

DISMAS HOUSE DIGEST

WINTER 2023 ISSUE



2023 YEAR-END RECAP

As we look ahead to a celebratory year, we reflect with gratitude on the end of 2023 and the tremendous support we received from our community.

Just before Thanksgiving, we had the pleasure of hosting the annual Father Jack Hickey Circle of Grace reception. This intimate gathering is our way of expressing gratitude to those who generously contribute \$1,000 or more each year. We deeply appreciate the steadfast commitment of our Circle of Grace members!

On Giving Tuesday, we launched our year-end giving campaign, *Where Dignity Begins*, which continued in December. Through heartfelt testimonials from former residents, we shared the profound impact of your contributions. Thanks to your generosity, we surpassed our campaign goal of \$30,000, directly benefiting our residents and their access to holistic services. We thank you for making a tangible difference in our community.

In addition to holiday celebrations at Dismas House, our residents and staff received the special opportunity to decorate a Christmas tree and enjoy lunch at the Governor's mansion. Dismas House was privileged to be among five nonprofits recognized by First Lady Maria Lee through her Tennessee Serves initiative. We are humbled by this honor and deeply appreciative of the numerous in-kind donations received at the Tennessee Residence throughout the holiday season.

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

Dear Friends,

I extend my heartfelt gratitude for your continued support of our mission. The kindness and generosity of our partners, collaborators, and community members have been the driving force behind our positive impact on the lives of returning citizens.

This year, we proudly recognize a significant milestone for Dismas House - our 50th anniversary. Founded in 1974 by Father Jack Hickey, a Vanderbilt University chaplain, the organization has remained a beacon of hope, dignity, and respect in Middle Tennessee and beyond.

In the spirit of reflection, we draw inspiration from Father Jack's words, **"When one is making the difficult transition from a life of incarceration back into the fullness of society - there is a terrible struggle that goes on. This struggle looks like courage. But the courage of those who struggle must be accompanied by the compassion of those who stand with them - because courage needs the quality of compassion in this world. The compassion of those who stand with those in struggle is the great vital sign of Dismas House."**

For our golden anniversary, I invite you to join us for a series of events and initiatives to commemorate our journey and strengthen your engagement with our mission. We look forward to celebrating our rich history with the changemakers who have been instrumental in shaping our 50-year legacy.

Warm Regards,

Kay Kretsch, CEO



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

We want to hear your story! Please contact Victoria Roth, Director of Marketing & Communications, to share your positive memories with Dismas House. Email: vroth@dismas.org.





JOIN US ON MAY 18

WHISKEY, WINE & WHISKERS

Get ready to raise your glass for the third annual Whiskey, Wine & Whiskers event! Experience unlimited tastings from the region’s favorite distilleries and wineries, live entertainment, and great company (whiskered friends) – all to support a great cause.

The third annual fundraising event will be held on Saturday, May 18 at The Horton Sobro. In honor of Dismas House’s founding year, 1974, this year’s event will be a ‘70s-themed party. We invite you to join us under the disco ball in your grooviest apparel!

We are actively seeking sponsors, vendors, and in-kind donations for the event. Please contact us to learn about a variety of opportunities for getting involved.

*Jessica Guzman, Vice President of Development:
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SCAN TO BUY TICKETS

SAVE THE DATE

Community Dinners: Quarterly

Since 1974, Community Dinners have served as a cornerstone of our mission. As part of our anniversary celebration, we invite you to join us for a special series of Community Dinners in June, September, and December. **Scan the QR code to learn more and RSVP.**



Forgiveness Gala: September 21, 2024

The culmination of our anniversary gatherings, our signature fall event will be unlike any other. This year, the traditional luncheon will be a ticketed, evening gala, taking place from 6-10 PM. Get ready to enjoy a delicious meal, dance the night away, and honor those who paved the path for positive impact in our community. Stay tuned for details!



FULFILLING DREAMS

AFTER 35 YEARS OF INCARCERATION

In a world marked by adversity and uncertainty, some perspectives shine through to remind us of the human spirit's resilience. Eddie's story is one such tale of redemption and determination that inspires us to believe in fair chances and the power of a dream.

