



**BUILDING
COMMUNITY**

#2424CHARLOTTE

Second Chances

Summer Newsletter | *Dismas House of Nashville*

FROM RESIDENT TO STAFF:

Gary Hired As New Dismas Facilities Manager



Recent Dismas House resident Gary Schwegmann was on a much different path before a felony gun conviction cost him dearly. He grew up in Southern Illinois, attended private school in grade school and then later studied Business Administration at Grand Canyon University. He was employed by Ingram Barge and worked in the river industry.

Gary explained, "In 2014, I found myself in prison and my wife and daughter out on the streets with little to no financial help. She resorted to selling drugs for a guy trying to make ends meet and my daughter fed, which I am sure many of you can guess what the outcome of that was. Yes, a prison sentence for her as well and my daughter in state custody."

When he was nearing the end of his prison sentence with no home and his wife locked up, Gary started looking for a place to go that would be a good fit. He wrote to many halfway houses and only one responded to every single letter he wrote: Dismas House. That response made him feel like he mattered, and he knew that it was the place he wanted to be, so he concentrated his efforts on getting accepted into Dismas House.

In February 2020, Gary was released from prison and headed to Dismas House. He says, "I was fortunate they had a bed for me and opened not only their doors but their hearts for me. I was welcomed with new clothes, the softest bed I had ever slept in, new shoes for my feet, socks that changed the way I thought about socks, and so much more that I could go on for hours."

In a few short months and despite COVID-19 restrictions, Dismas has helped Gary get his driver's license, connected him to resources for legal advice and, most importantly, enabled him to re-establish relationships with his children. Dismas provided Gary with the resources and mental and emotional support needed to help him achieve all that he has in such a short period of time.

He says he owes all of this to the staff and partners of Dismas as well as donors and supporters. Gary calls the staff a Dream Team and now he's part of that team too. He recently started a position as the full-time Facilities Manager at Dismas House while he pursues the opportunity to go back to college.

He says, "Dismas has taken me in and made me feel like family. So, it's my goal here at Dismas to help bridge communications with the guys getting out of prison from my own experiences in prison and here at the house, and to just pay all that Dismas has given to me forward and hopefully making someone else feel the way Dismas has made me feel, loved and of value."

*Our
Mission*

The mission of Dismas House of Nashville is to foster community awareness and understanding of the challenges and obstacles formerly incarcerated men face upon reentry by providing a system for personal transformation and growth as they transition back into society.

dismas.org   



DISMAS DAY!

DISMAS HOSTS FIRST VIRTUAL FUNDRAISER

Plans Kick-Off for July 21st

Dismas House is proud of our 46-year history and the impact we have had on the lives of former offenders seeking a second chance to make a positive impact in society. For the past four years, we have worked to construct a new 24,000 square foot campus and a proven program that will allow us to serve and impact more men in the future. We've grown from an 8 bed to a 72-bed facility and have personalized solutions for their transition back into the community. The change in bed capacity allows us to serve 150 residents per year, and we have 16 transitional housing units for residents who would like more time on campus to work on their transition plan.

As a Tennessee re-entry program provider, it is our vision that residents remain free and become self-sufficient, contributing members of society. To achieve our vision, we need your support to cover their basic need for food, shelter, and clothing in addition to delivering quality programming that makes a difference in the lives of those we serve.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted our grand opening and our annual spring Forgiveness Luncheon fundraiser, so Dismas House of Nashville is taking a new fundraising approach. We are hosting our first virtual event, "Dismas Day," on July 21st, 2020, from 8:00 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. During this interactive event, we will showcase the Dismas House mission through the lives of our first 12 residents and the supportive re-entry community. The event will also feature reflections from partners, supporters, and volunteers, as well as commentary from elected officials and special musical guests.

We are asking our community stakeholders, like you, to support "Dismas Day" by becoming a sponsor at one of three levels described below.



Dismas Day Sponsor Opportunities	Gold Level \$5,000	Silver Level \$2,500	Bronze Level \$1000
• 60 Second Commercial spot(s) during the event	2	1	
• Logo placement on social media and email event marketing	X	X	X
• Logo placement on printed marketing collateral	X	X	X
• Signage outside of Dismas House building	X	X	
• Recognition as a corporate sponsor in print media and other public service announcements (PSA)	X		
• Premier placement of company logo on Dismas.org home page	X		
• Speaking opportunity during the event	X		

Thank you for supporting our first virtual fundraising event. Please contact Dwanna Hughes, Special Events Director, at dhughes@dismas.org to start your commitment today.

