



- Volunteers of America – Minnesota will be moving approximately 20 full-time jobs and \$850,000 in annual payroll to 1394 Jackson Street. This equates to approximately 14 jobs per acre, which is well in line with the targets set by the St. Paul Port Authority. It is anticipated that the existing business operations within the Jackson Street building will remain in the area. The area will see a net gain in employment.
- Volunteers of America – Minnesota will be investing approximately \$750,000 in upgrading the existing building, improving aesthetics and efficiency, and improving sidewalk access along Jackson Street from the property to Arlington. This public-use sidewalk will be paid for by VOA. In the past decade, the City of St. Paul has approved improvements to the existing structure, including an elevator, worth more than \$250,000. VOA will leave the existing floor plan basically intact.
- Volunteers of America – Minnesota and its Residential Re-Entry Centers have a track record of working with neighbors and building community. Each Residential Re-Entry Center has a Community Relations Board that meets regularly with neighbors to ensure open communication and provide a forum to address any issues that arise. VOA's Residential Re-Entry Center in Minneapolis was recently recognized with a Community Investment and Leadership Award by the Lake Street Council, and was awarded a grant in March 2012 from the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs to fund a community-based urban gardening initiative.
- Volunteers of America – Minnesota is a non-profit organization but has offered to work with the City of St. Paul on an appropriate level of payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) on the Jackson Street property.
- Volunteers of America – Minnesota is a property owner in St. Paul and successfully operates two programs benefiting St. Paul residents. An active participant in the neighborhoods it serves, VOA is committed to keeping up its properties and recently completed more than \$100,000 in renovations and upgrades to its St. Paul properties.
- Volunteers of America – Minnesota has a long history in St. Paul of uplifting the lives of St. Paul residents. Dating back more than 100 years, VOA's footprint can be found in the lives of St. Paul residents; approximately one in five of those served through the existing Residential Re-Entry Center call St. Paul home.
- Volunteers of America – Minnesota has offered the St. Paul Port Authority the right of first refusal to purchase the site should VOA no longer be in use of the site; the Port Authority has declined VOA's offer. VOA will likewise extend an offer of first refusal of the site to the City of St. Paul for its consideration.



- The Jackson Street property has been on the open market for well over one year, available for other parties to pursue. To the knowledge of VOA and its brokers, the St. Paul Port Authority has not sought to purchase this property for its use despite it being openly marketed.
- The Jackson Street property was originally built in 1968 with an institutional use in mind. Operating under the name Norhaven for more than three decades, the building housed up to 108 women with developmental disabilities. For the past decade, the property has seen a variety of uses including office space, a night club, a restaurant, small businesses and an adult day care. VOA's appeal seeks use up to 74 residents, far less than past use and far less than the City zoning code presently permits for uses not requiring a conditional use permit.
- The Jackson Street property is zoned I-1. Some institutional residential uses, such as a sober house, are permitted without any conditions while others, such as VOA's re-entry program, are permitted subject to conditions. Several other similar properties operate in Ramsey County in similar zonings with conditions. The current Residential Re-Entry Center just two miles away on Kent Street in Roseville has been operating successfully since 1985. Volunteers of America – Minnesota seeks to re-locate this existing program to Jackson Street, and according to Roseville Chief of Police Rick Mathwig “the(ir) need relocate should not constitute an unnecessary safety concern for any municipality or landowner considering their request.”



We have been reviewed by the Minnesota Charities Review Council and are proud to have met its Accountability Standards.



1896: Volunteers of America founded by Ballington and Maude Booth; Maude Booth begins work with prisoners on transforming their lives.

1926: VOA's St. Paul chapter serves 122 parolees in St. Paul through its Volunteer Prison League; the league helped provide parolees with job training, education and housing as they transitioned back into the community.

1968: VOA -- Minnesota signs first contract with Federal Bureau of Prisons to place pre-release prisoners and temporarily operates on Portland Avenue in Minneapolis.

1974: VOA relocates the Residential Re-Entry Center to Lake Street in Minneapolis under contract with federal government.

1984: VOA leases Woodview site from Ramsey County for use as a medium security "workhouse alternative" for women, and a Residential Re-entry Center under a federal Bureau of Prisons contract. Original lease value was \$50,000/year VOA operates under ongoing leases with Ramsey County as renewed in 1987, 1991, 1996, 2000, 2003, 2007 and 2008.

2008: Ramsey County board transfers the women's program to a newly constructed county operated facility and discusses plans to develop Woodview site and notifies VOA of intent to not re-renew lease.

April 22, 2009: VOA indicates its desire to renew the lease at the Woodview facility by letter to County Manager.

June 15, 2009: County Property Manager conveys VOA offer to renew lease to all Commissioners via memorandum.

June 23, 2009: VOA makes presentation to Ramsey County Commissioners at a Board workshop. Commissioner Rettman indicated that the Board was clear two years ago that VOA needed to find another location; Commissioners Reinhardt, Carter and McDonough preferred some use versus being vacant; Commissioner Ortega recommended consultation with Commissioner Parker (absent) on preferences as the area's commissioner. September 1, 2009: Ramsey County Board votes to extend lease from January 1, 2010, through December 31, 2011 at a rate of \$12,500/month (\$150,000/year), with an option for renewal for January 1, 2012 through December 31, 2013.

August 2011: County and VOA execute 9th Amendment to the Woodview lease (the final option year under the lease) December 5, 2011: VOA President/CEO and VP Strategy and Operations meet with Ramsey County Manager and Property Manager to discuss option of purchasing Woodview property. County staff indicated they felt it would be unlikely, but indicated VOA could provide a formal offer for action.



April 17, 2012: VOA Vice President of Strategy and Operations tours two county properties with County Property Manager as possible rental options.

May 22, 2012: VOA Vice Presidents meet with Commissioner Rettman and County Manager to discuss Jackson Street use and Commissioner Rettman's letter in opposition. Commissioner Rettman mentions possible interest in discussing VOA purchase of Woodview.

June 8, 2012: VOA VP meets with County Property Manager to receive Woodview and vacant parcel information to review for development. VOA staff begins work internally on possible plans to develop site. Work is ongoing.
January 2013: Federal contract request/solicitation expected to be released for 2014 – 2018 contract period, requires proof from VOA of properly zoned facility under organizational control and with an expected capacity of at least 74 residents in order to apply for a new contract.



We have been reviewed by the Minnesota Charities Review Council and are proud to have met its Accountability Standards.

The Volunteers of America

HEADQUARTERS

306 Dakota Building

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA

Cedar 6580 - 4520

MAJOR AND MRS. IRVING STARR

Representatives for Minnesota



ANNUAL REPORT

1926

ACTIVITIES

INDUSTRIAL:

What is this Industrial Home? It is a place where the waste of your home is collected by men who want a chance to earn a living until something better can be found for them. Your newspapers, magazines, old clothes, shoes, furniture, etc., will enable us to keep this work going and thereby help thousands of men and women to get a new start.

INGLESIDE CLUB:

Our Girl's Club provides a home and safeguards the working girl earning her livelihood away from home and friends. It is some compensation as well as encouragement to receive from parents and relatives letters overflowing with assurances of gratitude for having protected their daughters.

