



# The Starry Night Gazette



Vincent House, 4801 78<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
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www.vincenthouse.org

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## A SIX YEAR CELEBRATION: *Dreams and Dilemmas*

### Big Dreams, Humble Beginnings.

On January 20, 2003, Vincent House began at a storefront in a Pinellas Park strip mall. With a reconditioned vinyl sign from "Your Mother's Backyard Subs" (the former storefront tenants) Vincent House announced itself to the world. Equipped with donated computers, telephones, and a cooler for food, Vincent House hoped to be the first ICCD certified Clubhouse in the State of Florida.



CIRCA 2003

*Founding members and staff in front of the original storefront location.*

### A Story Worth Telling.

When their youngest daughter was diagnosed with a mental illness Dianne and Elliott Steele quickly discovered the lack of support for persons living with psychiatric disabilities in Pinellas County. Their disbelief and anguish eventually inspired a passion *to do something*. Each decided to resign at the height of their careers: Dianne sold her Animal Hospital and Elliott resigned after 17 years of work at University Community Hospital. The Vincent House doors opened, *but would anyone come?*

### A Dose of Reality.

One of the first members to enter Vincent House dared, "What are you do-

ing opening a place at eight o'clock in the morning? People with mental illness take psychotropic medications. No one will ever come at that time." His passion undeterred, Elliott got the word out at local human service agencies, talked to case managers and visited drop-in centers. *Before long, people started coming. Some even showed up at 7am and waited.* Two years later Vincent House became the first three-year ICCD certified Clubhouse in Florida.

### Success brings Challenges.

With a lifetime membership of over 500 members and \$340,000 in annual member earnings, we have much cause for joy. Yet, our biggest failure is perhaps our inability to support everyone who seeks services. With funding for just seven rehabilitation specialists, and only 2,850 sq ft of space, we have reached our limit. The current waiting list exceeds 125 applicants. During the best of times, Vincent House is able to accommodate 60-65 new members a year. Right now new membership is on hold.



*Members and staff work side-by-side to produce and mail 2,300 monthly newsletters to family, friends and supporters. Clubhouse provides members with the opportunity for meaningful work, friendships and the hope for a brighter future.*

**F**ull Circle. Dianne and Elliott hoped that this day would never come. It's no easy task to turn away members, parents, uncles and siblings who desperately seek services for their loved ones. In the words of the mother of one of our applicants: "I've seen how Vincent House changes lives and saves lives. In the case of my son, I believe that Vincent House will help to save his life. Unfortunately, he's on a long waiting list."



SIX YEARS OF:

*"Celebrating Recovery Through Work"*

### Back to Our Roots.

While we've come a long way from our 'Ma and Pa' roots, Vincent House continues to be a modest, grassroots' organization. We're not bankrolled nor do we have the luxury of an endowment. Our members don't need a hand-out, only a hand-up. And they need your help if we are to succeed. Help us to dig deeper roots within the community by offering your ideas, encouragement and support. Join a Vincent House Discovery Tour, help us network for jobs or write your state representative with a request for expanded Clubhouse funding. Help our garden grow.

*"Alone we are each a petal, together we are a flower."*

-Georgia Post (author)

### Join a Discovery Tour & Experience the Possibilities

A Vincent House Discovery Tour offers interested people in the community the opportunity to tour our Clubhouse, see the work of the units, and meet the founders, members and a representative of our Board of Directors.

**A VISIT TO VINCENT HOUSE IS A LIFE CHANGING EVENT.**

Choose from any of the following dates:

Tues., Feb. 10 @ 5:30-6:30 pm

Wed., Feb. 25 @ 10-11am

Tues., Mar. 10 @ 5:30-6:30 pm

Wed., Mar. 25 @ 10-11am

**Please RSVP: 727-541-0399  
Ask for Elliott or Dianne**

**Your donations enrich members' lives...we thank you!**

**This is our current WISH LIST:**

- Clothing dressers
- Commercial Walk-In Cooler
- Part-time jobs for our members
- Color Laser Printer
- Upgraded Camcorder & Microphone
- A Safe for our member bank

## Belonging to Vincent House

Nancy Brown

I belong to Vincent House. It is the place for me. Before finding the road to recovery, I took many roads and saw many places. When my dear husband (Forrest) died, I lost my traveling companion; I was alone. I had recurring major depression and suicidal tendencies for many years and addiction ruled my life; I did not BELONG ANYWHERE. My self-esteem and depression was at its lowest and the road to recovery was rocky.

I thought that Vincent House would help me find a JOB (like a staffing agency would). I soon found out that I was expected and encouraged to work (volunteer) at Vincent House. In addition, I did not get paid any money.

Vincent House helped me come out of depression, get back to work, and complete two (2) years of college. I still did not understand the real meaning of what it meant to be a LIFETIME MEMBER of Vincent House. My accomplishments fed my ego but did not help my self-esteem. After relapsing in my addiction, I stayed away from Vincent House and avoided facing my problems, not realizing that I was sliding back into my illness of depression.

