



making a difference

LEXINGTON RESCUE MISSION



Above, Charlie Harris, center, is flanked by supportive Old World Timber employers Rocke Saccone, left, and Nathan Brown.

Right, Jim Connell founded Lexington Rescue Mission with his wife, Becky.



JOSEPH REY AU PHOTOS



TO THE RESCUE

*Mending broken
lives one-by-one
motivates Lexington
Rescue Mission*

By William Bowden

Charlie Harris places a weathered plank on the huge saw table at Old World Timber in Lexington. With a keen eye and a steady hand, he expertly guides it to the blade, executing a 10-foot rip cut that demands finesse and precision. The result is a perfectly straight edge, the first cut in a series that will transform the reclaimed wood into beautiful flooring or wallboard with a distinctive appearance.

Holding down a responsible, well-paying manufacturing job is commonplace for many people, but for Harris it represents a remarkable achievement. His determination to overcome alcohol addiction and the blemish of a prison record, coupled with the resources of the Lexington Rescue Mission, earned him the right to stand behind that saw table.

"All my problems resulted from drinking," Harris said. "The Lexington Rescue Mission gave me a foundation for building my life over again. I attended classes in their Jobs for Life program and that set me up to get my job with Old World Timber."

Harris is grateful every day for the people at the mission and for the second chance the timber company gave him. He's been there more than three years and has become a valued and trusted employee.

The power of redemption

Harris is but one of many examples of the power of redemption the Lexington Rescue Mission thrives on. Through a multifaceted support system that touches on its clients' physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, the Christian-based organization helps hurting people heal and get a fresh start. Under the motto "Reaching Hearts...Changing Lives," it works with those reeling from the effects of poverty, homelessness, addiction, and incarceration.

"We look at the whole person and help them reach their God-given potential, whatever that may be," said Jim Connell, founder and executive director of the mission. "We help them to be honest with themselves and confront the obstacles they encounter in becoming self-sufficient and living productive, meaningful lives. Denial of their past is one of the enemies they face."

Programs and services range from the immediate — a hot lunch, a clean pair of socks — to long-range programs in housing, career preparation, and job placement. A transitional residential program deals only with men while all other programs, including permanent housing solutions, serve men, women, and families.

The mission's first contact with those in need often occurs at The Outreach Center on Glen



GREG SCHNEIDER

The mission can help clients find short- and long-term housing.



Clients can meet with a staff member (Erica Dominguez, left) or volunteer to discuss their situations and needs. Mission volunteers give more than 5,000 hours a year to the organization.

Arvin Avenue in north Lexington. There, a free light breakfast and lunch are offered six days a week, plus basic needs such as clothing and hygiene items. Clients can meet with a staff member or volunteer to talk about their situations.

Kaleb Heitzman, a mission board member and an online consultant for web development and social media strategy, is among the cadre of mission volunteers who together give more than 5,000 hours annually. In addition to meeting with clients at The Outreach Center, they take on virtually all of the work done in prisons, including Jobs for Life classes that teach interview skills, resume writing, and proper attire.

"They often arrive at The Outreach Center with a physical need and walk away with an emotional connection to the mission," Heitzman said. "They may be on the street, lonely, and don't know what to do next. We find out what's going on in their lives, offer to pray with them, ask how we can help. Sometimes their biggest need is just someone to talk to."

Erica Dominguez, director of The Outreach Center, echoed that thought: "A huge part of what we do here is just encourage hope. We do that by seeing them as a person, not as part of some group."

She explained the screening process for entry into the mission's homeless intervention program. "We use an expanded definition of homelessness that goes beyond just living on the street. They may be a couch-surfer, going

from friends' houses to relatives' and sleeping on a couch, or they may be sleeping in a car — anyone who is not in a stable home."

It takes from two weeks to two months to be assessed and approved for the program, after which the mission can pay for half the moving costs and help with deposit money for a permanent housing solution. In some cases, income-based housing can be located.

Men in need of transitional housing can take advantage of the mission's Potter's House on North Limestone Street and The House of Hope on North Broadway, which between them can house 32 clients. They can stay for up to 45 days at The Potter's House, where sober living and rigorous monitoring of their progress is the rule. The House of Hope offers up to three months of residency as clients prepare for employment and independent living.

Many of these men are coming out of prison or a rehabilitation center, or just off the street. Eligibility for housing comes only after a mental and behavioral health assessment, a personal needs inventory, and a goals and values clarification. The process includes delving into backgrounds that may include sexual, mental, and verbal abuse.

"A lot of the problem with our clients is their mindset," said Mark Gaus, case manager for transitional living. "They may feel shame at what they've put their families through, or something done to them as a child that they had no control over, but are still dealing with

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Staff member Laura Carr helps a client find a warm coat, an example of the clothing services offered by the mission.

at age 40. They have told themselves for so long that they're not worth it. I tell them the reason I do this is because they are worth it."

Finding a way back

Like many of the mission's other clients, Charlie Harris had done serious prison time, in his case for first-degree assault, robbery, and burglary. He's now absolute proof that a person can go horribly astray, yet with the right kind of support, counseling, and commitment, find his way back to decency again.

"The mission helped me get a picture ID and a birth certificate before I could really do anything," Harris said. "They taught me interview skills, punctuality, communication skills. I look people in the eye now and have confidence, thanks to them."

Rocke Saccone, director of opera-



Something as simple as a hot meal can help a client on a path toward success.

tions for Old World Timber, gives Harris a glowing evaluation for his dedication to work and the skills he has acquired.

"Charlie is a superb employee," he said. "He has the hardest job, that ini-

MISSION POSSIBLE

Lexington has a rescue mission because Jim Connell felt a calling to leave his job with a hospital foundation in Columbus, Indiana, and begin his life of service in a new context.