FRESH AIR CAMP:

The Fresh Air Camp of the Volunteers of America, located on the North Oaks Farm is for working mothers and their children. Our aim is to take away all care and worry for two weeks by giving them a real vacation. This means all that the mothers and children want to eat, all the milk they can drink, home made butter, plenty of fresh air and rest. The mothers are taught to sew, each one being given a new piece of material which she makes into a garment. Hundreds of yards of material are given each year for this purpose by Mrs. L. W. Hill. Recreation consists of; swings, slides, teeter-totters, sand boxes, base ball, volley ball, tennis, swimming, shower baths and entertainments given by local talent.

THANKSGIVING:

300 families were the happy recipients last Thanksgiving of a well filled bushel basket. These baskets contain enough food to last a week for the ordinary size family. The baskets are delivered to the homes the day before Thanksgiving and many a sad story is told to those who go into the homes with these baskets.

CHRISTMAS:

From one hundred to one hundred and fifty families are visited each year to find out the size of the clothing that is needed. Each child receives just what is needed including shoes, stockings, underwear, caps, mittens, pants, blouses, dresses, sweaters, coats, overcoats, rubbers, overshoes, toys and candy. This does not include all of our Christmas work. Baskets are given to those who need food, fuel is also provided where it is needed. Hundreds of boxes of candy are sent to children in the hospitals.

Paroled men 122

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

	Receipts	Disbursements
General Work.....	\$10,620.23	\$ 6,550.00
Industrial.....	9,783.73	13,204.10
Spiritual.....	1,001.70	1,294.38
Ingleside Club.....	3,001.93	4,832.85
Fresh Air Camp.....	4,821.02	4,945.83
Relief and Special Relief.....	5,682.18	5,188.54
	\$34,910.79	\$36,024.70
Balance from January, 1926....	5,028.93	3,915.02

CHARLES J. DEWEY,
Auditor.

LOCAL BOARD

President	Vice-President
W. B. GEERY, Deputy Governor, Federal Reserve Bank	J. E. BURCHARD, Real Estate
Treasurer	Secretary
J. A. GREGG, Nicols, Dean & Gregg	W. F. SAILOR, Mack Truck Corp.
HON. L. C. HODGSON, Mayor	L. H. ICKLER, Pres. American Nat'l Bank
CHAS. PATTERSON, Pres. O'Donnel Shoe Co	G. P. LYMAN, C. B. & Q. R. R.
C. H. BIGELOW, Pres. Farwell, Ozmun, Kirk & Co.	A. W. LINDEKE
THOS. McDERMOTT, Denegre & McDermott, Attorneys	D. C. SHEPARD, II, Pres. Nat'l Exchange Bank
	RALPH BUDD, President G. N. Ry.

CONSULTING PHYSICIANS

B. F. SIMON, M. D. City Board of Health	E. I. BROWN, M. D.
F. G. CARTER, M. D. Ancker Hospital	A. E. COMSTOCK, M. D.
EUGENE HUBBELL, M. D.	T. R. MORGAN, D. D. S.
W. W. LEWIS, M. D. Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat	DR. WM. H. ECKLEY, Osteopath
	DR. S. D. FOSTER, Osteopath

GENERAL WELFARE WORK

RELIEF DEPARTMENT.

Families visited.....	1,858
Charity Beds.....	1,079
Meals.....	2,407
Coal given, pounds.....	80,000
Employment found.....	722
Garments.....	3,004
Shoes.....	291
Medical aid.....	169
Paroled men.....	122
Transportation.....	126
Hospital visitation.....	1,246
Magazines to hospitals.....	12,724

INGLESIDE CLUB.

Meals paid.....	8,642
Meals free.....	3,150
Beds paid.....	3,635
Beds free.....	1,029
Charity Meals.....	250
Charity Beds.....	108

INDUSTRIAL.

Meals paid.....	6,047
Beds paid.....	1,985
Charity beds.....	497
Charity meals.....	987

FRESH AIR CAMP.

Number given outing.....	1,350
Number meals.....	28,350
Clothing.....	915
Medical attention.....	75

THANKSGIVING.

Number of meals.....	3,100
Number of baskets.....	300

CHRISTMAS.

Clothing and Shoes.....	2,850
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WE HAVE NO PART IN THE COMMUNITY CHEST



BYLAWS PROTOTYPE

Community Relations Board of the Volunteers of America–Minnesota Residential Reentry Center (RRC)

ARTICLE I

General Information

Section 1. Purpose and Limits of the Community Relations Board. The purpose of the Community Relations Board (CRB) is to provide a means of mutual communication and support between the Volunteers of America-Minnesota (VOA) Residential Reentry Center (RRC) and its local communities. While the CRB has no formal advisory function to the internal affairs of the RRC, its purpose is to serve as a two-way communication link between the RRC and community leadership, and to advance public education, understanding, and advocacy for issues concerning the RRC.

Section 2. Objectives of the CRB. The CRB is formed and intended to benefit the RRC and the community by increasing public awareness of and education about the mission of the RRC and the Bureau of Prisons; coordinating the RRC operations with local law enforcement activities; assessing the impact of the RRC on the community; and increasing the RRC's involvement in community affairs and services.

Section 3. Location. The principal offices of the CRB shall be the Volunteers of America-Minnesota RRC at (address).

Section 4. Non-discrimination Policy. The CRB shall not practice policies of discrimination toward any community or individuals based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, physical or mental disability, age, retaliation, or sexual orientation.

ARTICLE II

Members

Section 1. Membership. Standing membership of the CRB shall include the managers of the RRC, the Community Corrections Manager (CCM) of the Bureau of Prisons and the Minnesota Corrections Association (MCA). In addition, consideration for membership shall be given to citizens representing local and federal law enforcement; city, county or township government; businesses and civic organizations (ex. Chamber of Commerce, Lions, Rotary, Kiwanis); councils of churches and other religious organizations; school boards; health care organizations; and media groups. CRB members may work closely with local law enforcement, government, business, civic, education and training, health care, pre-release, and religious agencies and organizations. Other interested citizens may also be considered for membership irrespective of any above mentioned affiliation.

Section 2. Selection of Members. Initially and for the duration of the CRB, the RRC managers shall select CRB members. The managers shall base their assessment on the individual's potential to develop opportunities for mutual assistance and support. The managers may solicit citizens for membership and may also respond to an interested citizen's request for membership appointment. Sole discretion for membership appointment rests with the managers.

Section 3. Removal of Members. Members of the CRB may be removed by the managers of the RRC for any reason that does not violate the ARTICLE I, Section 4, Non-discrimination Policy.

Section 4. Membership Term. Membership shall be on-going until resignation of membership or removal of membership by the RRC managers.

ARTICLE III

Meetings of Members

Section 1. Regular Meetings. The CRB shall meet quarterly each calendar year. Meetings shall be held at the RCC located at (address). Meetings shall be held to accommodate members' schedules to the extent possible, therefore, meeting dates shall be established on an on-going basis.

Section 2. Notice of Meetings. Notice of meetings shall be given to each member at an address designated by such member or to the last known address of such member, by handing a copy thereof to such member, or by any other delivery that is standard and customary. Notice of meetings scheduled shall be provided to each member not less than ten (10) days prior to the date of such meeting. Notice by mail shall be deemed given when deposited in the United States mail with sufficient postage affixed. Any member may waive notice of any meeting of members. Waiver of notice shall be effective whether given before, at, or after the meeting and whether given orally, in writing, or by attendance. The waiver shall be recorded by the secretary, who shall enter it upon the records of the meeting. Attendance by a member at a meeting is a waiver of notice of that meeting.

