



HOPE Newsletter

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HOPE serves the counties of Wythe, Bland, Carroll, Grayson and Smyth and the city of Galax.



In the News . . .

Santa made an appearance at HOPE this month and sat for free portraits taken by Becky Pearman (who moonlights as one of the District Three Mountain Lynx bus drivers). Nearly fifty families participated and also completed a survey of financial management and food security questions.



Construction of HOPE's two new group homes in Wytheville is moving right along under the watchful eyes of Fowler Residential Construction's Andy Fowler (right) and Jeramie Clifford, architect with Design Studio of Community Housing Partners, with scheduled completions for late winter and early spring. A third new group home in Galax is set to be occupied by Mount Rogers Community Services Board before the first of the year. Funding for that project comes in blended financing through the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development's State Housing Trust Fund and the Virginia Housing Development Authority.



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Board of Directors

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- Amanda Romans, Homeownership Director*
- Beth Horton, Lead Housing Counselor*
- Dan Kellett, Housing Counselor*
- Gary Slem, Housing Solutions Coordinator*
- Mike Pugh, HOPE Packs Coordinator*
- Zona Jones, Administrative Assistant*
- Dianna DeBord, Receptionist Trainee, Goodwill SCSEP*
- Ken Giamanco, Property Maintenance Trainee, Goodwill SCSEP*



Homeownership/Rehab Spotlight *By Amanda Gillman*

At the Shoney's in Hillsville, Virginia, just off the I-77 exit, Debra Marshall Bumgarner tends the salad bar. The spread before her, though simple, would have been a luxury a couple of decades earlier, in more ways than one. In the deserts of Iraq, it was hard enough to come by ice, let alone fresh vegetables for herself or the troops she cooked for. Today, she can walk into an industrial size refrigerator to restock items on the bar. She no longer has to try to keep sand out of the lettuce.

At her second job at Hillsville Elementary, she has the same conveniences available to her in the cafeteria, and the children coming through the lunch-line remind her of the good things in life, a welcome distraction from the memories of war.

But the memories still linger.

She enlisted in the Army in the mid-70s, back when the minimum age was 21. In 1981, she became part of the Army Reserves, serving one tour in the Gulf War and another, more recently in Iraq. She officially retired from the military in 2005. Her main assignments included hauling ammunition to the troops up front and preparing meals for her unit as a platoon sergeant. That was hard work, she said, but important work.

Once, when walking back to her tent with comrades, a mortar landed directly beside her. Thankfully, it fell apart. "I didn't think I was going to make it," she said. Three went off in succession in her vicinity. "That's probably why I have PTSD," she said.

It began after she returned home, she explained, the paranoia and crippling anxiety. "I was always looking behind me," she said. Loud noises that might be a simple nuisance for most people are triggers for her PTSD. Trucks rumbling across the overpass, for example, sound a lot like exploding mortars. "It makes you jump." The smell of diesel fuel is another. "Every soldier has their story," she stated. "It affects people in different ways."

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Debra and her family.

From the Executive Director

One of the advantages of sporting a gray/white beard (not just at Santa time of the year with twin 18-month-old grandsons in my lap) is the corresponding tenure that comes from being with the organization for a very long time. I appreciated having the HOPE board acknowledge my 23rd anniversary here just a few weeks ago. As we are at the mid-point of our progressive 25th anniversary celebration (Mountain Shelter was incorporated in May, 1992, and HOPE in July, 1993, with the two merging in July, 2007), this is a good excuse to rummage through some old photos.



One of the stories of our timeline is the connection with Mount Rogers Community Services Board. Mountain Shelter's housing programs were literally born at MRCSB in the early 1990s, and by 1996, MSI's very first real estate development was a 4-BR duplex purchased and leased to MRCSB for a group home. The MSI board met at the Petunia Duplex in 1997 or so (left), with Kevin Lightle, Max Dean, Maria Timoney, Rickey Spivey and Mimi Stout Leonard engaged in conversation.

Two decades later, the HOPE board is engaging in another deep conversation with our consultants Lisa Alderman and Charlotte Parsons, mapping out our 25th anniversary capital campaign. Pictured right are board members Rachel Jones, Lewis LaFon and Harvey Atkinson. For the first time in HOPE's 25 years, we have achieved 100% board participation in fundraising, a notable achievement and great foundation for our ambitious fundraising campaign. Thank you board members!