One year ago, Eddie Williams arrived at Dismas House after 35 years of incarceration. Upon reentering society, he discovered a vastly different world than what he had formerly been a part of – at least at a glance.

"You can imagine – after being away for over three decades, there's a lot that looked different. Technology and all sorts of things. But the more things change, the more they also stay the same."

STARTING OVER

At 54 years old, the most drastic difference Eddie noticed upon release was...Eddie. Looking in the mirror, he encountered a different person from the adolescent who made regrettable decisions in 1988. He saw an adult who was starting over.

"I wasn't the same 19-year-old knucklehead anymore. Going through the system is not a joke, and it's not a game. It's very dangerous. I did what I did that got me there, and saying I regret it is an understatement. But it's the past, and I have to focus on building my future. I'm so grateful that I made it out alive, and I'll do everything in my power to make sure I don't end up there again."

Determined not to let this part of his past define him, Eddie rediscovered a dream from further back that would fuel his ambitions moving forward.

"I grew up in Memphis, and I remember playing with toy trucks as a kid. One of my friends' dads drove a semi-truck. He would park it in the neighborhood, and we all thought he was so important. That always stuck with me. I knew I wanted to drive a truck back then – all of us kids wanted that."

Over the years, he witnessed those kids become adults and achieve their goal. **"They made it happen. I was behind bars, and I heard about them getting their commercial driver's licenses and even starting their own businesses. It was amazing to hear that they were doing what we talked about and doing so well for themselves."** *(Continued on page 5)*

A STEADY AMBITION

As Eddie recognized, some facts in life don't change. One such area is the outcome of hard work. Soon after arriving at Dismas House, Eddie worked with his case manager to establish a personal reentry plan, which outlined a strategy for obtaining his CDL. To reach that point, Eddie would need to enroll in a driver's training school – a costly, time-intensive endeavor. As Eddie began a part-time job to save funds, a member of the supportive employment team discovered a grant that would cover the cost of Eddie's classes.

Eddie enrolled in school and continued working while completing his education. For months, studying and practicing driver's tests consumed any free time. Along the way, he experienced several setbacks but never lost his motivation.

In recent weeks, Eddie excitedly shared, **"I finally finished – it's finally a reality. After all these years, I will be able to drive a truck."**

The joy in his voice was palpable as he reached toward his pocket, **"I just picked up the license – I can't believe it. I told my friends that I finally caught up with them. They all told me, 'We knew you would.'"**

A MEANINGFUL ACCOMPLISHMENT

To Eddie, a CDL is more than what meets the eye. **"When I passed that test, I felt the same way I felt walking out of prison. It felt like a new door had opened. The support I've received at Dismas House helped a childhood dream come true."**

A CDL means freedom. It means establishing a career that will allow him to purchase his first house and live independently – a milestone decades in the making. It means relocating back to Memphis and being surrounded by his family. It means reconnecting with the friends who never stopped believing in his dream.

"This past Thanksgiving, I got to enjoy my first holiday meal with my Mother since 1987. Sitting around the table with my family, I couldn't help but think about how good it felt. I don't take that for granted. I'm taking care of myself and becoming the person I want to be so I can get back home. Everything is falling into place, and it's time for life to really begin."



THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING RESIDENTS LIKE EDDIE. EACH MONTH, WE SHARE STORIES OF IMPACT LIKE THIS FROM THE DISMAS HOUSE FAMILY. TO HEAR MORE, VISIT [DISMAS.ORG/STORIES](https://dismas.org/stories).



DISMAS HOUSE

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MAKE YOUR IMPACT

There are numerous ways to support Dismas House and make an impact in the lives of returning citizens. We are grateful for each vital role that our community members play in our mission to end the cycle of incarceration.

"I'VE BEEN TEACHING YOGA AT DISMAS HOUSE SINCE WE WERE AT THE MUSIC ROW HOUSE. I'M SO GRATEFUL FOR THIS EXPERIENCE AND HOPE I CAN PLAY A SMALL ROLE IN HELPING SET RESIDENTS' MINDS AT EASE AS THEY REENTER SOCIETY." - MARY BETH, VOLUNTEER



*VIEW VOLUNTEER
OPPORTUNITIES*



SCAN TO DONATE

To learn more about volunteer and donation opportunities, visit dismas.org.