



Catching Up With Clifton

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Clifton Sanctuary Ministries, Inc.

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Annual Graduation & Honors Dinner



The Clifton Annual Awards and Honors Dinner was a huge success this year, thanks in large part to the fabulous contributions made by our guests and graduates. The evening began with a very special invocation offered by Clifton graduate, Dion Rodriguez, who offered a prayer that he wrote while a guest at Clifton. Clifton graduate Lee Duncan provided dinner piano music and Clifton graduate and CSM board member, Arthur Johnson, led three current Clifton guests in two songs that he wrote during his time in residence at Clifton.

We celebrated 30 years of providing hospitality to men who are homeless beginning with memories from Clifton Presbyterian Church member, Marilyn Schertz, who allowed us to relive with her the first nights that homeless men slept in the church's sanctuary. An excerpt from her remarks is included in this edition of Clifton Connection. Rev. Chris Henry gave us a little insight into what it was like to serve as an overnight host, which he did while a student at Columbia Theological Seminary. Serving as an overnight host clearly meant a great deal to Chris, and he still has a picture of one of the guests in his office which continually reminds him of what serving is truly about.

Saving the best for last of our three speakers, Alvin Bailey brought down the house with his recollection of being a guest at Clifton, what it meant to him then, and what it still means to him now. Alvin is a 2006 graduate of Clifton and is currently employed by a Fortune 100 company. Alvin recently became engaged to his lovely fiancé', Dorothy, and a wedding is planned in the not too distant future.

Volunteer awards were given to several individuals and church groups who have contributed in special ways this year. Executive Director, Alice Jenkins, awarded the "That's So Cool" awards to Mary Thurmond for the cool way that she asked her Facebook friends to donate to Clifton through the Facebook site instead of sending her presents for her birthday. Because of this cool idea, Mary's friends contributed over \$200 to Clifton. Imagine if all of our friends did that – we'd never worry about our budget!! Mary's daughters, Sarah and Rebecca, also received their own "That's So Cool" awards for their constant consideration of Clifton. Not a week goes by that one of the Thurmond girls don't stop by Clifton with donations of food or other needed supplies. Mary, Sarah, and Rebecca all share their household with CSM board



member, Mike Thurmond. Servings others is truly a family tradition at the Thurmond house!

Volunteer of the Year awards were given to Elise Cormier and Andy Smits, as well as Bill & Suzanne Lomas. The four award winners are all members of Epworth United Methodist Church and they have taken charge of our lunch bag program. They are quite faithful to the effort of lunch bag assembly and the men of Clifton look forward to the inspirational



messages that are written on their lunch bags.

Pleasant Hill Presbyterian Church and Mount Vernon Presbyterian Church both went home as co-winners of the Church Volunteer of the Year awards. Among the many things that Pleasant Hill does to support Clifton is the fabulous way in which the church continues to incorporate the men of Clifton in their Upward worship service each month. The men go out to Pleasant Hill and participate in the musical portion of the worship service and then share dinner with the congregation.

Mount Vernon Presbyterian Church supports Clifton in so many ways that we couldn't begin to list them all here. Clifton is always on the mind at the end of congregational dinners at MVPC and CSM Board member, Carol Beckman, often pulls up in the parking lot, opens her trunk and the food flows out.



MVPC Foundation also generously supports Clifton each year, helping with a targeted project. Many individual members of MVPC are also financial supporters of Clifton.

Our dinner ended on a hilarious note as Joe's Place guest, Donald Long, retold his speech that he initially delivered for Clifton Toastmasters entitled, "I'm Bed One". Donald humorously recounted his first days at Clifton and navigating the waters of homeless service providers, making one think they had been transported back to "Oz". Check our website in the near future for a video of Donald's speech.

We are thankful to Peachtree Presbyterian Church for graciously allowing us to use their fellowship hall for our dinner and look forward to another fabulous dinner next year!

Support Clifton on Facebook

Clifton Sanctuary Ministries has had a web page for years (www.CliftonSanctuary.com). Now we can be found on Facebook, the social web site, as a "Cause." Next time you are on Facebook go to the "Causes" page and look for Clifton Sanctuary Ministries. Then join our cause and invite your friends to join you. The cause allows us to increase the visibility of Clifton locally and across the Internet. Donations can be made at any time through the Cause page and on special occasions you can invite/challenge your friends to make a donation to Clifton. Join the cause and when your birthday approaches you will have the chance to send a special invitation to your friends. Can't wait you can go to <http://apps.facebook.com/causes/birthdays/new> to make your birthday wish known to your friends.

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Clifton Sanctuary Ministries
Sharing the love of God we are a sanctuary for men seeking to overcome homelessness.