ARTICLE IV

Officers

Section 1. Authority. The RRC recognizes the importance of appointing officers to fulfill the administrative functions of the CRB. These Bylaws are not intended to reflect in any way that the officers, by virtue of appointment, have any formal function or authority within the RRC nor that the officers have greater influence or power than the other members of the CRB.

Section 2. Appointment of Officers. The following officers of the CRB shall be appointed by the manager of the RRC for a term of one year: Moderator, Vice Moderator, Secretary. Unlimited consecutive terms may be served by any individual appointed to an officer position. The RRC manager may be appointed to any officer position.

Section 3. Moderator. The moderator shall preside at meetings of the CRB. The moderator shall direct the general management of the business of the CRB, including facilitation of all meetings at which the moderator is present.

Section 4. Vice-Moderator. The vice-moderator shall perform such duties as the moderator may prescribe from time to time. In the absence of the moderator, the vice-moderator shall perform the duties of the moderator.

Section 5. Secretary. The secretary shall record all proceedings of the meetings of the members in a book to be kept for that purpose. The secretary shall give, or cause to be given, notices of meetings and meeting minutes to the members. In the case of her absence, the moderator shall cause such notices to be given. The secretary shall be the custodian of all books, correspondence and papers relating to the business of the CRB, except those maintained by the moderator and vice-moderator. The secretary shall perform such other duties as the moderator or vice-moderator may prescribe from time to time.

Section 6. Removal of Officers. Officers of the CRB may be removed by the manager of the RRC for any reason that does not violate the ARTICLE I, Section 4, Non-discrimination Policy.

ARTICLE V
BYLAW REVISION

Section 1. Amendments. The VOA Director of Services for Adults Completing Rehabilitation Programs may amend CRB's Bylaws to omit or include any provision which could be lawfully omitted or included at the time of such amendment or inclusion. Notification of the revised Bylaws shall be given to each member at an address designated by such member or to the last known address of such member, by handing a copy thereof to such member, or by any other delivery that is standard and customary. Notice of Bylaw amendments shall be provided not more than sixty (60) days from the date of the amendment. Notice by mail shall be deemed given when deposited in the United States mail with sufficient postage affixed. Any member may waive notice of Bylaw amendments. Waiver of notice shall be effective whether given before, at, or after a meeting and whether given orally or in writing. The waiver shall be recorded by the secretary, who shall enter it upon the records of the CRB.

The undersigned, as Director of Services for Adults Completing Rehabilitation Programs at Volunteers of America, hereby certifies that the foregoing Bylaws of CRB were adopted as of (date).

X_____ Date: _____

Director, Services for Adults Completing Rehabilitation Programs
Volunteers of America-Minnesota

Jerome Burkhart, age 46

Jerome Burkhart grew up on the streets of Chicago. The youngest of seven children, his single mother did the best she could, but young Jerome was typically unsupervised and on his own. He started running with a rough crowd and got into using and selling drugs by the time he was in 8th grade. Before long, he dropped out of high school.

“I was just living day to day. I didn’t care about the future,” Jerome reflects. “I didn’t have any goals and was using heroin. Selling drugs was a quick way to make a buck.”

Jerome fathered two children in Chicago. Then, he visited friends in Minneapolis, liked the city and decided to stay. In a few months, he moved into the home of his girlfriend and her two children.

All along, Jerome continued to use heroin. He knew he needed to get off drugs or he’d end up dead. In despair, Jerome burglarized a jewelry store. He knew he wouldn’t get away with the crime, and getting caught didn’t bother him – he could get clean in jail.

When Jerome found himself entering the Moose Lake Correctional Facility in November 2008, he made a commitment to change his life. He also participated in a chemical dependency program and family strengthening course at the facility. Jerome knew he had to have a high school diploma in order to make it on the outside, so education was also a goal. He started out with very little confidence in his academic ability, but with hard work and the help of inmate tutors, Jerome earned a diploma in just three months.

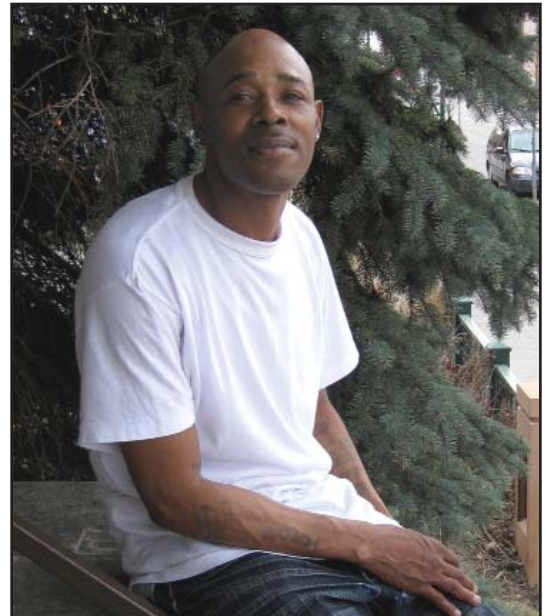
Eleven months later, Jerome was eligible for work release. He was given the choice of several reentry programs and selected the Volunteers of America-Minnesota’s Residential Reentry Center (RRC) on East Lake Street in Minneapolis. The facility provides residential reentry services for men who are allowed to complete part of their prison sentences in the community and offers them an opportunity to become accountable, productive, tax paying citizens, while avoiding further involvement in the criminal justice system. “The residents at [the RRC] are different than [those at] most other facilities,” says Jerome. “They want to transform their lives for the better.”

When asked what life is like for an RRC resident, Jerome explains, “[The RRC] has a lot of rules. Even though some of the rules sound stupid, they are for your own good even though you may not realize it at the time. Also, you need to be accountable. [The RRC] needs to know exactly where you are at all times, so they can have your back.”

“They help you find a job if you apply yourself – you have to take their programs and classes. They help you with your resume and help you change your life and attitude,” reports Jerome. “The [RRC] facility has been good to me. They helped me get a job at Target Field working in the food warehouse. I deliver the food to the concessions. I got the job in January 2010, when it was only 2 degrees. I had to stand outside in line for three days in a row. I was one of 1,500 people who got a job out of the 5,000 people who applied. I started the job in February, part-time. Now I have been moved to 40 plus hours a week. I would never have gotten this job if it weren’t for the [RRC]. It feels good to have a bank account. And, it feels so good to have financial stability from a job because I really earned it,” Jerome says.

When asked what pearls of wisdom he has acquired from his past transgressions and incarceration, Jerome reports, “Drug dealing messes up people’s whole family. My past actions had a negative affect on others—my family and the drug users—their thoughts and their lifestyle.

{over}



I used to think I was the victim. But I have learned it's important to take responsibility and move on. You can't blame your problems on someone else," he says. "It's important to turn a negative into a positive. The consequences you experience are a direct result of the choices you make. It all reflects back on you," he reveals.

When Jerome finishes the program at the RRC, he has hopes of becoming a chemical dependency counselor and is already enrolled in classes at Minneapolis Community and Technical College. He'd also like to have a home someday where his kids and family know they are welcome.

"I have been so blessed—I don't want that blessing to go away," Jerome explains.

Rhonda Peterson, age 40

Rhonda was a kind-hearted, compassionate child. At age eight, she told her mother that she'd like to begin donating a portion of her allowance to "Feed the Children" after witnessing the faces of needy children with deep eyes and cheerless expressions on television. Other than that, Rhonda says that her life growing up in Ham Lake, "was pretty normal, pretty average. I had friends and played in the neighborhood, like most kids do." Sadly, her father died of a heart attack when she was just thirteen, and her brother, who was significantly older, moved out of the house leaving Rhonda and her mother by themselves. "It got kind of lonely," she explains.

