



# The Starry Night Gazette

Vincent House, 4801 78<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
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Special Edition

[www.vincenthouse.org](http://www.vincenthouse.org)

May 2009

## Building An Expansion of Hope

### GROUNDBREAKING NEWS



*Our neighborhood cat watches over our backyard, the site of our future 4,800 sq ft addition.*

**STAY TUNED**  
for upcoming invitations to our  
**Groundbreaking Ceremony!**  
*(Completion date set for early October)*

**FLASH!!**

### Why Expand Vincent House?

By Elliott Steele, co-founder

You may ask yourself: *Why would anyone do a \$1M expansion of a non-profit facility during these difficult economic times?* In recent months I've sat through many town hall type meetings, hearing of federal, state and local budget cuts. I've read the horror stories of people becoming jobless and homeless - homelessness that has even affected children. Domestic violence is on the rise. More and more I realize that we cannot afford to cross our arms and do nothing. We must enlarge Vincent House and put an end to our waiting list of over 125 potential members. Many of these people are going through the desperation and despair we experienced 15 years ago. I remember the feeling of hopelessness while witnessing our family member battle an illness over which neither she nor we had any control.

With a waiting list of over 125 potential members, I have had the heart wrenching task of telling family members that we have no space for their sons or daughters. I recently sat for an hour and cried with a father who's twenty-one year old son is newly diagnosed with a mental illness. This father simply doesn't have anywhere to turn. We receive calls from legislators who wonder why parents are complaining to them about the lack of mental health services. Vincent House and the promise of its restorative community is but a distant dream for those on a seemingly endless waiting list. As parents, we know firsthand the desperation and despair this illness can bring. And as parents, it is our duty to care for our children when they are ill. But without the tools and resources to provide that help, this can seem insurmountable.

Funding for mental health services has experienced annual cuts for years. At the same time, the number of people in need of these services is dramatically increasing. But in spite of these difficult economic times, **we will build**. Brick by brick, donation by donation, we will expand so that in October 2009 we will no longer have to deny people with mental illnesses the opportunities they desperately need and deserve. In our hearts, we know we are doing the right thing.

### The Long Wait is Over

By Doug Hammond

Being on the waiting list was agonizing to say the least. After my tour of Vincent House the days and weeks dragged on. I was isolated and alone, besides family, my room and Internet. My mom did things with me when she could (like going to the movies and such) but it wasn't enough to fill the void I felt inside. There were many dark days that I don't care to remember but that will stay with me for a long time (maybe forever): depression, being hospitalized, feeling lost and hopeless, and wondering why God was making me endure these things. I was always hoping and waiting for a phone call or any kind of update to my enrollment. When I finally got a date that I would be able to come it was one of (if not the) happiest moments in my life. Orientation was such an exciting experience, the members and staff became like a second family to me. I don't know what I would do without the support of Vincent House. I have made a few friends here and I know I will make many more as time goes on.



Doug Hammond, center, works with member Latoya Johnson, left and Clubhouse staff Jonathan Godwin, right.

# When Waiting is the Only Option

## The Meaning of a Waiting List

*This writer is helping Vincent house with its expansion campaign so they can burn their waiting list to help her daughter and everyone who needs help to begin their recovery without delay. Won't you join her?*

My daughter Jennifer has never had it easy. At birth she suffered a brain injury. While growing up, Jen wanted to become a teacher's aide. Eventually she got a job with the county schools, in the Bauder Elementary School kitchen. The kids knew her as "Miss Jen", and she had found a purpose in life.

Then the budget cuts hit, and Jen was laid off. Through her despair Jen tried to look for jobs in an ever-growing jobless market. Jen always wanted to be independent; I guess she gets that from our proud Irish side! Jen's world, however, was about to change forever, as mental illness overtook her. At first I thought Jen was just depressed from the constant bad news, but soon I realized she had mental health issues. For her own safety she went to the crisis center, and ten days later I got a call saying, "What time are you picking her up?" *What? What am I supposed to do with my child with no supports in place? I'm no expert; mental illness is all new to me.*

I learned quick. I learned to pick up the phone and call anyone and everyone, and I found myself going around in circles! "She has the wrong insurance"... "She doesn't qualify for our services because she's developmentally disabled"... "She doesn't qualify because she's got a mental illness." *If I can't find somewhere for Jen to recover, I'll have to leave my job because I can't leave her alone in this condition. If I leave my job, we're all going to lose our home.* It wasn't just about Jen anymore; we were all affected by a situation that was not her fault.

