless veterans with other homeless people does not work well, he says. “There needs to be a segmented approach so that veterans receive specific services. The issues they face—the PTSD and substance abuse issues—are more severe because of their military service. They are distinctly different than what other homeless people face.”

Veterans’ Specialized Needs

In 2006, Volunteers of America serviced more than 6,000 homeless veterans. That included housing and help through 32 VA grant and per diem program, 13 HRVPs, two housing programs sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, two service centers, a mobile service center in Florida, two combined substance abuse and housing programs, two special needs grants for veterans with mental



Getting Honest

Rene Triggs has never had a problem working. He's always had a job at one time or another. He joined the Marines in 1973 as a machine gun operator. He was an amateur boxer. He was a garbage collector for 13 years. He was a truck driver, too. Each of these careers were begun and ended by drug addiction, and consequently, time in jail.

Triggs sought help through many short-term treatment programs. Some were expensive, some were free. Some he completed; some he quit.

His failure was partly due to a secret he had managed to keep from every employer: he was illiterate. He has a near photographic memory and a quick wit, which he thought was enough to carry him through life.

Rene entered the Volunteers of America of Greater Ohio veterans program believing he could slide through like he had the others. If any reading was required, he would quit or make excuses. This time his case manager challenged him to get honest with himself to kick the habit. It prompted Triggs to do some soul searching and self-reflection. He came back to his case manager with the confession: "I can't read."

With this myth in Rene's life shattered, he could "get honest" with the issues behind his illiteracy and drug addiction—what was really holding him back.

"I had to be torn down and built back up," said Triggs.

Graduating from the program in August of 2005, he drives a truck for Columbus Steel. His reading skills are getting better with each passing month.

"As long as I live, I'll always be in debt to Volunteers of America," he said. "They helped me break the bonds of my mental imprisonment."

illness and frail elderly veterans, and two programs specifically for incarcerated veterans. Local offices have numerous success stories of how their programs have helped rehabilitate and restore hope to soldiers and seamen.

Kresak and the VA, for example, have long enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship that has in turn brought much-needed help to veterans in Columbus and Cleveland. The partnership began in 1994 with a small agreement through the VA's Healthcare for Homeless Veterans program.

The Greater Ohio office has 165 spaces in its residential programs in Cleveland, 120 spaces in Columbus and will soon open a 50-bed residential facility in Dayton. All three cities also have HVRP programs with a capacity to serve 1,011 veterans to receive supportive services for employment, mental health issues, substance abuse and other needs created by chronic homelessness.

In Cleveland, the residential program has 25 places set aside for veterans with chronic mental illness. Both the residential and nonresidential programs are located in a Veterans Resource Center. In Dayton, local staff members have identified a building on the VA campus that can be used for the residential program. Kresak says the hope is to be in the building within a few months.

Replicating Earlier Success

Around the country, Volunteers of America is a leader in providing housing and supportive services for homeless, addicted, frail elderly and low-income veterans. Focus is on both preventing and ending homelessness among veterans. Some local offices have created programs that have become the standard bearers in caring for our nation's veterans. Not only do they house and help find jobs, but they tend to mental health needs, substance abuse treatment—even offering specific help for frail elderly veterans.

For example through the Department of Labor's Incarcerated Veterans Transition Program, Volunteers of America offices in Louisville, Kentucky and Los Angeles, prevent homelessness by meeting veterans right at the prison gate—and helping them find housing, access health care and jobs, link up with VA benefits and other community resources and get transportation.

In Lexington, Kentucky, Volunteers of America operates the Homeless Veterans transitional Treatment program, which serves up to 40 homeless male veterans who are recovering from substance abuse in an intensive residential therapeutic treatment setting. Located on the campus of the Leestown Medical Center, the round-the-clock program offers the 12-step model as well as case management services. Kentucky offers a continuum of care. Many veterans leaving the transitional treatment program next receive help from St. James II, a transitional housing program that helps maintain long-term sobriety and steps up employment and life skills. Veterans can stay in this program for up to two years and then are assisted toward permanent housing and independence.