Message From Outgoing CEO, Gerald Brown

Dear Supporters of Dismas House of Nashville,

It is with great respect that I inform you that I will be transitioning from the role of CEO of Dismas House of Nashville, effective on June 30, 2020. The past four years have been filled with countless blessings, challenges and celebrations.



When I began my journey with Dismas House, I never would have imagined how deeply the mission, residents and re-entry community would resonate with me. To experience the many positive changes in the lives of the residents and welcome them to their new home is one of the most rewarding accomplishments of my career.

The strength of Dismas House is not based on any one individual but the collective leadership, dedication and support of generous people like you. Your commitment is critical to the success of this organization and has saved lives and turned people around to a better life.

I would like to thank our donors, partners, volunteers, board of directors and staff members for your service to our residents. You helped usher in a new era for Dismas House and this trajectory must continue to serve the community.

The Executive Committee has tapped Kay Kretsch to serve as the Interim CEO. Kay is a former Board Chair and has led the effort to design, build, furnish and set operational standards for the new campus that opened in March. The Board is grateful to Kay for serving in this capacity.

I humbly thank you for your service, dedication and collaboration. It has been an honor to serve with you.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gerald Brown".

Gerald Brown, CEO, Dismas House of Nashville

Message from Outgoing Chair, Tom Stearns

This year is beginning to feel like one of the Indiana Jones films – filled with thrilling, exciting moments, unexpected crises, despair, sadness and fulfilled dreams. Certainly, none of us foresaw how the COVID-19 pandemic would impact the world, including Nashville, a city torn apart by tornadoes and windstorms. Dismas has had to nimbly adjust to each new crisis during the move to its wonderful new campus at 2424 Charlotte Avenue.



The move to the new building occurred just as the reality of the seriousness of the coronavirus was unfolding on Nashville. Daily decisions were being made about how to protect staff and residents amid the need to vacate our longtime home on Music Row. All the festivities surrounding the opening of the new campus were delayed indefinitely. Yet, we now have more residents at one time than ever before in the history of Dismas.

The new building is simply beyond description in its beauty and design. YOU MUST VISIT!! Every detail has been carefully considered. The common spaces are welcoming and the bedroom suites, comfortable and accepting—the business wing, functional and appropriate. There are many to thank for all this, but none more than Kay Kretsch and Gerald Brown.

We are extremely fortunate to have had exceptional staff through all this turmoil – Gerald Brown, Dr. Julie Doochin, Dr. Malinda Davenport Crisp, Glennis Taveras, Tom Angland, and Dwanna Hughes. They have worked tirelessly. We have been fortunate to add three more wonderful staff members – Philip Hill, Kleopatra Gaiter and Gary Schwegmann. We now have the largest staff in Dismas' history.

Continued on next page...

Dismas is blessed to have a highly active, committed, and dedicated Board of Directors and Advisory Board. These individuals and the committees of the Board have worked to support the organization every step of the way.

But we still face a few challenges. In the interest of public safety, we postponed the Annual Forgiveness Luncheon. As you know, this event is Dismas' premier fundraiser. The financial impact of this decision on the organization is significant. Plans are to hold the Forgiveness Luncheon later, but how and when that will occur is still subject to speculation.

As the tale continued to unfold, Gerald Brown submitted his resignation effective June 30th. The indisputable truth is that Dismas would certainly not be in the place that it is today without Gerald. Through his hard work and leadership, he was able to turn the organization around and set it on a course for growth. On behalf of everyone on the Board and Staff, I want to offer our sincere appreciation to Gerald for his work and dedication to Dismas House over the last four years.

The Executive Committee has tapped Kay Kretsch to serve as the Interim CEO. Kay is a former Board Chair and has led the effort to design, build, furnish and set new operational standards.

So, like an Indiana Jones film, we end this fiscal year with a happy ending – a magnificent new building, new staff and lots of new residents.

Thomas H. Stearns, FACMPE

Thomas H. Stearns

Board Chair,
Dismas House of Nashville



DONOR SPOTLIGHT:

Paul Connelly: He's All In for Dismas House

Paul Connelly is the Vice President over Privacy, Cybersecurity, and Physical Security at HCA. He joined the Dismas House of Nashville Board in 2018. HCA Healthcare supports community organizations like Dismas House, and also helps individuals interested in serving on not-for-profit boards with financial support, board training, and even time off for service activities. This has enabled Paul to be generous with his time, talent, and financial resources.



In addition to volunteering during Community Dinners, Paul secured a 500-sock donation from

Bombas and continues to support the organization as a major donor. For his service, Paul received the Volunteer Appreciation Award earlier this year.

