

# GMC NEWS



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GEORGETOWN MINISTRY CENTER

## CENTER REOPENS

Our grand reopening was a smash hit. We had a great crowd on short notice. The space once closed off with cubicles is now wide open. There were two people from The Current, a reporter from the Georgetown Patch, and one from the Georgetown Dish. As the reporters peppered us with questions I began to realize that this was an evolution of thinking. How did we come to this expansion?

A few years ago the new condos in the West End began to fill with affluent new residents who found the conditions in the library at 24th and L uncomfortable at best. Rules were made.

Only one bag per person. And there was a size limit. No duffel bags. Soon the homeless who had found the library to be a hospitable respite from the heat and the cold were no longer feeling welcome.

My own reaction was a mix of understanding the feelings of the new community members and wanting to do something for the homeless people. Thus began our quest to build an alternative to the library. At first we conceived an internet cafe.

We realized that our space was inadequate for the purpose. We went out looking for a larger space in the community for our cafe/clubhouse. Churches had no space to spare. Landlords did not want a homeless program in their space. We realized we couldn't move our program space but our administrative needs were a different story. So we moved admin out and there was a lot more space to work with. Before we could find an architect a design team from HOK just across the street stepped forward to volunteer their services. Chloe Hiyu, Nita Tuveson, Esther Simon, and Ming Hu took the time to understand what we needed and conceived the perfect plan for our project. When we needed additional help they brought in META Engineers Paul MacDonald and Cindy Ladewig who volunteered engineering services.

It is never easy to envision the finished product while looking at drawings. When Kadcon Construction turned the space back over to us in mid-July we could not believe how great the transformation was. It is amazing. Come by and check it out. Everyone is welcome! (See related story on page 2.)

—Gunther Stern



## GREGORY

It is almost five years since Gregory died. He had been sick. We had been talking to him about going to the hospital but he refused. We had been discussing an involuntary hospitalization. He had been throwing up; he was weak and not eating. He left one morning and never came back. We soon learned that he had passed away. My recollection is that I went to the medical examiner's office and identified the body. How jaded is that. I can't remember if he was one of the ones I have identified. It is the grimmest of duties. Even if you are a regular you have to meet with the grief counselor. He is solemn as he goes over your options for counseling, even though you assure him you have been there before and know the drill...and anyway, "I'm not family." Nothing really prepares you for the picture they show you, the disembodied head, body completely covered, wrapped in a shocking white sheet. The hair is neatly combed in a way it never was in life. It takes a few seconds to process the visage, distorted by death and the unfamiliar hairstyle. In the end the features that are Greg emerge. Yes, that is Greg.

All this comes flooding back in a coffee shop in Wheaton recently, where I am meeting his two adult children and their families. Matthew and his wife and Annie, her husband, and a young son and daughter. They are so normal. They are here to appreciate the support Gregory got from GMC in the last days of his life and perhaps to understand their father. They are well adjusted, articulate, smart, thoughtful people. They exemplify the success their father should have had.

They knew him well. Though they were young when he left, they had talked to him by phone and visited him in the different places as he moved around the country trying to escape his demons. Gregory was a constitutional lawyer whose career was derailed by a raging depression and the resulting psychosis. He learned that alcohol deadened the symptoms, quieted the voices raging, disparaging, and condescending inside his brain. Though it might be hard for his children to understand, he was not running away from them. He was saving them from the demons within him.

It was often easy to see the torturous thoughts that were contorting his face as he sat there glassy-eyed on his favorite bench by the C&O Canal. The bench where he was picked up by the paramedics in his final hours. The smile on his face was the kind of smile that one has while enduring a verbal assault and can do nothing but endure. The kind of smile that is an embarrassed, humiliated, and what else can I do but smile. The attack comes from invisible assailants. His very private battle is contained in his brain, silent to the many passers-by.

When he was revived at the hospital he was told he needed an operation that would save his life and that he could not live without (Gregory, continued on page 3)

## CLUBHOUSE MODEL

Georgetown Ministry Center has always viewed itself as a community and family. Strong relationships have been built between staff and participants, and we are continually focused on empowering people to move to the next level. We are currently working to apply different aspects of a clubhouse rehabilitation model to help us develop programming that reflects these core



elements of GMC.

Clubhouses exist throughout the world and have proven to be a successful model for psychiatric rehabilitation. Official clubhouses are certified by the International Center for Clubhouse Development, and while GMC is unlikely to seek certification any time soon, we are working to implement some of the key principles of a clubhouse model at our center.

Participants in a clubhouse are called members, and membership is completely voluntary. Those who choose membership are invited to be involved in key decision-making processes. On Tuesdays at 2:30, we have started holding house meetings, when staff and members discuss programs and other concerns.