Florida operates a Veterans Mobile Service Center, which travels the state, combing the streets seeking out homeless veterans. When a homeless veteran is found, he or she is immediately provided with food, clothing, a primary care medical examination, a determination of eligibility for VA and other government benefits and an assessment of housing needs. Often, veterans are referred directly to Volunteers of America housing programs in Florida.

John Bailey, Nancy Hughes and Rob Rogers—CEOs of Volunteers of America Bay Area, Illinois and the Carolinas—are all new recipients of federal funding and have been partnering with "veteran" Volunteers of America programs to help establish their own.

In North and South Carolina, says Rogers, Volunteers of America is planning for two 50-bed residential programs, one in Durham and the other in Charleston.

“There is a significant population of veterans in the Carolinas, approximately 600,000 in the two states. Sadly, a large number of veterans are homeless,” says Rogers.

The VA will help fund the intensive case management the support Carolina veterans will receive. “The program takes into account the strengths and needs of each person,” Rogers says. “Case managers will help each veteran put together a plan to meet their goals.”

Program participants will go through a 24-month, five-stage progression that moves them from homelessness to independent living with support from professionals as well as through a built-in peer mentoring component.

In Chicago, says Hughes, need far outstrips supply, but Volunteers of America is working to reverse that trend. “There are less than approximately 30 beds for veterans in Chicago, and there are 18,000 homeless veterans in the area. There are very few providers of services for veterans, especially supportive housing.”

In Illinois, it was common sense to parlay Volunteers of America’s national expertise in working with veterans into local programs that can address the pressing needs of Chicago’s homeless veterans. The office recently created an HVRP program that can serve up to 250 veterans annually and received \$1 million of the Volunteers of America share of the VA funding for a 50-unit residential program.

Hughes says that, in addition to unique mental health issues, it’s important to separate veterans into their own programs so that they can access the benefits structure. “If veterans aren’t in a program staffed with people who under-

Volunteers of America’s Reach in Housing Homeless Veterans

STATE	CITY
Alabama	Mobile*
California	Los Angeles, Oakland*
Florida	Cocoa, Fort Lauderdale, Gainesville, Key West, Jacksonville, Lake City*, Miami, Tampa, Pensacola*, Punta Gorda*
Illinois	Chicago*
Indiana	Indianapolis
Kentucky	Lexington, Louisville, Pikesville
Louisiana	Baton Rouge, New Orleans*
Maine	Portland*
Michigan	Lansing
New York	New York City, Rochester
North Carolina	Durham*
Ohio	Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Sandusky, Cincinnati*
South Carolina	Charleston*
Tennessee	Johnson City, Knoxville
West Virginia	Cerido
Wyoming	Sheridan*

Housing and services for veterans are located in or being developed (*) in 35 cities in 16 states.

stand the benefits veterans can receive, those veterans will miss out.”

In Oakland, California, Bailey says that he has long been troubled by the veterans who have come through the local office’s programs. “I was motivated to create these programs for veterans because of the individuals I saw coming through correctional programs. I’m a veteran, and the need for services has bothered me.”

Bailey explains that the Bay Area office now has the capacity to provide specialized services for veterans. The office received nearly \$600,000 in funding from the VA for a transitional housing facility that will serve between 50 and 55 veterans. Bailey hopes the program will be up and running by this year.



A Safe Place and Strong Support

Volunteers of America of Florida has been working with veterans since 1998, says Director of External Affairs Ed Quill.

“The VA contacted us to help with outreach to homeless veterans in rural encampments,” Quill explains. “We worked with them to develop the Florida Veterans Mobile Service Center, which we operate.”

Today, in addition to the Mobile Service Center, which provides health services, Florida has programs in Jacksonville, Gainesville, Cocoa, Fort Lauderdale, Miami and Key West. As it expands those programs and moves into more cities, including Lake City, Pensacola, and Punta Gorda, the office is also working on a unique program called Cabins in the Woods, a residential program specifically designed to help veterans who have moved into the woods to escape the cities where their mental health issues are often exacerbated by urban life.

