

Halfway Home

The Newsletter of Renascence, Incorporated

Spring 2017

The mission of Renascence is to help non-violent, male ex-offenders make a successful transition from prison into the community.

“I’m not who I used to be”

Riding through the countryside in Autauga County on the way to Crystal Lake Manufacturing, a company he formerly worked for that makes mops and brooms, Lanny Mullis was full of plans for the immediate future. It was Friday, December 29, 2008. Lanny had been at Renascence since April, had paid all but \$500 of his restitution, and he expected to be off parole once that was paid. He had a steady job with a local landscaper that he secured while at Renascence and had held for a good while.

We took what he called “the scenic route,” traveling down Highway 31 to get to Highway 14. Lanny grew up in Prattville, so he pointed out familiar landmarks from his childhood—where his father’s widow still owned 11 acres, where he used to go to the store, where he was arrested for a DUI, among others. We also passed a house where a pontoon boat that someone had given him sat in the yard. The friend was to swap the boat for a camper once Lanny finished his time at Renascence. This was to become his home.



Lanny and his “best friend”
Little Bit

But sometimes things don’t go as planned. When I got to Renascence Monday morning after feeling good all weekend about how well things were going for Lanny, I had a total shock. He had “celebrated” his birthday on Jan 31 with beer



While at Renascence, our men are required to take care of the upkeep of the house and grounds as a part of our program to adjusting to the free world. A job Lanny took on during his time as a resident was tending our community garden.

and drugs. He confessed and told the house manager he didn’t even need to be tested, then called his parole officer, who took him off. Unfortunately, such is the nature of addiction.

Sometimes success doesn’t happen the first time around, but that doesn’t mean it can’t happen. Lanny returned to Renascence in December 2010 and left with a graduation certificate in February 2011. He’s been driving trucks ever since, an occupation he wanted to pursue “ever since I was a kid.”

Currently, he drives a log truck several hundred miles a day and likes that he is home every night. “Home” is Columbus,

MS. In his spare time, he enjoys working in his yard and garden. He’s “not rich, but I’m staying out of trouble.”

When asked what his time at Renascence did for him, he replied, “It gave me a positive attitude and let me know I am somebody.” He closed our conversation with a quote he learned at Narcotics Anonymous meetings: “I’m not



who I want to be; I’m not who I’m gonna be; but by the grace of God, I’m not who I used to be.” —DP

Lanny next to his log truck that he has almost completed payments on.

A Vital Mission

Halfway Home

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Director Al Smith

I write this with a heavy heart. You see, this is my last newsletter article for Renescence. After over 3 years at the helm, I am moving back to Maine to be close to aging parents. It was a tough decision but one I needed to make.

As I look back over three years, I am amazed at how far we have come. Renescence is stronger and leaner than it has ever been. We have expanded the house to take 14 men instead of only 12. That may not sound like a big increase, but every bed helps when you realize the in-

credible need for our service.

I thank each and every one of you who have supported us in our mission. We couldn't have done it without you. We often talk about how Renescence isn't "sexy" when it comes to attracting donors. We are not cute puppies or kittens. We are not deserving children or battered women. We are a simple nonprofit trying to get men back on the right track after they have made some mistakes. I thank you for recognizing the importance of what we do.

In three years we have had a lot of successes, and as often happens when dealing with humans, a few failures as well. I have watched attitudes change, I have watched men grow and develop into the men they always wanted to be, and I have made many friends along the way. I have met many loyal supporters who generously give of their time, resources, and money to make sure we can keep helping those men.

But most importantly, I have met a lot of men. Many really good men! Men who have made bad decisions. Men who may be caught up in addiction and struggle to break free. Men who don't like their life choices but struggle to stay on the right side of the law. Men just like the men you know! We have helped many of them reach a new stage in their lives and begin new journeys. As many of you know, Renescence means "rebirth" and rebirth I have witnessed!

The exciting thing about helping these men is that the effects of our efforts do not simply remain with the men. When we help a man get his life back on track, that gift goes far beyond the man. It extends to wives, children, moms and dads, family members, and society as a whole. If you think about the impact one man makes on those around him over a lifetime of interactions, it is fair to say that although Renescence may not be "sexy" it is truly vital!

Take care and please keep supporting this vital mission!