Rhonda was an extremely busy teen. Her high energy level combined with a strong work ethic had her working two part-time jobs by the time she graduated from high school. Then suddenly, her mother passed away from a brain aneurism—tragically on Rhonda's 18th birthday.

Life changed significantly after that. She lived alone in the family home and started working 65-hours a week. Rhonda had trouble making ends meet and was exhausted all of the time. Finally, she obtained a full-time administrative job at Medtronic with a normal, less demanding schedule. Rhonda loved her job and excelled at her work. However, after eight years she met Jim (not his real name), a charming young man who had inherited a substantial amount of money. Rhonda knew she was deeply in love. Jim persuaded Rhonda to sell her home, quit her job and move in with him. And for the next year or so, the couple traveled around Minnesota building houses. "It was really hard work, but I've always liked being active and outside. I enjoy doing manual labor—I like to work with my hands," Rhonda reports. The work was physically and mentally taxing. To help Rhonda overcome exhaustion, Jim introduced her to the illegal drug, crystal meth (meth). It seemed to keep her invigorated so she could work harder and longer. She used the drug from time to time and although Rhonda's relationship with Jim eventually ended, her connection to meth continued.

Now single, Rhonda began working a variety of part-time jobs in excess of 60-hours a week. She was near collapse from fatigue. "I started to use meth again. It helped me go 100-miles an hour. Most of my friends were using it too," she reveals. "My friends kept asking me to get them some, and before I knew it I started selling the drug. I made \$80,000 a month and quit my other jobs. The money and lifestyle were addicting."

Then one day, Rhonda's meth supplier, who had been arrested for possession and alleged distribution of meth, called from jail. Without thinking, Rhonda gathered the money needed—\$300,000 in cash—and bailed her supplier out of jail. Rhonda's large amount of cash raised the police department's suspicions about her involvement in her supplier's suspected drug operation. Shortly thereafter, Rhonda was arrested for possession with intent to sell meth and was sentenced to 97-months (eight years) in federal prison at Pekin, Illinois.

While in prison, Rhonda didn't want visitors. "I was too ashamed and embarrassed about what I had done," she reports. "I mainly kept to myself, read lots of books and exercised regularly. I also ran marathons at the prison, some for charity—and I won every time." Rhonda also successfully completed a drug treatment program at the facility and worked full-time in the prison laundry completing alterations for inmate uniforms. Upon release, the prison laundry supervisor acknowledged Rhonda for her energy, strong work ethic, and the high quality of her work by writing a personal recommendation for her.



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After serving just six years of an eight year sentence, Rhonda was released to Volunteers of America-Minnesota's Residential Reentry Center (RRC) in Roseville. The facility provides residential reentry services for men and women who are allowed to complete part of their federal prison sentences in the community. The RRC program offers former offenders an opportunity to become accountable, productive, tax paying citizens, while avoiding further involvement in the criminal justice system.

Rhonda spent her first two-weeks at the RRC in orientation. "They have a lot of rules and structure at the RRC," she explains. "I took all of the RRC's classes and did everything I was supposed to do—all while keeping a good attitude. I applied for three jobs and got them all. The job I accepted was full-time interior and exterior painting."

Rhonda was released from the RRC in February 2011 and went to live with her brother. She decided to take a break from her painting job, and today completes alterations for a bridal shop in the mornings, and mows lawns and plants trees for a landscaping company in the afternoons. Since the landscaping work is seasonal, Rhonda plans to go back to her painting job in late fall.

"I'm thankful I got caught," Rhonda confides when she is asked about her stay in prison. "It saved me. When I got out [of prison], I saw the people I used meth with. They had lost everything—their houses, cars, family, and even their teeth. The thought of using drugs makes me sick. I made my own choices and take complete responsibility for myself and my mistakes."

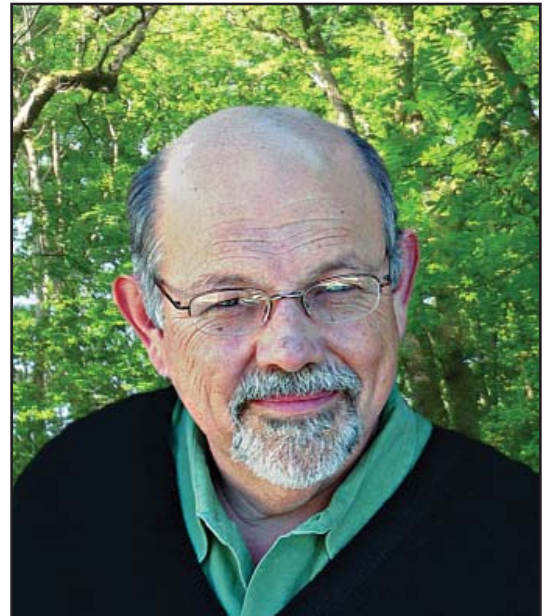
When asked about the future, Rhonda says, "My parents died young and I don't know how long I have, so I'm thankful for everyday. I don't have any huge goals beyond getting my own place again, being happy and starting a family. I'd also like to make more new friends. Right now, most of my friends are those who are active in [Crystal Meth Anonymous (CMA)] and that's great, but I'd like to make more new friends outside of that group. Whenever I run into my old drug-using friends, I ask them if they'd like to come to a CMA meeting with me. If I can help one of them get off drugs, I'll be satisfied."

Lee Stagni, age 57

Lee Stagni was an up-and-comer and “Challenge” could have been his middle name. He had already landed a lucrative job in marketing when his employer, a supercomputer firm, transferred him from New Orleans to its Minneapolis world headquarters in 1984. Then just four years later, Lee left to pursue a higher-level opportunity as vice president of sales and marketing for a Twin Cities based software company. Next in 1993, Lee accepted a position as the chief marketing officer for a wholesale PC distribution company. While there, he developed a successful marketing strategy that grew the company to more than \$2 billion in sales. As a result, the company was acquired in 1996 by one of the world’s biggest computer equipment lessors.

The feeling of success was exhilarating for Lee, but he wanted more.

So in 1997, Lee went to work as President and Chief Operating Officer for Control Corporation, a family-owned company which manufactures and sells computer boards, networking devices and systems. The owner and CEO, Bob Beale, hoped to position the company for sale.



Lee says that he quickly discovered that Beale was very eccentric. This fact became increasingly clear to him when Beale predicted Armageddon in 2000. He reports that Beale stockpiled guns, ammunition, gold bullion and fuel tanks so that Control could continue to operate despite the anticipated chaos of the new millennium. Additionally, Lee says Beale was engaged in a variety of disputes with the IRS and Minnesota Department of Revenue regarding his failure to pay taxes. Because of his unconventional beliefs, Lee was relieved that Beale took a backseat to operating the company and came into the office rarely.

But then in the spring of 2000, Beale telephoned Lee from an out-of-state tax protesters meeting and instructed Lee to stop paying him directly because Beale stated, “Taxation is a device of the devil.”

A puzzled Lee wondered how Beale’s orders could be met and sought out the advice of Control’s legal and accounting counsel. The company’s counsel indicated that Beale could be paid as a consultant for future income. In short order, all of Beale’s new consulting income was directed to a newly formed shell company. But Lee states this did not satisfy all of Beale’s demands. How was Lee supposed to redirect income that had already been paid to Beale? In a moment of weak judgment, Lee admits he illegally backdated several contracts and documents to conceal personal income already paid to Beale. Then at the end of the year, Beale and Lee instructed Control personnel not to issue an IRS Form-1099 to Beale’s new company as required by federal law.