Connell and his wife, Becky, arrived in Lexington in April 2001 and began operation of the Lexington Rescue Mission in a house on North Limestone Street that became The Potter's House, offering transitional living for men. The mission now has three locations in the city.

The mission is a member of Citygate Network, a group of approximately 300 missions throughout North America whose members emphasize Christian spirituality in their dealings with clients. Lexington's branch draws its support from corporate and individual donors, churches, foundations, and municipal and federal grants.

During its 18-year history in Lexington the mission has grown considerably in its presence, scope of services, and number of clients. Some numbers from 2018 show the organization's strength:

45,631 MEALS SERVED

1,411 WALK-INS HELPED

110 GRADUATES OF THE JOBS FOR LIFE PROGRAM

146 CLIENTS PLACED IN TEMPORARY OR PERMANENT JOBS

6,917 DONORS

\$1.8 MILLION
ANNUAL BUDGET

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tial rip cut that has to be dead straight, and he's the best at it. We also put him in a leadership role. Every new hire shadows Charlie to learn the skills and our work ethic."

Nathan Brown, founder and CEO of the firm, is impressed with the way the Rescue Mission rehabilitates its clients in a work sense, helping them get ready to hold down a job.

"They do a great job of getting their clients through the healing process and ready to come to us with a good recommendation," he said. "We have several from the mission here, and they're not with us just because of our compassion, but because they do a good job. They made mistakes in their lives, but they're not bad men. They've redeemed themselves and paid their debts."

Lora Abney was among those giving testimonials at the mission's most recent "A Night of Celebration" fundraising event. She graduated from the Jobs for Life program while incarcerated and was court-ordered to the Hope Center for a recovery program after her release.

"My [mission] case worker helped me during my recovery with getting to doctor's appointments and running errands," she said. "They then provided me with a mentor and helped me find full-time employment. Everyone I've met at the mission has loved me and helped me." She now works at OWL, a nonprofit organization that helps people overcome barriers, such as mental or physical disabilities or prior incarceration, to achieve personal and professional growth.

Brian Lewis told about growing up in an inner-city Cincinnati housing project where he said "violence was always around. I made some bad choices and wound up with a 10-year sentence for drug-related charges."

He credits the Jobs for Life program with teaching him skills for success, and his mission mentor with helping him get a driver's license, apply to college, and acquire his real estate license from the Kentucky Real Estate Commission.

"I needed a helping hand, a second chance in life," he testified. "No one ever taught me how to win. This is what the mission and its volunteers do every day."

Dustin Owens had a very special person with him when he attended the celebration event and gave his testimonial: the 19-year-old daughter he had recently reunited with.



GREG SCHNEIDER

Charlie Harris has learned invaluable skills at Old World Timber.



JOSEPH REYAU

Jobs for Life program graduate Lora Abney, center, can count on Beverly Bales, left, and Anne Sawyer as mentors.

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The mission has helped Dustin Owens rebuild his life and reunite with daughter Abigail.

“The way I had lived, I had pretty much alienated myself from everything and everyone that was good,” he recalled. “Nobody wanted to have anything to do with me. My daughter Abigail and I were apart for 10 years. The Lexington Rescue Mission made our reunion possible.”

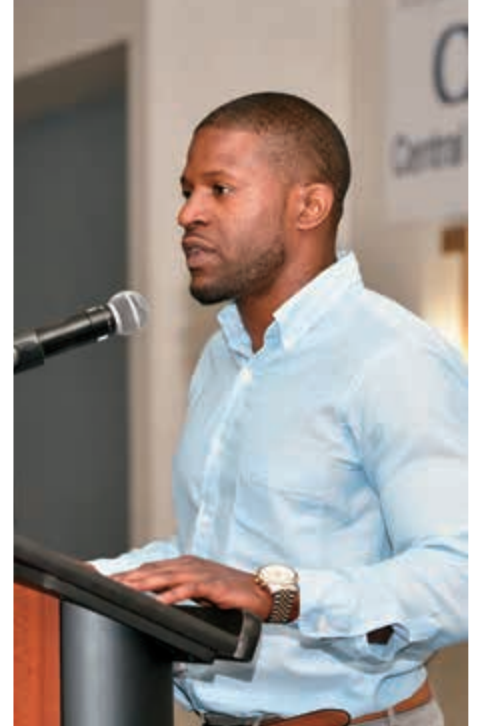
Owens’ jail time in Fulton County, Kentucky, came after a conviction for trafficking in heroin. Upon arriving in Lexington after his release, he stayed at The Potter’s House on his way to finding gainful employment. He’s a workmate with his fellow mission “graduate” Harris at Old World Timber and is also the coordinator at the mission’s House of Hope.

The spirit of Christmas

There are many such stories in the 18-year history of the Lexington Rescue Mission. The organization has created a reputation for looking hurting people in the eye and convincing them they are worth saving, that each life has a special, unique value.

One story in particular illustrates Mark Gaus’ explanation of why he does rescue work — “I have the heart for it” — and the caring attitude of all those connect-

ed with the mission. Logan Kennedy was staying in The Potter’s House and found himself alone at Christmas when all his fellow residents had scattered for the holidays. After helping him get this far in his recovery from alcohol and drug abuse, Gaus thought of Kennedy as “my little brother.”



JOSEPH REY AU PHOTOS

Brian Lewis, who acknowledges having made “bad choices,” now has his real estate license.

“Logan told me he had contacted his grandmother about coming to visit and she said, ‘Maybe next year.’ He had no place to go over the holidays. So, he wound up at my house for Christmas Day. And I gave him a present.”

That’s the heart of the matter at the Lexington Rescue Mission. **KM**



Becky and Jim Connell, with their daughter Laura, founded the mission in 2001.