The name "Renescence"

The name Renescence means "rebirth," and was inspired largely by the fresh start men will begin in this residential program and partly by the poem "Renescence" by Edna St. Vincnet Millay (1862-1950). It comes directly from the same Latin word as the more familiar form Renaissance, which came into English from French. Renescence is pronounced "reh NAY sons," with the same stress on the second syllable.

From the Board President



Nelson Smith

Let me begin my column by acknowledging and thanking board members who transitioned off the board in late 2016, including former President Mary Lil Owens, Fundraising Co-Chairs Nancy Bradford and Bill Mitchell, Cyrus Johnston, and Brian Belsterling. The work they did in advancing this enterprise was truly outstanding. I especially want to recognize Mary Lil for her outstanding leadership in steering Renaissance through some challenging moments. Importantly, Mary Lil and Nancy continue to serve Renaissance as members of the Ping Pong Committee. Thank you all for a job well done.

Our Ten Year Celebration and Benefit on March 3 was a great success. Ten years of shepherding formerly incarcerated men back into society is a notable milestone and we celebrated it with gusto. Special guests Mayor Todd Strange, Chief of Police Ernest Finley, County Commissioner Isaiah Sankey, and City Councilman Tracy Larkin added to the luster of the evening. And through residents' stories, we introduced quite a number of people to Renaissance and its critical place in our community. Importantly, we added just short of \$5,000 to Renaissance' coffers.

Next up is our Ping Pong for Renaissance 2017 Tournament. This will be held at the Alcazar Center on Eastern Boulevard, beginning with the Slamfest kickoff party on Friday, May 5, with the tournament itself on Saturday, May 6. Last year's tournament in August was a great success, and this year's brings much promise with a bigger venue and more tables for competition. Look on pages 4 & 5 for more information – it will be great fun.

It is with regret that we say farewell to Al Smith, our outstanding Executive Director, who is returning to his home state of Maine this spring. He has done an excellent job in managing and advancing Renaissance operations during his tenure, and has expanded community awareness of the important work Renaissance does in reintegrating the men we serve back into society. Al, you will be missed. Best wishes and God speed.

Finally, I wish to thank all of you who receive this newsletter for your steadfastness in supporting Renaissance. Your faithful contributions and support are vital to our operations and sustainment and are deeply appreciated.

With best personal regards,
Nelson Smith



Three Renaissance residents tell party guests their stories about what Renaissance has given them to help them prepare them for a better life. They attributed a lot of their new outlook to House Superintendent Dereck Wise, Director Al Smith, Recovery Group leader and Board Member Laura Murdock, and Volunteer Bible Study Leader Andy Whitehead.



(Above) Churchwomen United President Avril Harris and member LaShandra Warren-Barnes discuss business after the meeting at Renaissance House on Feb. 25. CWU has been a faithful supporter of our reentry program since the beginning, both with an annual financial donation as well as individual kindnesses and donations of food and supplies for the men. (Below) Secretary Deborah Carr, President Avril Harris, and Ozie Harold at the meeting.





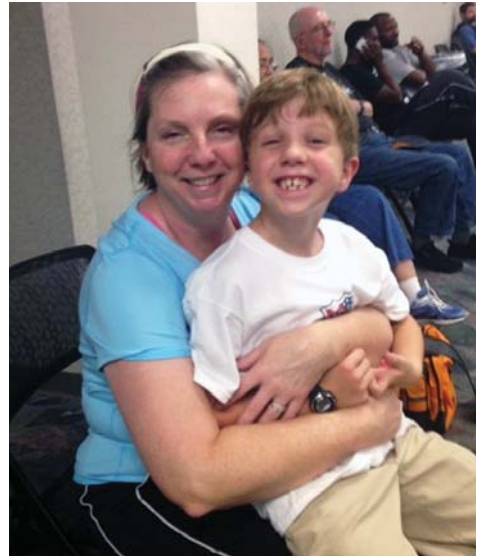
NOT JUST A KID'S GAME

Last year's Table Tennis Tourney was a huge success for Renaissance! So much so, that we plan to repeat it this year as our major fundraiser, again in partnership with Table Tennis Charity (PingPong.GIVES).

A big change is that it will be held on Saturday May 6---just before school lets out, which we hope will allow more children, teens, and parents to be involved than in last year's end of summer event. This is an amateur tournament and all levels of skill are invited. Another change is location. It will be held at the Alcazar Shrine Center, 555 Eastern Boulevard.