Because of the role he played in Beale’s tax evasion, Lee was charged with six counts of tax evasion and five counts of conspiracy to defraud the IRS. Lee’s case went to trial in September 2006. Meanwhile, Beale jumped bail and spent 1½ years as a fugitive.

Lee was convicted on one count of conspiring to defraud the IRS and five counts of aiding and abetting tax evasion. In April 2007, he was sentenced to 48-months and reported to the Federal Prison Camp at Duluth, a minimum-security facility, in June 2007.

Lee was later transferred to a Federal Correctional Institution at Florence, CO to participate in a special faith-based program for inmates. During that time, he did a lot of introspective thinking, considered many of the choices he had made during his lifetime and experienced what he describes as life-changing revelations.

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He explains that the program gave him the opportunity to see outside of himself and enabled him to make observations about his life almost as if he were watching a movie. While there, Lee also penned, “Letters From Camp,” a collection of personal reflections and observations about prison life.

After two years of incarceration, Lee was released to Volunteers of America-Minnesota’s Residential Reentry Center (RRC) on East Lake Street in Minneapolis in June 2009. The facility provides residential reentry services for men who are allowed to complete part of their prison sentences in the community and offers them an opportunity to become accountable, productive, tax paying citizens, while avoiding further involvement in the criminal justice system.

After completing orientation at the RRC, Lee’s primary objective was to get a job. As part of his employment search, he reconnected with a former consulting client. In July 2009, Lee was hired by that client to perform a variety of marketing and copywriting duties (and continues to be employed there as of the date of this interview). Finally in December 2009, Lee was released from the RRC and went home to his wife and daughter.

Lee explains that he has many aspirations for the future. As a seasoned marketer and business strategist, he explains that he would like to develop a business incubator for former offenders and war veterans so that they can launch their own businesses. He said that both groups face similar challenges related to “leaving the system” and assimilating into community life. Lee believes he can help them succeed. Additionally, he indicates he would like to publish his 600-page “Letters From Camp.” He has already shared the manuscript with soon-to-be inmates and their families to educate them about what to expect during incarceration. Overall, Lee says his focus is to use his expertise in marketing and business strategy along with his life experiences for the greater good.

Doug Stolba, age 63

Back in 1968, Doug Stolba believed he was destined for a career in physical therapy. But shortly after earning a degree in biology and chemistry, he and several other Luther College athletes were recruited for a specialized life insurance sales training program by a well-known insurance provider. With a young wife to support and no other immediate job prospects, Doug decided to give it a shot.

His wife's birthday marked the sale of his first life insurance policy, and over the next few years Doug built a solid insurance business in Decorah, Iowa.

After his second son was born, he relocated his family to the Twin Cities where he became licensed to sell a broad range of insurance and investment products. Retirement planning became Doug's specialty, and in 1983 he formed his own retirement planning business which expanded rapidly.

But his family's lifestyle grew even faster. The couple built a lavish new home, avoided few luxuries, and were living beyond their means. Soon, they were drowning in debt.

In desperation, Doug started to move company money from account to account, and siphoned off undocumented personal loans. But that wasn't enough. He also began borrowing money from client accounts and created altered account statements to conceal the activity. The situation snowballed and Doug found himself entrenched too deeply to ever replace the cash. So, he continued fleecing his clients and covered his tracks for the next several years.

Finally in April 2002, his luck ran out when an investor met with a financial planner to discuss her investments. The financial planner became suspicious after reviewing information Doug provided about her accounts. The client questioned Doug and demanded additional documentation.

Doug knew the game was over. The bubble had finally burst. As he sat in his car with a gun to his head, Doug's life flashed before his eyes as he considered his options. However instead of pulling the trigger, he opted to face the consequences.

The next day, Doug contacted the office manager at his retirement planning business and explained what he had done. In turn, she reported him to the Minnesota Department of Commerce who referred the matter to the FBI for investigation. While his now adult sons rallied in support, Doug's wife filed for divorce, and he found himself homeless and living at a St. Paul men's shelter until he went to court.

In the meantime, the FBI investigation uncovered dozens of clients that had been swindled by Doug and estimated investor losses at approximately \$5.5 million.

Doug pled guilty to two counts of mail fraud for the fabricated account statements and was sentenced to eight years in prison in November 2002. He reported to the Federal Prison Camp, a minimum-security facility, at Duluth in March 2003.

After six years of incarceration, Doug was released to Volunteers of America-Minnesota's Residential Reentry Center (RRC) on East Lake Street in November 2008. The facility provides residential reentry services for men who are allowed to complete part of their prison sentences in the community and offers them an opportunity to become accountable, productive, tax paying citizens, while avoiding further involvement in the criminal justice system.

{over}



Doug spent his first several days at the RRC in orientation. Recognizing that he needed to obtain a job promptly to earn more privileges, he updated his résumé and secured a job at a McDonald's restaurant. Over the next months, Doug continued to work steadily and attempted to put the remaining pieces of his life back together. He obtained a driver's license, applied for Social Security (since he was 62), and began to investigate housing options with the assistance of RRC staff. In June 2009, he was released from the RRC and moved to an apartment in St. Paul where he completed the remainder of his sentence under supervised house arrest.

Today, Doug works for a Plymouth-based marketing firm where he works 50 hours each week performing telemarketing and insurance lead generation. When he's not working, he spends time with his two grandchildren, fishing, and photographing nature.



Volunteers of America Residential Reentry Centers



Theodora House

Indianapolis, IN

Residential and non-residential services for women

Residential capacity: 104



Women's Care Cottage

North Hollywood, CA

Residential services for young women ages 18-21

Residential capacity: 12



Regional Reentry Center

Roseville, MN

Residential services for men and women

Residential capacity: 74



Residential Reentry Center

Minneapolis, MN

Residential services for men

Residential capacity: 63



Booth Hall

Gillette, WY

Residential services for men and women

Residential capacity: 126



Perry F. Bradley Facility

Hutchins, TX

Residential services for men and women

Residential capacity: 120



Avenue J

Fort Worth, TX

Residential services for men and women

Residential capacity: 116



What is the project? What is a Residential Reentry Center?

One of VOA-MN's many programs is a Residential Reentry Center currently operating in Roseville. A residential reentry center is a secure facility (this does not mean the residents are locked in, but they are monitored continuously; there are restricted entry/exit points, etc.) that works under a contract with the federal government and provides services to assist offenders as they return to the community and strive to become productive members of society. This service is a crucial component in a successful, life-changing reintroduction of people leaving incarceration. The facility in which our current program operates is owned by Ramsey County and the county has indicated its desire to sell the property for redevelopment, thereby not renewing the lease.

What kinds of services will the Residential Reentry Center provide to its residents?

The services we provide in our Residential Reentry Center include rehabilitative case management/counseling services with an emphasis on accessing services needed for addiction, mental health, and permanent housing so that residents may become employed, reunited with their family and accountable, productive, tax paying members of the community. Services are provided in a stable, short-term living environment that provides the basic necessities of daily living such as shelter, meals, health care, utilities, and personal sanitation facilities. These rehabilitative case management/counseling services and basic necessities of daily living are combined with constant (24-hours, 365-days) staff supervision and monitoring assure safety, security and program compliance.

Does VOA-MN have experience operating a Residential Reentry Center?