Invite Friends 85 members • \$420 raised

Looking Back on 30 Years of Hospitality

By Marilyn Schertz

Over thirty years ago Clifton was undergoing a transformation as we searched together to find a ministry we could all do. The spark of that



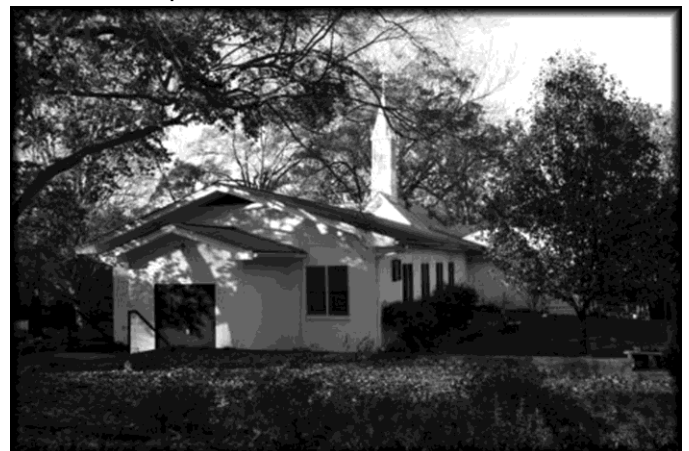
transformation was ignited by our weekly Bible study together every Sunday night, fueled by knowing a man in our neighborhood named Joe Coppage – a 30-something schizophrenic who wandered the streets

of Atlanta looking for food and shelter and safety; and set on fire by a young man named Mitch Snyder, a shelter organizer in D.C., who saw our facility – already equipped with a washer and dryer, a bathroom with a shower and a large room in which people could sleep and asked the question, what are you waiting for? He charged us to open the doors of our church to the homeless poor who were suffering and dying on the streets of our city. A core group of the members responded to the call and moved forward to make night shelter happen.

And so on November 1, 1979, our doors were opened to shelter homeless men. It was agreed that we would try it through the winter and then evaluate in the spring whether or not to continue. The stories of those first nights were both poignant and funny. The first task was to find folks who were sleeping outside and then try to convince them to get into Ed & Murphy's old blue van and come to our church for a meal, a shower, clean clothes and a bed. Not everyone was willing to jump on that van. Decisions about running the program were made as we went along, and rules and procedures were developed by trial and error. Our goal was to target those on the street who were the weakest – often this was the man who was in his last stages of alcoholism – and provide for them a place of hospitality, rest and recuperation. Rules were designed with that end in mind. Though drinking on the grounds was never tolerated, the lines became

fuzzier when dealing with inebriation in our guests. It was clear that the angry drunk would cause everyone to be uncomfortable and maybe feel unsafe, but the happy drunk who quietly ate his supper and went straight to bed? Like I said, it was a fuzzy area. One of the earliest growing pains for us, was having to ask a guest to leave the shelter. On more than one occasion, we invited a guest to come sleep on one of our couches or front porches because he had been asked to leave the church and we couldn't bear the thought of sending him out into the night. We had a lot of maturing to do in dealing with the struggles of addiction. At the end of the winter when it came time to decide whether or not to continue, we realized we had a group of men who had come to know Clifton as their home. How then could we suddenly stop and send them away? Well, we couldn't.

I worked for many years as the Monday night host and my fondest memories from those days include – standing at the doorway when the bus pulled in to greet each man and welcome him in. Playing a game of Spades or Dominoes and realizing shortly into the games that I was in way over my head. These were professionals, and boy was it fun to play with them! There was a woman who came on Monday nights whom we called the sewing lady. She was inspired to come and offer her skills after



someone from our church spoke to her Sunday school class. She would come in shortly after supper, set up her sewing machine and do whatever mending or hemming or button sewing

needed to be done. And so between cooking and serving supper, washing clothes and offering new ones from the clothes closet, sewing on buttons, helping a guest fill out a form, there was often much more than the activity itself – there were the conversations, the sharing of stories, the laughter and sometimes the tears and the discovery of the humanity in one another that transcended the reality of the situation. We have seen amazing transformations occur. In the lives of our guests, who often came into the shelter broken physically, emotionally and spiritually and experienced the healing that comes from regular food, from several nights of good sleep, and from gathering the courage to address the demons and obstacles in their way. And in our lives – the hosts and caregivers - who were also broken, weighed down

by our sinful selves. In reaching out to the men in the program, we too were transformed by the power that comes in the encounter of the Holy One.

Those of us who were at Clifton in those early years had a reunion this past spring. During a weekend of sharing memories, singing all the old favorite songs, and worshipping together we were reminded of what we had once experienced together as a community – of the power of the Holy Spirit working through us and in spite of us



Happy Birthday to Clifton!

A fun time was had by all! God loves homeless people! Those were only a couple of comments overheard at Clifton's 30th birthday party, held on the lawn of Clifton Sanctuary on Sunday, November 1. The weather was glorious and the entertainment provided by The Lucky Dogs, a local band featuring CSM graduate and board member, Arthur Johnson, was outstanding.



Chef Peter grilled up some fabulous burgers, hot dogs, and veggie burgers along with all of the fixins, topped off by birthday cake. Approximately 75 people joined in on the fun, including long time volunteers, neighbors, and guests, as well as some new friends. Thanks to all who attended – we look forward to seeing you again. We won't wait thirty years for the next celebration.



(Editor's note: *If you are looking for some great entertainment for your next party, please contact The Lucky Dogs. They were awesome! Contact Julie at (404) 373-3253 and she can hook you up!*)

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Funding for Clifton Sanctuary Ministries is provided by the City of Atlanta, Georgia Department of Community Affairs, HUD, local communities, churches and many individuals. We love you, We bless you, We appreciate you, We thank God for you!