Although we want children, teens, and adults to participate in the tournament on Saturday, we will hold a "Slamfest" adults only preview party Friday, May 5. This event will include food, drinks, music, a silent auction, and a professional DJ. Tickets are \$45 each.

Ping pong (or table tennis) is an active game that can involve the whole family. And it's good for everybody no matter the age because it involves quick reaction time, eye hand coordination, and strategic thinking. Also, it's considered to be the world's best brain sport because "it stimulates all areas of the brain simultaneously," according to Dr. Daniel Amen from the University of California Irvine.



Angela Sherbine and her son Nathaniel enjoyed playing at the tournament.

We challenge our Renaissance residents to step up to the table and play by the rules just as a ping pong player is expected to do in the game. Playing by the rules is a must for our residents who have to do so in order to turn their lives around. Helping them accomplish this is our mission.

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TO REGISTER:

Friday, May 5, 6 – 9 pm

Slamfest Pre-Tourney Party (adults only)

RSVP either on the website or by sending a check for \$45/person to Renascence, Inc., 215 Clayton St., Montgomery, AL 36104

Saturday, May 6 – 9 am – 3 pm

Amateur Table Tennis Tournament

(all ages and skill levels)

Admission: \$10 for players under age 18
\$20 for players 18+

Pre-register for the tournament online at <https://halfway-home.net> or call Renascence at (334) 832-1402 for more information. (See the website for player levels.)

We welcome volunteers who wish to help on the day of the tournament! Call Tricia Crowley at 264-7386 if you'd like to help.

TOURNAMENT SUPPORTERS

Bear Lumber Company
Ed Crowell



Two residents practice at the house before the tournament.

Thank you, Donors and Volunteers



Thanks to all who have so generously given
Donations, Volunteer Hours, and In-Kind Items to RENASCENCE.

The following list reflects gifts and services for November 30, 2016 through March 15, 2017

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As of March 22, 2017, Renaissance has served 266 men, saving Alabama taxpayers \$17,406.85 a year for each man we take in.



TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Our men are released from prison with only \$10, a bus ticket, and the clothes on their backs. For those with no family support, which is the case in many instances, we must purchase necessities. Donations of these items go a long way toward helping not only the men, but also toward helping us save funds to pay monthly bills and salaries of the 24 hour per day supervision of the men. Listed below are some items that are always welcome.

- Bus passes (5 passes for \$10.00)
- Toiletries (toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap, shampoo, etc.)
- Jackets
- Towels and wash cloths
- New underwear
- Walmart gift cards
- Cleaning supplies
- Twin bed sheets & pillowcases
- Paper supplies (paper towels, toilet paper, etc.)
- New pillows
- Bicycles

In addition to the above items, we also encourage groups to bring in meals to sit down and share with the men. Be sure to let us know ahead if you want to do this so we can prepare. This is a concrete way to show them your support.

For the first few weeks after they arrive, residents need to get identification, drivers' licenses, and sometimes to get to doctors' appointments, so we appreciate volunteers who are willing and able to take them.

Whatever you choose to do, whether it be financial or hands-on, you can be sure you are making a significant difference in a person's life—and at the same time, maybe in your own.

RECLAIM, REBUILD, REINTEGRATE

Help Renascence residents reclaim and rebuild their lives, so they can reintegrate successfully into society as productive, responsible individuals.

Your 100% tax-deductible contribution to Renascence, Inc. could provide the following:

- \$50 health clinic visit
- \$500 6 GED assessments fees
- \$100 drug screens/month
- \$2,500 one in-house program
- \$5,000 one resident/3 months
- Other (operations, programs, etc.)

Name _____

Address _____

Make checks payable to Renascence, Inc. and mail to Renascence, Inc., 215 Clayton Street, Montgomery, AL 36104, or donate via our website at www.halfway-home.net

I wish to receive future newsletters via email.

Email address _____

Renascence, Inc. is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization.

Halfway Home

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PLEASE JOIN US!

SLAMFEST PRE-TOURNAMENT PARTY

Friday, May 5, 2017
6 pm to 9 pm
Tickets: \$45

PING PONG TOURNAMENT FOR ALL AGES

Saturday, May 6
9 am to 3 pm
Admission: \$10 (under 18);
\$20 (18 & up)

Location: Alcazar Shrine Center
555 Eastern Boulevard
Montgomery, AL 36117

Register on <https://halfway-home.net>
Or send check to Renascence, Inc.
215 Clayton St., Montgomery, AL 36104