Located in Lake City, the Cabins in the Woods site is a wooded property with

a natural surrounding. It will allow residents, 32 in all, to have both the quiet setting they prefer and the support from fellow veterans that can help them to set goals for leaving homelessness and moving toward independent living.

“These veterans went from their proms to the jungles in Vietnam. When they came back, the mood of country and their experience was such that they sought out the jungle here,” says Quill. “That’s why this program is so attractive for this group. It is tailored to what will they accept and engage in so they can reach their maximum potential. Many have forgotten how to live in society.”

The program is tailored, he says, to provide life skills education—teaching them how to budget time and money and to cook and clean for themselves, for example—as well as offering a strong level of clinical support to help with mental health and substance abuse issues.

Quill explains that the program is unique in that veterans had a hand in designing and building it. Volunteers of America of Florida expects to open

the facility in 2008, with VA funding for 28 of the beds and funding for four additional beds coming from other sources.

Hughes forecasts a growing need in services to American veterans. “Over the next three to five years, the need will change significantly. We didn’t see homeless Vietnam veterans for 10 to 15 years after the war and then there were droves. With Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Iraqi Strength, veterans are accessing services much sooner. These veterans have much longer tours of duty and experience higher level of combat fatigue and much higher disruption in employment and education as a result. The housing market is also significantly different than it was in the Vietnam era.” ■

Sherri Alms writes for nonprofits, associations and other organizations on a range of topics. Volunteers of America Senior Writer/Editor DeQuendre Neeley-Bertrand contributed to this story.

In the Summer issue of Spirit, an article titled “Baller LaTroy Hawkins Serves up Inspiration” incorrectly identified Meredith Price as the author. Sherri Alms authored the article.



To Whom Much Is Given, Much is Required

BY DEQUENDRE NEELEY-BERTRAND

You can use your enormous privilege and opportunity to seek private pleasure and gain, Robert F. Kennedy once said. But history will judge you, and as the years pass, you will ultimately judge yourself, on the extent to which you have used your gifts to lighten and enrich the lives of your fellow man.

It is that kind of sentiment that catapulted Volunteers of America board member Nancy Gofus down the path of philanthropy. With a storied career of corporate successes, Gofus and her husband got to thinking about the next chapter of their lives. With their youngest heading off to college, they knew they would be able to devote more time in service to others. Their first project? Only a successful \$1 million capital campaign for their home church.

A veteran of the telecommunications industry, Gofus is senior vice president and chief marketing officer for Reston, Va.-based Verizon Business. Five years ago, she was executive vice president of marketing and customer care at XO Communications. It was there she met Jimmie Walton Paschall—then XO’s head of human resources and board member at Volunteers of America.

“I would listen as [Jimmie] came back from board meetings,” Gofus said. “I was interested in the importance of the work she was talking about.”

One day, Paschall asked Gofus about her interest in a board seat at Volunteers of America. Because of Gofus’s extensive marketing background, Paschall was sure the organization could put her expertise to good use.

“There’s a tremendous wealth transfer about to take place as baby boomers approach retirement... We have a great story to tell and not enough people know it.”

—Nancy Gofus, secretary of Volunteers of America National Board of Directors

“I have felt incredibly blessed in my life,” said Gofus. “I’ve had a very rich career, and I knew it was time for me to take a little bit more time and start giving back to the community.”

Gofus has taken the helm of the Volunteers of America Major Gifts Community Campaign, which raised \$20 million in the previous four years under former board member Brian Allen.

“We do important work, but we are not well recognized,” Gofus shared. “I saw it as an opportunity to participate at the board level and use the skills that I have to aid in helping others.”

Gofus believes in lending one’s specific talents and gifts toward charitable efforts. Some, for example, may be “called to do very special work,” tending



Nancy Gofus

to the needs of prisoners, veterans, individuals with addictions for example. “Perhaps my calling is to financially support their work, but I think we all have a role to play.”

Gofus says her goals as a board member and vision for the future of the organization involve “continuing our efforts to speak with one voice,” but also work toward a better balance between public and private funding.