Members like Christine appreciate that “you can just walk in here and be a member. . . . Everyone can treat this like a home.” Another member, Nhiahni, thinks the house meetings are a great addition to GMC and that “it’s [the center] improving, because y’all are . . . letting us make some decisions. We don’t always have to get



what we want, but at least we get our foot in the door.”

With a clubhouse model, staff and members work side by side in day-to-day operations. Staff and members work together to mop, clean the bathrooms, and clean the kitchen. We are also beginning to train members to run the shower and laundry program. Also, we are beginning a technology group where members will train one another in computer use. The shared responsibility and joint work will continue to expand over time.

Training members to clean the center effectively results in not only new skill sets but also pride in the space where guests and members come together to be a family. While discussing cleaning up

at the end of the day during a house meeting, Nhiahni explained why she enjoys staying to help staff: “When I have my own place, I want to be able to do what I put in here. If I don’t learn anything else, I’ll know how to mop the floors, do the dishes, do some dusting, put the dishes away. . . . This is a stepping stone. If you’re going to do it here, when you get your own home, you’re going to do it there.”

In order to help members grow and become invested in the clubhouse, we are developing informational workshops. To this end, GMC staff member Tobias Brown, a current law student, led a Know Your Rights workshop, and we are trying to line others up to do presentations about housing options in DC, getting medical insurance, and other issues that directly impact our members.

Finally, we believe in having fun! We have a Scrabble tournament scheduled, will have monthly birthday celebrations, and expect to do many more activities that strengthen social skills and build relationships. First and foremost is creating a safe, welcoming environment for everybody. The clubhouse is “a place to meet different types of people,” says Clarence. “A lot is going to happen [on the streets] to everyone in here, but this is a place to come and collect your thoughts. It’s a warm place to come to, it really is.”

—Stephanie Chan & Kyla Dixon

## PAYPAL

We have taken credit cards through Network for Good for several years now but it has become very costly. We started experimenting with PayPal last year. PayPal does not charge non-profits, such as ours, monthly fees and discounts the per-donation fee significantly. The fees are relatively small, but for a locally focused organization like ours, the monthly fees add up and the reduced per-donation fees of PayPal are compelling.

PayPal does encourage donors to open a PayPal account but you don’t have to, and you can quickly navigate around the offer and get on with the donation. On the other hand, if you have a PayPal account you know it’s a breeze. You can use most credit cards or do a secure bank transfer. It is very flexible.

In the end, good old paper checks and the U.S. Postal Service are still the best. There is no fee. But if you prefer to use your credit card and make an online donation, then rest assured your donation is making more of an impact with our PayPal account.



## SPIRIT OF GEORGETOWN

If you did not get your invitation then we made a mistake, or the post office did, but we want to get one to you. Just give us a call at (202) 338-8301 or email us at [info@gmcgt.org](mailto:info@gmcgt.org) and we will get one out to you right away. You can also log onto [spiritofgeorgetown.org](http://spiritofgeorgetown.org) and register in a flash. The 2011 Spirit of Georgetown Benefit will honor Page and Howard Smith on Thursday, October 13, 2011, and will be hosted at the lovely home of Nancy Jacobson and Mark Penn. Please consider supporting us with your attendance at this great annual event.

## TASTE OF GEORGETOWN

Make sure to block out Saturday, October 15, 2011, from 11 a.m. until 4 p.m. on your calendar. The 18th Annual Taste of Georgetown will showcase the spectacular cuisine of 30 of Washington, DC's finest restaurants, highlighting Georgetown's culinary personalities and featuring nearly 60 delectable dishes to sample, as well as wine pairings and the jazz talents of Blues Alley.

The Taste of Georgetown has become the premier food and wine festival of DC. Proceeds benefit Georgetown Ministry Center's services supporting the homeless. Get more information at <http://www.tasteofgeorgetown.com>.

Entry into the Taste of Georgetown does not require a ticket, but tasting the delicious entrees by Washington, DC's best does! For \$5: one tasting ticket; \$20: five tasting tickets.

You may purchase tickets at the event at the Eagle Bank parking lot at Wisconsin and Grace Street. In-person ticket sales begin at 11:00 a.m. and end at 3:30 p.m.

Tickets are now available for purchase online.

*(Gregory, continued from page 1)*

it. He refused the surgery. Perhaps he was deliberately choosing to end this lifetime of torture. Perhaps he really did not understand the consequences of his decision.

As we sat there talking, Matthew asked at one point if there were something that the family could have done to have relieved him from his tortured odyssey. Annie wondered what responsibility Greg had for his condition.

What occurred to me at that moment is that they needed to blame themselves or him or somebody for what was nothing other than an unavoidable tragedy. A one-man natural disaster. A family tsunami. There was nothing that anyone could have done differently. He could not save himself because he had very little insight into his illness. He could not have been saved by his family because our laws make it very difficult to intervene.