For more than 40 years, we have been nationally recognized for our work in successfully assisting former offenders in becoming productive members of society. The program is licensed under specific guidelines by the State of Minnesota and meets the stringent requirements established by and enforced under a contract with the Federal Government. Additionally, as part of our Christian Ministry of Service, we believe that every human life is important and that each person deserves a redemptive second chance – a philosophy which is at the heart of our Residential Reentry Center program. We combine strict safety, program compliance, education and compassion as we prepare our residents for a renewed future.

What kinds of visitors will the facility attract?

Residents of our Residential Reentry Centers are encouraged to invite guests to visit, especially family members. Visiting hours for our Residential Reentry Centers are limited to Thursday evenings, Saturday and Sunday afternoons, and holidays. Our Roseville facility typically receives an approximately total of six guests per visitor day. Most guests are family members, significant others, and children.



Tell me about your Community Relations Board, how does it work?

Strengthening the community is part of the VOA-MN mission. Our current Residential Reentry Centers are recognized as quiet neighbors who have become vital parts of their communities. Each of our Residential Reentry Centers has a strong commitment to community participation and a close relationship with the surrounding neighborhood and business communities. For example, our residents have engaged in activities which must be pre-approved by the Bureau of Prisons including community clean-up and National Night Out. Additionally, each Residential Reentry Center has a Community Relations Road (CRB) composed of community leaders and Residential Reentry Center staff which serves as a communication link, advances public education and awareness, as well as understanding and advocacy for issues concerning the Residential Reentry Center.

How does this program affect community safety?

Throughout our long operating history we have not had a neighborhood safety incident at either of our Residential Reentry Center locations. It is also our experience that a 7-days/week, 24-hours/day, professionally staffed program helps reduce unwanted activities by providing a highly trained, watchful presence in the neighborhood. We also have strong support from the Minneapolis Police Department and the Roseville Police Department as both agencies have supplied strong letters in support of our safe operations in their communities and our ongoing commitment to transparent partnerships with community and law enforcement.

How will this program affect property values and future community development?

Our market analysis indicates that the neighborhoods in which we operate Reentry Centers have not been affected differently than other Twin Cities neighborhoods in regards to property values, ability to sell real estate, or redevelopment opportunities. As a matter of fact, the Lake Street neighborhood in which we operate has seen significant increases in property values and significant new development since the inception of our program.

Will this program change my neighborhood?

VOA-MN has a history of making positive impacts in the communities that we operate. Based on our history the neighbors can expect a quiet neighbor, dedicated to safety, open communications, quality property maintenance, and highly trained staff dedicated to uplifting the lives of their fellow community members. This program will provide over 20 full time equivalent jobs with an annual payroll over \$ 850,000. With over 116 years of service in Minnesota, Volunteers of America invests in, and stays in, the communities where we purchase properties and serves community members by helping people gain self-reliance, dignity and hope.



Our mission is to help people gain self-reliance, dignity and hope.

Volunteers of America-Minnesota is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit health and human services organization incorporated in Minnesota. Called to serve since 1896, we are one of the largest and most comprehensive nonprofit organizations in the state. We offer a wide variety of programs that serve more than 26,500 people of all ages each year in these impact areas:

- **Children, Youth and Families**
- **Seniors**
- **People with Special Needs**
- **Adults in Community Reentry**

Volunteers of America-Minnesota employs 830 paid, professional staff and is governed by a local voluntary board of directors. We are affiliated with Volunteers of America, a national, faith-based organization dedicated to helping 2 million people each year live healthy, productive lives and reach their full potential. Our work touches the mind, body, heart and the spirit of those we serve by combining compassion with highly effective programs and services.



Our Values

We are fiscally accountable.

Volunteers of America-Minnesota's annual budget of \$42.7 million (fiscal 2010) in revenues is funded by government contracts and grants, and through the support of individuals, private corporations and foundations, program service fees and the United Way. Fiscal accountability is a priority and our management and administrative expenses run lower than industry averages. We have been reviewed by the Minnesota Charities Review Council and are proud to have met all of its Accountability Standards for public disclosure, governance, financial activity and fundraising.

We help seniors be healthy, active and independent.

Volunteers of America-Minnesota offers a continuum of in-home and community-based service options for older adults to help restore, maintain and promote their independence, as well as support their physical health and emotional wellbeing. Our services include senior community centers, volunteer services, home-delivered and group meal programs, social services, information and referral, care management, caregiver support, legal services, protection against abuse and neglect, adult day programs, mental health and assisted living.

- 19,670 served annually



We help children, youth and families function more successfully.

Volunteers of America-Minnesota offers a continuum of care for children, youth and families aimed at strengthening individual and family functioning for success at home, at school and in the community. Our residential and community-based services for children and youth with emotional and behavioral challenges include mental health, treatment, case management, and foster care. Our respite services support families of children with disabilities, and our three alternative/specialty high schools offer educational opportunities for at-risk and immigrant students. Additionally, we provide charter school authorization for 16 charter schools throughout the state.

- 5,336 served annually

We help adults completing residential reentry and rehabilitation programs find positive directions.

For more than 100 years, Volunteers of America has recognized the importance of providing services for people completing rehabilitation programs. In Minnesota, our programs promote responsibility, quality of life and ethical behavior and ensure successful reentry into the community. These programs include residential reentry services for men and women, a program for chemically dependent women who have who have experienced multiple traumas, and transitional housing for women coming out of chemical dependency treatment.

- 442 served annually

We help people with special needs live actively in the community.

Volunteers of America-Minnesota believes that each individual, regardless of their ability, special needs or disability, should have the opportunity to live and participate in society. For that reason, our programs for people with special needs seek to increase self-sufficiency and encourage an active, participatory quality of life. These programs include in-home support services and specialized residential services with supported living services for people with special needs/intellectual disabilities, as well as specialized residential services with supported living services for those with persistent mental illness and families who are chronically homeless.

- 199 served annually

We provide quality, affordable housing for families, seniors and people with disabilities.

Nationally, Volunteers of America is the largest nonprofit recipient of funding from HUD to build housing for seniors and the disabled. Our well-run facilities are combined with customized, compassionate support services which differentiate us in the affordable housing arena. In Minnesota, we offer affordable housing for families, seniors, at-risk families and people with disabilities. The support services we offer at our affordable housing facilities are tailored to promote independence and self-sufficiency for residents.

- 865 served annually

Additional information and questions

Kim Rymer, Director of Communications, at 952-945-4074 or krymer@voamn.org

Visit us! Website: www.voamn.org | Facebook: VOAMN | Twitter: VOA_MN



We have been reviewed by the Minnesota Charities Review Council and are proud to have met its Accountability Standards.

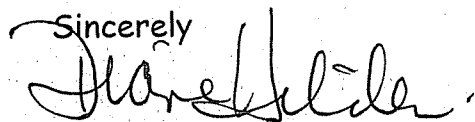
July 2, 2012

Honorable Mayor Coleman and City of St Paul Council Members

I encourage you to welcome the Volunteers of America's Residential Re-Entry Center to St. Paul. As an individual who has worked for many years in community corrections at Reentry Services (now part of R.S.I.Eden) and currently as a Crime Prevention Coordinator for a District Council in St. Paul I am aware of community concerns regarding ex-offenders. I am also aware of the benefits to the community when programs such as the Volunteers of America work toward integrating ex-offenders back into the community with strict supervision offering them a variety of practical services to change their lives.