When we finally found Vincent House, I thought, *What a nice place! Food service, education, computer training, connections to local employers, support - what a wonderful idea this is! Everyone is so welcoming and nice! Vincent House would be perfect for Jen to get back on her feet, somewhere to make friends and know she's not alone in her challenges.* I wondered if she could start next Monday...

Then my heart sunk: The waiting list is twice as long as the current capacity! My last hope for my daughter, who never had it easy, was out of reach again. Now what am I going to do?

## Once Upon a Time: When There was no Waiting List

By Richard Baker

Before I found out about Vincent House or even knew there was such a thing as Clubhouses I lived in despair. Though I have lived a full life I have struggled with mental illness since my teens. At the age of forty, I ran out of options and I had to move to Florida and in with my father. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Feeling isolated and alone, and not knowing for sure what to do, one day in August 2004 my psychiatrist had read about a place called Vincent House in *The St. Petersburg Times* and suggested that I should check it out. So that night I got on the Internet and looked it up, I got the number and called the next day to arrange a tour.

I came that week for a tour and was really impressed. I had never dreamed of a place like this! Here I found people with similar interests and problems all working together to better themselves and working for the greater good. I came back the next week and went through orientation. And I have been here ever since. I was very lucky to get in as quickly as I did. I was in serious need of direction in my life and Vincent House not only gave me purpose, but also an understanding of my illness. I hate to think what would have become of me had I not gotten into Vincent House as soon as I did. I would have probably been in and out of the hospital with nothing to look forward to, no plan for recovery, and no hope of ever living a normal life. Now I have hope, something to wake up for in the morning, a purpose. I have gone from being disabled to becoming enabled. I now belong to a community where I am both wanted and needed.



Staff member William McKeever, left, works with member Richard Baker on the Gazette.



### Community Volunteers in support of Vincent House

*Hair stylists Chris Sulimay, fifth from top left, and Sandy Hall, bottom left, offer free haircuts to Vincent House members on a regular basis.*

## Van Gogh's Palette, Inc., Board of Directors

*Vincent House is a program of Van Gogh's Palette Inc., a not for profit 501(c)3 corporation. The Board of Directors is comprised of individuals from the community who volunteer their time, energy and expertise for the benefit of Vincent House.*

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**Marc Rippen**  
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**Paul Ziegler**  
*Vice President, Colonial Bank*

**Vincent House has remained a grassroots project.  
Your support and input is vital to our continued success.**

- Please read the accompanying pamphlet.
- Attend a Discovery Tour and bring a friend.
- Complete and return the enclosed survey.
- Please contact any corporations, foundations, or philanthropists who may wish to support our efforts.
- Volunteer your time, skills and efforts to our Capital Campaign.
- Leave a legacy by buying naming rights and sponsoring a room.
- Dedicate a brick in honor or memory of someone dear to your heart.
- Attend our Groundbreaking Ceremony.

**This is your project, too. We need your contributions and help to achieve our goals.**

**Join a Discovery Tour**

- Tues., May 12, 2009 @ 5:30-6:30 PM
- Wed., May 27, 2009 @ 10-11 AM
- Tues., June 9, 2009 @ 5:30-6:30 PM
- Wed., June 24, 2009 @ 10-11 AM
- Tues., July 14, 2009 @ 5:30-6:30 PM
- Wed., July 22, 2009 @ 10-11 AM

**Please RSVP  
Dianne or Elliott Steele  
at 727-541-0360**

**New Beginnings - A Family Perspective**

**A Daughter's View:  
Surrounded by Love**

By Jenny Beckus

Dianne and Elliott are the greatest people ever. They quit their jobs to help their daughter and other people with mental illness. Dianne had her own practice as a veterinarian. Elliott was the Administrative Director of Support Services at University Community Hospital. Dianne and Elliott have created a warm family environment at Vincent House. Elliott has planted a vegetable garden and a butterfly garden so that being outside is peaceful. They ask for our thoughts and opinions so we feel like we are part of something and we are not alone.