When I finally "got with the program" and worked with my sponsor on my recovery, I realized something was still missing from my life. I still felt like "I did not BELONG ANYWHERE." Humbled enough to reach out for help, I returned to Vincent House. As a LIFETIME MEMBER I was welcomed back in the Clubhouse where I not only BELONG but I long to be. I often need the structure of the *work-ordered*



From left, members Joseph Altieri, Larry Haines, Laia Longo (staff) and Nancy Brown work in our "Leisure Bank" to assist Vincent House with staff and member banking needs.

day as our motto "Recovery Through Work" suggests. However, Vincent House is much more than a **job** to me. While it humbles me to see others (with mental illnesses that seem to be more severe than mine) who are recovering right alongside of me, I am working on building my self-esteem. They are helping me, as much as I hope to help them, to live with and overcome the debilitating effects of mental illness. It is like a family. We really have fun together, too.

Vincent House helps me discover and pursue the passion to help others that has been buried under the weight of my mental illness and addiction. With Vincent House as a major part of my recovery, I know that my road to recovery will be an endless journey of discovery and growth. I know that I do not belong **just anywhere**. Vincent House has a place for me. I BELONG to VINCENT HOUSE. *This* is the place for me.

## A Place of My Own

Adam Franz

I became a member of Vincent House in 2007 and have been coming regularly for about 9 months. After 3 trips to the hospital, I decided to try group home housing rather than return home to live with my mother. I tried two different homes, both locations were group homes in which you share a house with several other consumers and have at least one roommate. During this time Vincent House helped me find employment. First was floor maintenance, then folding linens, and now I'm a book puller at Seashell Books.

At the group home I found more freedom than at the hospital, and got to meet a lot of nice people. However, I wanted to take it a step further and have my own place to live. I passed the idea by my mother and she accepted. With the help of a real estate agent, we began looking for suitable housing. We finally found the place where I am currently living – a one room efficiency with kitchen and bathroom. The place was not in bad shape, it just needed some updating. After making the purchase, my mother and I began a 5-month process of renovating. Some of the tasks were: a new paint job, new air conditioner, new water heater, tile in the kitchen/ bathroom, and a new carpet. In November, with the work completed, I gave notice of my move. They agreed, and I was in my new condo by Thanksgiving. It has been several years since I've lived on my own. You get a sense of freedom that you don't get when living under someone else's roof. Thank you Vincent House and mom for helping me get to this stage in my life.



## Vincent House Wellness Walkers

Jenny Beckus

Vincent House has a Wellness walking group every Tuesday from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. We currently visit two parks: England Brothers Bandshell and Sparkle Lake Park. At Sparkle Lake Park we walk around the outside of the park, run laps on the basketball court, play basketball, do push



From left, Alex Houser, Jenny Beckus, Jason Michaud & Reena LeMacher are a few of the members who attend our Tuesday Wellness Walk group.

ups and sit-ups. It is very enjoyable and brings variety to the Wellness walk. At England Brothers Band Shell we walk laps around the trail. There is no minimum or maximum for the number of laps that are completed. We are able to walk at our own pace, and that makes the walk more enjoyable. The Wellness walk also serves as a means of interaction among members outside of the work-ordered day. While walking we are able to enjoy each other's company, help motivate each other to push harder to go the extra mile and put our best foot forward. Cte-sias gives us a great workout every Tuesday. We have an average of five members who attend the weekly Wellness walking group. The walking group is just one of the many things I like to do at Vincent House. I look forward to coming to Vincent House every day.



**Accomplishing My Goal**



Angela Parker

I have been a member of Vincent House since September 8, 2004. Vincent House has given me the opportunity to get back to work in the community. Since becoming a member, I have had three TEP jobs at Suncoast Medical Center doing clerical work and creating new patient charts. I currently have a permanent position with Windmoor Healthcare as a transportation specialist. I keep a log of all of the patients' names, addresses, and when they get dropped off at their homes. I have been with Windmoor since February 25, 2008, and I really like my job. It gives me a purpose to get out of bed in the morning. I get a chance to get dressed and look forward to the day. I like the people and the patients I work with. I tell them about Vincent House and I hope that they decide to join. In the beginning, I needed help with some paperwork and a fellow worker helped me complete it. I have not always been able to work because of my mental illness but now I know I am grateful to have the opportunity at Vincent House to practice work and now have a permanent job. Before my job at Windmoor, I felt like I wasn't accomplishing a goal and now I am!