I live in Roseville, am the founder and long-time board member of the Lake McCarrons Neighborhood Association, The current Volunteers of American Residential Re-Entry facility is in my neighborhood and in our Association's geographical service area. I have followed and observed VOA's program in action first hand as a neighbor and member of the VOA's community relations board for many years. I continue to be impressed with VOA's vision to uplift the lives of re-entry center residents and positively integrate them into the community. It has been evident to my neighborhood that VOA staff routinely collaborates with a variety of agencies and individuals within the greater Roseville/St Paul communities. These VOA outreach practices are both for the purpose of educating others about the VOA re-entry program and to develop community opportunities for program participants.

In my estimation, having a VOA Re-Entry facility in St. Paul is an opportunity for the City bringing not only an infusion of jobs and but a renovation to the Proposed Jackson Street site. I am aware of the possible doubt of neighbors having a residential re-entry facility move into their neighborhood. The experience of the Lake McCarrons community over many years has been nothing but positive. I believe that the proposed VOA Re-Entry facility on Jackson site will continue to be a good neighbor run by caring and skillful staff for the benefit of highly motivated ex-offenders.

Sincerely


Diane M. Hilden

466 Bayview Drive

Roseville, MN 55113

Resident & Board Member, Lake McCarron's Neighborhood Association



Dear Honorable Mayor and City Council Members,

It is my pleasure to provide this letter of support as Volunteers of America seeks to re-locate its program to the Jackson Street location. VOA's program to help those nearing the end of their federal sentences speaks to the power of redemption in all of our lives. This program seeks to provide those willing to change with the tools and ability needed to change and become self-sufficient benefits our entire community.

VOA's program works seamlessly within the community and the work of VOA's community relations board ensures community voices are heard and respected. It is also understood that often providing the physical space required for programs such as these are difficult choices, however, city staff has clearly indicated the Jackson Street location is an appropriate use with applicable conditions.

In my 20+ years of work at the Union Gospel Mission, I see firsthand the necessity of providing a well-rounded program for individuals which includes housing for more than just 30 days. Especially in these tough economic times, we need to welcome such programs into communities with open arms and ask how can we help rather than hinder the good work being done. Strong partners make strong people which makes for better communities.

I encourage you to welcome VOA to this location. They already do great work within St. Paul and I am confident they will continue to do so.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Roe-Smith, WorkNet Director
Union Gospel Mission Twin Cities



June 28, 2012

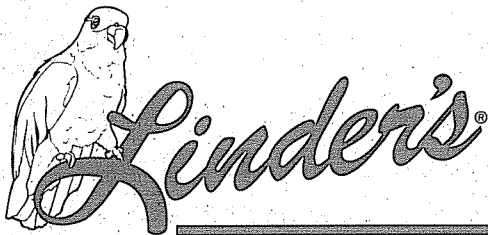
Dear Honorable Mayor Chris Coleman and St. Paul City Council Members,

My name is Rev. David Maghakian, I am the Pastor of North Como Presbyterian Church in Roseville. I am writing to express my support for Volunteers of America – Minnesota's request to successfully relocate the Resident Re-Entry Center, currently operating in Roseville, to 1394 Jackson Street in St. Paul. Over the past several years, I have been blessed to witness first-hand how VOA's mission to help people gain self-reliance, dignity and hope. These core values have truly been on display at the Residential Re-Entry Center. The VOA staff runs an extremely professional operation that not only provides those leaving federal incarceration a successful pathway back to the community, and has also integrated themselves into our community. VOA is an asset to all of us. Through VOA's community relations board activities, we've all received a greater sense of what it takes to build and maintain strong healthy communities, and how our blessings to each other can come in many different forms as well as unexpected places. All of my interactions with them have been positive, respectful, and very collaborative. I believe VOA's Residential Re-Entry Center will be a vibrant and strong addition to your community. I encourage you to welcome them to St. Paul.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rev. David Maghakian", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Rev. David Maghakian



Linder's Flower Marts

275 W. Wheelock Pkwy

St. Paul, MN 55117

651-255-0417

Fax: 651-255-0445

E-mail: flowermarts@linders.com

To Whom It May Concern,

Over the past several years, I have had the pleasure of being acquainted with the staff, program and participants in Volunteers of America; which happens to be located just up the Larpeur hill from Linder's Greenhouses. Through the monthly relations board meetings that I have attended, I have found VOA and the Re-Entry Center to be a positive part of our community. VOA's community relations board meets regularly to discuss any concerns that might arise. They are always welcoming of local businesses and residents as they invite us to take part in their meetings and ask questions or express concerns.

I have also found it to be educational in respect to the hard work both the staff and participants put in to make the program successful. They provide an opportunity to those in re-entry to be re-introduced to the community in a positive, holistic manner. It has been a very unique experience for me to take part in their meetings and learn about their facilities and programs. It would not be, without the obvious care of many people and their hard work and time investment, the successful venture that I have come to know it as. Over my time I have found it to be not just valuable to the participants, but invaluable; as it provides them with the training and connections necessary to become a positive member of our community.

It has been also been a positive experience for my business, Linder's Garden Center, located at 270 West Larpeur. Linder's has employed re-entry center residents over the years and we've been impressed with their work ethic, dependability and willingness to learn. The residents who we've been fortunate enough to work with have all received job training through VOA and work closely with their assigned job placement staff. My experience with the VOA team and with those in re-entry has been rewarding for both parties. The VOA has been a positive resource in our community, and I'm sure they will make a positive impression operating within Saint Paul.

Sincerely,

David John Linder

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: March 13, 2012

CONTACT: Kim Rymer
Communications Director
Volunteers of America-Minnesota
Office 952-945-4074, Cell 612-267-7622, krymer@voamn.org

**Lake Street Council Recognizes Volunteers
of America-Minnesota Reentry Center with Award**

(Minneapolis, March 13, 2012)—Volunteers of America-Minnesota (VOA-MN), a nonprofit health and human services organization, is pleased to announce that its Residential Reentry Center on Lake Street in Minneapolis was recognized with a Community Investment and Leadership award by the Lake Street Council. The award recognizes VOA-MN's contributions toward improving the image of the Lake Street neighborhood through projects including maintenance of sidewalks and streetscapes. The award was presented today at the Lake Street Council's 2012 Annual Meeting.

For more than 40 years, VOA-MN has been nationally recognized for its work in successfully assisting former offenders in becoming productive members of society. VOA-MN's Residential Reentry Center on Lake Street provides men, who are allowed to complete part of their sentences in the community, with a variety of services which enable them to restore community ties, obtain employment and become accountable, productive, tax-paying citizens while avoiding further involvement in the criminal justice system. Each VOA-MN residential reentry center is committed to participating in and contributing to their communities.

The Lake Street Museum, Regala de Oro Gallery and Harriet Brewing were also recognized for contributions to the neighborhood. "Each of these businesses has shown exemplary innovation and community responsibility," Joyce Wisdom, LSC Executive Director, said. "They are committed to the betterment and economic vitality of Lake Street."

About Volunteers of America-Minnesota

Volunteers of America-Minnesota is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit health and human services organization whose mission is to help people gain self-reliance, dignity and hope. We have served Minnesota since 1896 and are one of the largest and most comprehensive nonprofit organizations in the state. Each year, our wide variety of programs uplift the lives of more than 26,500 children, youth and families, seniors, people with special needs, and adults completing community reentry programs. We are affiliated with Volunteers of America, a national, faith-based organization that helps more than 2 million people annually live healthy, productive lives and reach their full potential. For more information about Volunteers of America-Minnesota, visit <http://www.voamn.org> or call 952-945-4074.