Of his experience with Dismas, he shares, "I first learned about Dismas House at the 2017 Forgiveness Luncheon, and then made a personal connection with Gerald Brown through being classmates in Leadership Nashville. The more I learned about Dismas, the more I saw Gerald's passion for the cause, the more I saw the commitment from the staff, and the more I got to know the residents, the more I've wanted to do everything I can to help. It is virtually impossible not to be all-in when you see the difference Dismas is making in our community and for these men." We are grateful for the tremendous support of donors like Paul Connelly.



"Dismas is allowing me the opportunity to transition into my new phase of life."

—Chavez Hunter



Program Previews Are Back!

We resumed Program Previews this month and have opened our doors to individuals and organizations looking to learn more about our programs. Religion Communicators Council and 4:13 Strong recently visited Dismas House, and we hope to see you soon. Precautions are in place to ensure the safety of our residents, staff, and visitors.

If you would like to sign up for a Program Preview, please contact info@dismas.org.





PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT:

Residents Get Fit With LeanFit HIIT

Dismas House is pleased to have Blakely Dunn as our newest volunteer program provider. Blakely, a Nashville native and trainer at CrossFit Music City, began teaching LeanFit HIIT (high-intensity interval training) classes to our residents in early May. Every Monday and Wednesday at 3p.m., residents gather (more than 6 feet apart!) to exercise with Blakely virtually through Zoom. Blakely fell in love with fitness at the age of 24 while trying to quit smoking. She eventually turned her newfound passion into a career. Having known many individuals who have been impacted by incarceration and/or addiction, Blakely feels called to work with people facing these challenges. She hopes to help Dismas House residents replace addictions with fitness, as she has done, and build both confidence and physical strength through their participation in her classes.



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT:

Deb Shumann

NOURISHING THE HEART AND SOUL

Deb was introduced to Dismas House of Nashville about two years ago through a colleague who cooked community dinners at Dismas House after work. She was familiar with the organization through her work with CoreCivic but unsure of the mission and history. Intrigued, Deb decided to go check it out for herself. After her first dinner with "the guys," she was hooked. Since then, Deb has cooked many meals at Dismas as well as invited residents out for dinner. Deb feels that she learns so much and is greatly enriched by being a part of the Dismas family.



Deb moved to Nashville in 1983 from San Francisco but has lived and worked in Connecticut and Texas. She has spent most of her career in travel and events for companies like Wright Travel, Service Merchandise and Friedman's Jewelers. From 1986-1996, she served in the United States Naval Reserves and was called to active duty during Desert Storm.

Deb says, "My dinners and outings with the men at Dismas House makes me feel good. I guess it is the mother instinct coming out. I just hope my time with them helps them in a small way through their journey back into society."



Coping with COVID-19 at Dismas House

At Dismas House, the safety of our staff and residents is our top priority. As we learn more about the virus and ways to slow the spread, we are taking the following precautions:

- Since all individuals behind bars are being tested for COVID-19, our admissions manager asks applicants during their interviews if they tested positive or have been in quarantine. If they tested positive at one time, verification of a follow up test showing they are no longer positive is requested.
- We created an updated COVID-specific program agreement that outlines our COVID policies in addition to our regular policies. Once an applicant is accepted, we require that he sign this updated version of the program agreement. In it, he agrees to socially distance, wear masks and go into quarantine upon arrival for a stipulated period of time.
- Initially Dismas staff provided transportation to prisons all over the state to pick up residents up in order to lessen potential contamination. Though we still provide this service for those coming out of Middle Tennessee prisons, we ask individuals from prisons outside the region to socially distance, wear masks, gloves, and preferably not take public transportation to come to Dismas in order to lessen risk of contamination on public transportation.
- When they arrive, we assign residents to rooms on the 4th floor, where no other residents currently live.
- Once there for four-five days, we take residents to the COVID testing center at Nissan Stadium, where drive-thru wait times are 15-minute or less. Results typically arrive within two business days.
- If cleared (and no one has tested positive thus far), we move them to the main residential floors to join the rest of the resident community.
- For guests who visit Dismas House, we ask that they wear a mask and sanitize their hands upon entry. Masks are available for those in need. While meeting or touring the building, social distancing is required.
- Most programming has moved to a digital format, primarily Zoom. To cover the cost of this, we requested and were awarded a Frist technology mini grant.





2424 Charlotte Avenue
Nashville, TN 37203



BIG PAYBACK RECAP

*Thank you for your support during
The Big Payback. Because of your
commitment to help us fulfill our mission
to raise community awareness, **we
raised over \$4,100** to be used toward
general operating expenses. Thank you
for giving the gift of second chances.*



New Hospitality Suite

Residents Brian Sippos and James Brown eat breakfast
together in the new Dismas
Hospitality Center at 2424
Charlotte Avenue, Nashville!

Thank you Core Civic for your
generous support.