**TRANSITIONAL EMPLOYMENT**

- |                            |                            |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Dimitri Byelov</b>      | <b>Liberty Lanes</b>       |
| <b>Brian Howe</b>          | <b>Liberty Lanes</b>       |
| <b>Carol Jackson</b>       | <b>Senior Services</b>     |
| <b>Lisa Sanders</b>        | <b>Sirata Beach Resort</b> |
| <b>Brittaney Spaulding</b> | <b>Liberty Lanes</b>       |
| <b>Athena Steele</b>       | <b>SCC-FACT Team</b>       |
| <b>Michael Taddeo</b>      | <b>Suncoast Center</b>     |
| <b>Deborah Wilson</b>      | <b>Suncoast Center</b>     |
| <b>Abraham Youssouf</b>    | <b>Galleria Plumbing</b>   |

**Continuing Education in 2009**

- |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Michael Ballenger</b> | <b>Aloysia McPherson</b> |
| <b>Latoya Johnson</b>    | <b>Shawna Rylander</b>   |
| <b>Bob Krehbiel</b>      | <b>Steve Scofield</b>    |
| <b>Franklin La Torre</b> | <b>Justin Shea</b>       |
| <b>Gayle Marchiniak</b>  | <b>Jason Sulimay</b>     |

*Working has helped me with my recovery through increasing responsibility.*

*-Jason Sulimay*

**Supported & Independent Employment**

- |                          |                              |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Michael Ballenger</b> | <b>Irrigation Specialist</b> |
| <b>Nancy Brown</b>       | <b>Tax Preparer</b>          |
| <b>William Champion</b>  | <b>Recovery Specialist</b>   |
| <b>Jennifer Dickey</b>   | <b>House Cleaning</b>        |
| <b>Tess Daniels</b>      | <b>Housekeeping</b>          |
| <b>Adam Franz</b>        | <b>SeashellBooks.com</b>     |
| <b>Debra Gaide</b>       | <b>SeashellBooks.com</b>     |
| <b>Eddie Gares</b>       | <b>Recovery Coach</b>        |
| <b>Craig Haydon</b>      | <b>Ground Maintenance</b>    |
| <b>Dennis Hill</b>       | <b>Theater Usher</b>         |
| <b>Gary Hinkson</b>      | <b>Sirata Beach Resort</b>   |
| <b>Brian Howe</b>        | <b>Prep Technician</b>       |
| <b>Bonnie Lawniczak</b>  | <b>Machine Operator</b>      |
| <b>Brian Lutz</b>        | <b>Food Preparation</b>      |
| <b>Philip Noonan</b>     | <b>Maintenance</b>           |
| <b>Angela Parker</b>     | <b>Transportation</b>        |
| <b>Michael Ralston</b>   | <b>Transportation</b>        |
| <b>David Reed</b>        | <b>Transcriptionist</b>      |
| <b>Shannon Riley</b>     | <b>Recovery Coach</b>        |
| <b>Heidi Rippen</b>      | <b>Service Clerk</b>         |
| <b>Ron Ritchie</b>       | <b>Transportation</b>        |
| <b>Chris Schaer</b>      | <b>Telemarketer</b>          |
| <b>Justin Shea</b>       | <b>Recreation Leader</b>     |
| <b>Joe Stabile</b>       | <b>Floor Maintenance</b>     |
| <b>Jason Sulimay</b>     | <b>Receptionist</b>          |
| <b>Terry Taggart</b>     | <b>Pet Groomer</b>           |
| <b>Judy Wilson</b>       | <b>Transportation</b>        |
| <b>Ed Wohlford</b>       | <b>Tri-Glo/Raytheon</b>      |



## GRATITUDE

### Thanks to Coldwell Banker Residential Real Estate Cares for your generous donation

Thanks to **Fox Run Florists and Gifts**  
for your Contribution towards our  
Valentine's "Petals of Friendship" Day.

### White Family helps turn up the Heat at Vincent House.



Special Thanks to the White Family for the  
donation of a brand new cooking grill.  
We look forward to introducing more  
grilled and healthy meals.

## My True Heroes

Tess Daniels

On November 13, 2008, I made tenure at Bay Pines Veteran's Hospital. It took three years to do this. I did not think I would make three weeks much less three years. There was a much more important date. That was March 2005, and that is when I found Vincent House. Without Vincent House, I would not have had the courage to apply for an independent full time job. I drop by Vincent House to recharge sometimes only for 15 to 20 minutes. It is enough. I spend all my government holidays and vacations at Vincent House. If at work, I seem to be getting a little off kilter, they say, "Go to the house."

When I get to spend time at Vincent House, it is spent with my heroes, the other members. I see them and know I can make it another day. We are a family, because everyone has walked in each other's shoes. There is no judgment here at Vincent House, just acceptance.

There are two people on this earth who had a dream. This dream became a passion. Elliott and Dianne Steele have an inability to take "no" for an answer. Vincent House became a reality so other people could realize their dreams,

By watching Elliott and Dianne advocate for people with mental illness, I've learned to advocate for myself. (It's not been easy.) The benefit of advocating for myself is that I now discuss my medications with my doctor. I've been able to discontinue several medications and I am now only on one medication. I wrote my Congressman and got results!

The other thing about Vincent House that is a miracle to me, I have not been hospitalized, since finding Vincent House. This is unbelievable to me, never did I think I'd go over 4 years with no hospital stays. Elliott and Dianne, thank you for your dream and never taking "no" for an answer.

*Where would I be without Vincent House? In my apartment, in my bedroom, in the dark.*

From my heart to your hearts, all my love: Tess.