In the end it is our society that has failed to make the connection between the dirty, disheveled homeless man and the person he should have been. We have created laws that protect the right of someone with little or no insight into his illness to make poor decisions that lead to a tortured existence on the street. The next time you see a homeless man or woman on the street, try not to avert your eyes. Look into his or her eyes and think about what might have been had there been an earlier intervention. Think about the children, the wives, mothers, husbands, and fathers left behind. We can do better.

—*Gunther Stern*

*When I think about these things I invariably think of the Treatment Advocacy Center in Arlington, Virginia, which advocates for more aggressive treatment of people with mental illness. See <http://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org>*

## Board of Directors

<i>Christ Church, Georgetown</i>	Catherine Ballinger Elizabeth Bluhm
<i>Dumbarton United Methodist Church</i>	Martha Dickey Ester Dijkstra
<i>Epiphany Roman Catholic Church</i>	Susan Gschwendner Won Park
<i>First Baptist Church, Georgetown</i>	Barbara Hargroves Vinette Saunders
<i>Georgetown Lutheran Church</i>	Connie Baker Christine Traugott
<i>Georgetown Presbyterian Church</i>	Alexander Bullock Tracy Davis
<i>Georgetown University</i>	Linda Greenan
<i>Grace Episcopal Church</i>	Drew Davis Kimberly Ludwig
<i>Holy Trinity Catholic Church</i>	Linda Formella Joe Ryan
<i>Kesher Israel, Georgetown Synagogue</i>	Jessica Ribner
<i>Mt. Zion United Methodist Church</i>	Essie Page
<i>St. John's Episcopal Church</i>	Jocelyn Dyer
<i>St. Luke's United Methodist Church</i>	Dorothy Preston
<i>St. Paul's K Street</i>	Eric Lobsinger
<i>St. Stephen the Martyr</i>	Jackie Durham

### And from the community...

<i>Citizens Association of Georgetown</i>	Dick Stoll
<i>Community Representative</i>	Beth Neilsen
<i>Georgetown Business Association</i>	Rokas Beresniovas
<i>Georgetown BID</i>	James Bracco
<i>Georgetown Clergy Association</i>	John Graham

## Officers

<b>President</b>	Joe Ryan
<b>Vice President</b>	Dick Stoll
<b>Treasurer</b>	John Lange
<b>Secretary</b>	Jocelyn Dyer

## Staff

<b>Executive Director</b>	Gunther Stern
<b>Outreach Director</b>	Roy Witherspoon
<b>Business Manager</b>	Dymenn Sasser
<b>Program Coordinator</b>	Stephanie Chan
<b>Shower Program Managers</b>	Tobias Brown Dorothy Preston
<b>Consulting Psychiatrist</b>	Ron Koshes, M.D.
<b>Development Director</b>	Claire Spencer-Spears

## NEW STAFF

This summer brings two new employees to the Georgetown Ministry Center: Dymenn Sasser, GMC's Business Manager, and Stephanie Chan, Program Coordinator. Dymenn, who graduated from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, joined Georgetown Ministry Center in March to handle the broad details of the business side of GMC, including payroll, fundraising events such as Help the Homeless, and our sandwich calendar. Her organizational skills not only keep the administrative side of GMC running smoothly, but also allow other staff members to focus on outreach and programming.

Stephanie, who started with GMC in July, was brought aboard to manage GMC's new clubhouse. A recent graduate from Trinity College in Hartford, CT, Stephanie spent the past three summers working in a homeless shelter in her hometown of Boston. There, she did everything from prepping hot meals, working in development, and teaching a knitting and crocheting class. As Program Coordinator, Stephanie leads the center's morning meetings and weekly house meeting (to gather feedback and discuss issues relating to day-to-day operations), as well plans events and programming for the center, such as a Scrabble tournament and a Know Your Rights workshop. She is also training members to help keep the center clean by creating task groups to monitor the kitchen area, operate the laundry machines, and clean at the end of the day. With Stephanie on board, the GMC vision of a clubhouse model is gradually falling into place.

Georgetown Ministry Center  
1041 Wisconsin Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20007



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## WINTER SHELTER

The Winter Shelter is scheduled to reopen on Sunday, November 6. In case you don't know, this is a community based shelter that would not exist without the generosity and concern of the supporting congregations. GMC brings the cots, staff, and residents, who are chosen for their ability to get along in a small community. They are vulnerable and resist the bigger, tougher shelters in the area. As it turns out, our residents have entertained the volunteers from the congregations with lively chatter about current events and life. Please let us know if you would like to be part of this effort. We will always need dinner volunteers to contribute some part of the dinner, overnight volunteers to support the staff person, and drivers to move the shelter on the Sunday moving days. You can email me at [Roy@gmcgt.org](mailto:Roy@gmcgt.org)

—Roy Witherspoon



31661 on the CFC

9635 on the United Way