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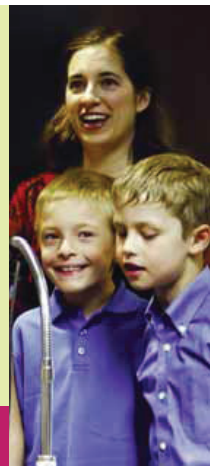
Longfellow/Nokomis

JUNE 2012

messenger

Vol. 29 No. 4 21,000 Circulation

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New Longfellow gardening program aims to give ownership to 'invisible' residents

By JAN WILLMS

Invisible.

That is the feeling one man described when he was asked how he liked living in Longfellow.

He is one of 63 residents who currently live at the Volunteers of America Residential Reentry Center (VOARRC) on Lake Street.

The facility provides services for men who are allowed to complete part of their prison sentences in the community. But transitioning back into the community is no easy task. Cut off from family and friends, it is easy to forget the social skills needed to function smoothly in day-to-day life. It is hard to forge new relationships. It is easy to become invisible.

A grant that will provide an opportunity for VOARRC residents to learn about gardening and growing and cooking food may change those feelings of not belonging. And Mark, one of the residents, thinks it will all lead to better things. (For this article, only first names are used and no photos of the residents are published, to protect their identities.)

"I get the sense people will engage those of us here in VOARRC who would like to reintegrate into the community," he said. Mark said that when he was young, he did some gardening at his grandparents' farm and later in life, he and his wife had a home garden.

"I'm looking forward to



A grant that will provide an opportunity for Volunteers of America Residential Reentry Center residents to learn about gardening and growing and cooking food may change feelings of not belonging in the Longfellow community.

learning more about it," he said. "Food is so expensive, and maybe down the road I can have a garden. It's also good exercise, and I find it therapeutic."

Mark said he is looking forward to helping with the community dinners at Minnehaha Com-

munion Lutheran Church, and he hopes the skills he learns could help him get a job in a nursery or garden center.

"Most of all, I'm excited about the interaction we will have with some of the people, and I'm excited about the chance to give

something back to the community," Mark added.

The seeds of an idea to help the men rejoin society were planted when Joanna Solotaroff heard at a meeting from one of the residents that he felt like he was unseen in the Longfellow area. A light bulb went off in her head. She decided something had to be done to make the VOARRC residents feel more a part of their neighborhood.

Solotaroff, a community organizer at the Longfellow Community Council, had become friends with Amy Moore, social services coordinator for VOARRC.

"We started talking about how we could work together," Moore recalled. "Our agency has a community relations board that meets four times a year, and we invite our neighbors, agencies in the community and anyone with an interest in what we are doing to come to these meetings. Joanna came, and when she heard this resident's response, she wanted to start right away figuring out how to get these guys involved in the community."

"Community engagement is one of my tasks," Moore explained. "We hear from offenders about a lack of job skills and training."

Moore said that statistics have shown that when people are released in the community but eventually end up going back to prison, {over}

90 per cent of those revoked don't have a job.

The Bureau of Justice has shown that unemployment and lack of job skills is the biggest barrier to successful reentry into the community.

Moore and Solotaroff started brainstorming to see what they could do to make the offenders a part of Longfellow.

"We talked to Ruhel Islam, the owner of Gandhi Mahal. We

that the residents could help cook those dinners. They also enlisted Harvest Moon Backyard Farmers, an organization that installs gardens and provides garden coaching, to assist with teaching gardening skills.

The final result of all the ideas culminated in a \$10,000 grant from CURA that will allow up to 12 incarcerated individuals living in Longfellow to participate in an

how to garden, but will explain the reasons for the gardening steps she recommends.

"Krista will spend 90 minutes with them twice a week," Moore said. "About an hour will be hands-on gardening and the rest of the time will be spent explaining the process, such as why we turn the soil, for example."

She added that the book provided tells about the use of compost, nutrients, how to water and use fertilizer.

The garden spots have been leased from Minnehaha Avenue Community Gardens.

"By the end of the 22-week growing season, the participants will have read the entire book and completed at least 10-12 weeks of hands-on gardening," Moore said. "They will have worked on at least one community dinner and taken one cooking class."

The residents can also volunteer a couple days a week at Free Geek Twin Cities, a nonprofit in the Seward neighborhood that provides volunteers the guidance and training they need to use, build and understand computers.

"They take about 10 recycled computers, take eight apart and use for parts and put together two good computers with the others," Moore said. "At the end of the project, each resident will receive a computer."

Graduates of the program offered through the grant will receive

a certificate stating they are trained in sustainable food, plant and herb growing, weather and soil management.

"They can substitute the work they have done for recent job history, we hope," Moore said. There is a small stipend and transportation funds through the grant, although participants are able to walk to the Minnehaha Gardens and Free Geek Twin Cities.

"They will be supervised at Free Geek Twin Cities, and Krista or I will supervise them at the gardens," Moore said. "Accountability is the key."

So what all started with a comment about feeling invisible in the community has mushroomed into a project that is offering individuals in transition a chance to join the community.

"I believe the benefits of a program such as this are immeasurable," Moore said. "It gives the residents job skills, something to bring back to their parents or kids when they are released and community involvement. I hope this is a mold for future partnerships, and I think this grant may spark something other communities can look to."

Looking ahead to harvest time, Moore said it would be wonderful if some vegetables are derived out of the garden. "But it's a great thing, even if we just get one tomato," she added.

"Most of all, I'm excited about the interaction we will have with some of the people, and I'm excited about the chance to give something back to the community."

sat down with him and said we would like to work with him on a project," Moore related. She said Islam is active in the Longfellow area and concerned both about the business community and his fellow citizens.

He suggested gardening, since people always need food and need to know how to grow food.

"We looked to him, because he is the one who talks about sustainable food sources, and he knows what he is doing," Moore said. He also said he could provide cooking lessons in his kitchen. They kept pursuing ideas.

"Joanna was the mastermind, and she did all the legwork. She happened on this great opportunity," Moore said. The opportunity came in the form of a grant through the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) from the University of Minnesota.

"We started kicking around ideas," Moore related. "We researched different kinds of gardens. Urban farming is really important now, on the cutting edge. People will need skilled helpers."

She said the Minnehaha Communion Lutheran Church regularly holds dinners, and they decided

eight-month gardening or computer training program which will allow them to gain job skills and become involved in the Longfellow community and experience a supportive learning environment.

Partners in the grant are VO-ARCC, Longfellow Community Council, Free Geek Twin Cities, Minnehaha Communion Lutheran Church, Harvest Moon Backyard Farmers, Gandhi Mahal Restaurant and Minnehaha Avenue Community Garden.

The residents began their gardening experience May 25. Each received a water bottle and a gardening book. Krista Leraas of Harvest Farms is teaching the selected residents on Mondays and Thursdays. They have a workbook to follow, "How to Grow More Vegetables: And Fruits, Nuts, Berries, Grains and Other Crops Than You Ever Thought Possible on Less Land Than You Can Imagine," describing in detail some of the gardening processes they will be using.

"Krista is the best!" Moore exclaimed. Leraas has a master's degree in culture, ecology and sustainable community. She not only plans on teaching the residents

"It gives the residents job skills, something to bring back to their parents or kids when they are released and community involvement. I hope this is a mold for future partnerships, and I think this grant may spark something other communities can look to."