Furthermore, “as you look out over the next 10 years, the challenges are going to be enormous.” She’s particularly interested in responding to the needs of returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. And she’s ready to lay down the gauntlet to get more individuals involved in giving.

“There’s a tremendous wealth transfer about to take place as baby boomers approach retirement,” said Gofus. “These are volunteer assets, financial assets to reach into. We have a great story to tell and not enough people know it. It is time now to start doing it in a compelling way to reach this group of people.” ■



Fausta Sawal accepts the Spirit of Service Award from Alan Solomont, former board member of the Corporation for National and Community Service.

“Time and again, Mrs. Sawal demonstrated her caring nature and her ability to effectively assist individuals in a time of need.”

–U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA)

Celebrating the Spirit of Service

Fausta Sawal has been a volunteer to elderly and disabled clients of the Volunteers of America of Western Washington’s Senior Companion Program for 16 years. She visits clients in the Seattle/Kings County area weekly, helps them with light chores such as laundry and recycling, takes them on walks, reads with them and helps them maintain their independent status at home for as long as possible.

Many times, Sawal has quite literally been a lifesaver. One client suffered a heart attack while they were together, and it was Fausta who placed the call to 911. Another fainted on the street, and Fausta assisted her to the emergency room. A third fell from a bus, and Fausta took her to the hospital.

For her steadfast dedication to Volunteers of America and her clients, Sawal was awarded the Spirit of Service Award this past summer in Philadelphia

by the Corporation for National and Community Service. The Corporation is a federal agency with three major wings, AmeriCorps, Senior Corps and Learn and Serve America. It partially funds the Senior Companion Program with stipends for the volunteers.

“Fausta has gone above and beyond the call to serve her community and nation,” said David Eisner, CEO of the Corporation. “Not only does she give her own time and talents, but also she inspires others in the community to volunteer and give of themselves.”

The Spirit of Service Awards pay tribute to the most outstanding participant in each of the Corporation’s programs. Fausta was selected for the 2007 award

because she exemplified the spirit of national service, demonstrated exceptional service and leadership, and served as a role model for others in her community.

Sawal was selected from a pool of more than 16,000 other senior corps volunteers across the country. In addition to visiting with clients, she assists the Senior Companion program in many other ways. As president of the program’s Advisory Council, she spearheads fundraising, in-service meetings, trainings, special events and recruitment. She also leads a group of Filipino senior companions.

A mother of eight, grandmother of 29 and great-grandmother of four, Sawal also volunteers with other community agencies in Seattle’s Asian community. She lobbies to promote senior issues at the state capital, is past president of the Asian Pacific Senior Alliance and is a member of the Filipino American Widows Association of Seattle, which named her Mother of the Year in 2004.

Her commitment to service was also recognized by Washington state Senator Patty Murray on the floor of the Senate the day she accepted the Spirit of Service Award.

“Time and again, Mrs. Sawal demonstrated her caring nature and her ability to effectively assist individuals in a time of need,” Murray told Congress. “I would like to thank Mrs. Sawal for the positive impact she has had on so many lives in Washington state. Both her past activities and her current pursuits are helping to create healthier and happier communities. I am sure Mrs. Sawal will continue to make significant contributions to her family and in the elderly and disabled communities in Washington. Mrs. Sawal is a remarkable woman, and I am pleased she is being honored for her years of dedication to helping others.” ■

Volunteers of America is a national, nonprofit, faith-based organization dedicated to helping those in need rebuild their lives and reach their full potential. Through numerous human services programs, including housing and health care, Volunteers of America helps more than 2 million people in more than 400 communities each year. Since 1896, our ministry of service has supported and empowered America's most vulnerable groups, including at-risk youths, the frail elderly, men and women returning from prison, homeless individuals and families, people with disabilities, and those recovering from addictions. Our work touches the mind, body, heart—and ultimately the spirit—of those we serve, integrating our deep compassion with highly effective programs and services.

*For more information about Volunteers of America,
visit www.VolunteersofAmerica.org.*





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