Dianne and Elliott have taught me that "It is not what happens to you that determines how far you will go in life; it is how you handle what happens to you." Dianne and Elliott are very hard workers. They are very dedicated people. Vincent House has changed my life. If it wasn't for Vincent House I don't know where I would be. I am a young adult, and I have learned a lot from the staff at Vincent House. I have been attending Vincent House for a year now. I serve food in the Food Service Unit and I have even learned how to cook a little bit. I also like working in the Administration Business Unit. I have learned to write articles for the Gazette and the newsletter for Vincent House. Before I started attending Vincent House, I never dreamed I would be able to write articles on a computer (with a lot of help from my Vincent House family).

**A Happy Mom  
Returns to Work**

By Kathy Beckus

Ten years ago, my daughter Jenny had her first breakdown. It was a frightening and very sad time for Jenny and our family. We had no idea what the future held. My husband and I have our own business and I stopped working to stay home with Jenny.



*Kathy Beckus, left, with her daughter Jenny, right, while visiting at Vincent House.*

During the next several years our family's life revolved around Jenny's struggle with stabilizing her condition through medication, and finding a way to live with the unpredictable fears that would surface. Jenny lost her sense of independence and self worth. Her world shrank. Although we had a wonderful support of loving friends and family, in a certain sense it seemed that our family was in "suspended animation."

A little over a year ago Jenny changed both her therapist and her medication. Her new psychiatrist recommended we call Vincent House, which unknown to us, was going to transform all of our lives. Vincent House has been a portal back into the world again, not only for our daughter, but for our family as well. Jenny now has a place to go, friends to see, work to do, and new skills to learn. Her emotions are more balanced. I have been able to return to work, which has lightened my husbands load and eased our finances. It has been wonderful for Jenny and me to spend time apart.

We will forever be grateful to Dianne and Elliott, the staff and club members for surrounding Jenny with acceptance, purpose and friendship. Thanks to Vincent House not only has Jenny bloomed again, but so has our family.

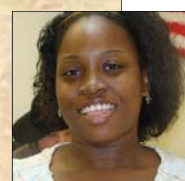
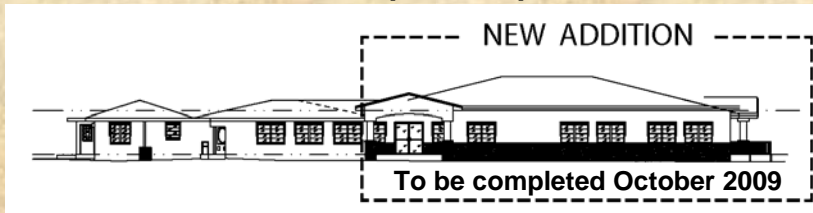


Founders of Vincent House, Dianne and Elliott Steele, with member Jenny Beckus, center.

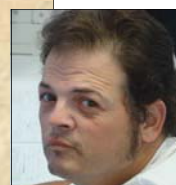


## GOOD NEWS!

### Vincent House Plans to Expand Hope to the Community



When Vincent House first opened in a local strip mall, we wondered if anyone would really come. It was an inspired yet risky endeavor, especially for our co-founders who left their respective careers to start Vincent House. The naysayers warned that it couldn't be done, not in Florida. That was then.



Six years later and after countless success stories, the challenges have grown—and so have the risks. We watched as our Clubhouse creaked to its limits with members eager to seize the opportunity of work and friendship. We watched as our membership size increased to 500 people. And we watched as our waiting list swelled with over 125 applicants.



We will watch no more. In May, we will begin building an expansion to accommodate the applicants clamoring to join Vincent House. It's risky business to build in this economy, but it's much riskier to sit idly while over 125 people with mental illness languish in the depths of hopelessness and despair. That's one risk we won't take.