Crisis Spotlight *(continued from page 4)*

which makes keeping a steady job difficult. “Most people [without depression] don’t understand,” she said, “the struggle it is mentally to prepare yourself to go to work.”

Keeping her boys and the precious memory of her mother in the forefront of her mind helps her stay focused on her goals: saving enough for a place to live and spending precious time with her family.

When people tell her, “I don’t know how you do it,” that makes her feel good, she said, and gives her spirit a boost to persevere. “I have eyes watching me. I can’t quit. I can’t let them see me quit.”

She keeps reminding herself that this is all just a season and that there will be better days on the other side of this valley. It weighs on her that she hasn’t been able to go to church lately, but she hopes she’ll get to soon. “I have faith,” she said, “sometimes it gets thin—but you gotta have hope for a better day.”



Dana and her family.

Homeownership/Rehab Spotlight *(continued from page 2)*

The adjustment to civilian life was one of the most difficult transitions to make, she recalls. “I almost had a nervous breakdown. She had the opposite of a proper homecoming. Upon returning, she discovered her first husband had left her and left her with a mess of financial issues to sort out. He’d been spending the checks she sent home while overseas on everything but the bills. “I almost lost everything.”

With the support of her family and her resilient spirit, she pulled through one of the most unstable chapters of her life. “I had to stay focused,” she said matter-of-factly. For her, this was her only choice. She was out of options. She spent the next several years of her life working on putting it back together.

After her formal retirement from the Army and Army Reserves in 2005, and years of battling mental wars within herself, Debra realized something had to give. She explained to her doctor at the V.A. what kind of troubles she was having and received a prompt diagnosis of severe PTSD. It wasn’t easy asking for help, she said, but she is so glad she did. “I was too proud. I didn’t want to burden nobody.”

Some days are better than others, she admitted, but with the help of her team at the V.A. and her family at home, she’s making progress. “It’s a lot better than it used to be.”

By taking care of herself, she’s now able to take care of her family better. Her son, Arce Bernal, lives in the home with her and his wife Jennifer and their dog Sassy. He is disabled due to angular sclerosis. Because of his condition, he is unable to sit or stand for sustained periods of time, which renders him unable to work. Eventually, she explained, he’ll be in a wheelchair. This will require modifications to her existing home, a place that is need of some repairs, she said.

She lives in her late father’s homeplace. She took care of him, a veteran himself, in the house until he passed away a few years ago. The house, built a century or so ago, is where her dad grew up and she grew up. Up until 1997, when her mother had to receive hospice care, the house didn’t have indoor plumbing or running water. They had to carry water in from the spring

That’s where Helping Overcome Poverty’s Existence, Inc. (HOPE), stepped in after receiving a referral from the Wytheville Veterans Affairs Community Based Outpatient Clinic. “It was just like a blessing,” she thought when she found out she had been selected as a candidate for the HOPE project, funded through a grant from the Wells Fargo Foundation, HOME Matters to Veterans and Fahe. HOPE will be helping her take care of several much-needed repairs to her home through outside contractors. They’ll be helping her fix the roof in her son’s bedroom, where it leaks when it rains, and other maintenance projects like lighting, fresh paint and even placing a new heat pump and making the bathroom more accessible.

She’s made a life of serving other people. Now HOPE is grateful for the opportunity to serve her.

Donor Recognition (July-September 2017)



Heroes of HOPE

Thank you to our monthly donors who support HOPE's sustainability in the community.

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We are now able to set up recurring donations straight from donor bank accounts. If interested, give us a call and we can send along the paperwork.

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HOMELESSNESS and HUNGER

cost everyone.

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 George Wythe High School Class of 1962 (CFK in honor of Mert Stafford)
 Kiwanis Club of Wythe County (HOPE Packs)

United Way of Wythe County, Inc. (HOPE)
 Wytheville Ruritan Club, LLC (HOPE Packs)

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United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development (HOPE Packs)
 United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HOPE)
 Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (HOPE)
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The Jackson Law Group, PLLC (HOPE)

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 Rotary Club of Wytheville Morning (CFK)
 Sabika Inc. (HOPE Packs)
 Skyline National Bank (CFK)
 Wytheville Baptist Church Good News/New Hope Sunday School Class (CFK)

CFK—Community Food Kitchen
 HOPE—general operating/unrestricted
 HOPE Packs—backpack program

THANK YOU also to our hundreds of volunteers and the many donors of food, clothing and household items for our clients!

