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Quarterly Newsletter of Lower Lights Ministries

Summer 2009

Rachel's House Receives Special Blessing

This year has marked several milestones for *Rachel's House*, our prisoner reentry program. Earlier this year, many RH graduates celebrated our first annual "Alumni Event," celebrating the continued success of many participants. We also enjoyed the smooth transition of welcoming Kristin Garrison as Program Director, as well as releasing a second edition of greeting cards produced by inmates at Ohio Reformatory for Women. Little did we know that one of the greatest blessings was yet to come.

Upon her resignation to pursue her education, Lower Lights approached Pastor Jan Ruark to inquire about purchasing their Franklinton home located directly across from our offices. This beautiful home had been well cared for by Bill and Jan, and was an opportunity we could not pass up, believing God was opening the door for us to expand Rachel's House to a third location. We did not, however, expect what would happen next.



As we were preparing contracts for the property acquisition, David Gay, Executive Director of Lower Lights received a call from a long-time supporter. The family, desiring to remain anonymous, has a long family tradition of giving generously and prayerfully to worthwhile endeavors. Last year, the family noticed that their charitable fund was dwindling due to the struggling economy. The family was somewhat perplexed, inquiring why God would allow something they intended for good to be taken away, however, the family did not sense the urgency to invest the gift in ministry. As months passed, statements continued to show losses.

Finally, the family decided to close the account, trusting that it was God's will for this fund to be put to use immediately. Rachel's House was their first choice in which to invest. When they went online to transfer \$10,000 to Rachel's House, they recognized the first increase in nine months. We appreciate their faithfulness that will result in more women experiencing the love of God.



Volunteer Works Her Way Out of Job

It was not without immediate concern from our staff when Sharon Acker, Employment Coordinator for *Rachel's House*, came into our office proclaiming, "I am out of a job!" Fortunately, Sharon was reporting with excitement that all of the ladies of Rachel's House were employed. Considering the current competitive job market, this is no small achievement for women with prison records, and many attribute their successful job placement to Sharon. We asked Sharon to share briefly her experience as a volunteer.

Sharon has served *Rachel's House* since 2004, serving initially with transportation, but evolving into a member of the Leadership Team as *Employment Coordinator*, assisting participants with job placement and retention, and logging approximately 20 hours weekly. Sharon says her greatest blessing is "...seeing women change their attitude about work, get promotions, and find job satisfaction." Sharon appreciates when she sees employed RH participants help other women find jobs. In contrast, Sharon cites that a huge barrier is finding employers who will give ex-offenders the opportunity they need. Fortunately, Sharon, as well as the participants, have helped many employers transcend stereotypes.

Sharon loves to serve, asserting "The miracles and blessings I see in Rachel's House help sustain me in my occupation where there are fewer evident blessings." Marilyn Goin, Rachel's House Spiritual Director speaks for all of us when she says, "Sharon is a totally amazing volunteer!"

Family Gets Creative to Bless Others

Dan and Debi Renner, committed Lower Lights volunteers and attendees of Grace Fellowship in Pickerington, presented Lower Lights Ministries with a considerable gift this Spring. Dan explains that his pastor presented their family with an envelope containing \$150 to accompany his sermon on the "Parable of the Talents" and encouraged them to report how the funds were used.

"We wanted to use the money in a way that our whole family could participate in. We also wanted people to get something of value in return for their contributions," Dan states. "We decided to take our money and invest it in supplies to bake gourmet cookies and create custom designed handbags. We took those items and sold them to friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors. Okay, I admit it..." Dan confesses, "...Debi did most of the baking and sewing, but the kids and I helped in different ways... making Lower Lights fliers, order forms, and knocking on doors peddling our goods." All told, the family was able to present Lower Lights over \$1,000.

We asked Dan what he felt was their secret to success and any advice he would give to others considering doing the same. "Have Fun!! We really had a good time as a family. It allowed us to do ministry together and to teach some life lessons. Use the project as a means to engage people you might not rub elbows with every day. We got to meet some new neighbors and got reacquainted with others. Extend your reach. Don't just ask for a donation. Leave people with something of value for their support. Whatever you do, do it with excellence. You are not only representing Lower Lights, but also our Lord Jesus." We plan to take Dan's advice as a ministry!

KIDS @ CAMP

As in years past, Lower Lights is a flurry of activity as we engage in our Summer Camps. These camps afford Franklinton children the opportunity to be in a safe, nurturing (and fun!) environment throughout the day, as well as giving them the chance to grow spiritually and relationally.

In June, Lower Lights, in partnership with **New Life Gahanna** church, hosted our 2nd Annual Masterpiece Arts Camp. For five days, local children learned dance, illustration, music and more. The camp concluded with a special Gala Event on Father's Day where they were able to show off their newly found artistic talents and skills.

Throughout July, Anna Feeney is coordinating our four week Summer Day Camp called "God's Wonderful World." Over 65 children have participated in this camp, and equally amazing, groups have traveled far to assist with camp, including groups from Houston, Shippensburg (PA), and two groups from West Virginia (Pierpont & Winfield), as well as groups from throughout Ohio.



Columbus Equipment Company – A Tradition of Giving

As in years past, **Columbus Equipment Company** recently blessed Lower Lights Ministries with a generous contribution of \$14,000 to continue our impact on Franklinton families. Tom and Cookie Stivison, co-owners of this family construction equipment dealership, have been committed to our mission for years, contributing financial support, as well as sponsoring our annual Pumpkin Patch event. They are dedicated to continuing the giving tradition that Columbus Equipment Company has had since opening in the early 1950s. We appreciate the generous, faithful support of this and other corporate investors.



Light the Way Home Participant - Moving Forward

We recently sat down with Sharon, a *Rachel's House* graduate and current *Light the Way Home* participant for a conversation on how God continues to move in her life, and the doors that are opening for her since coming to Lower Lights a couple of years ago.

"I can't tell you how broken, horrible and miserable I was prior to going to prison," Sharon states. "I was a cold-hearted person with no regard for others. I was selfish and it was all about ME!" Today, however, God has been putting back the broken pieces in Sharon's life. "Once I found Jesus and He sent people into my life to be His tangible presence, things have changed. God has softened my heart in ways I didn't think was possible," she continues. Sharon says that while at Lower Lights she has grown spiritually, her self-respect and love for others has increased, and "...because of the warm and inviting spirit of the people at Lower Lights..." she wants to do good for others.

Sharon has been steadily employed since participating in the Rachel's House program, and shows great promise as a Franklinton resident and a community leader. Sharon see herself as someone who gives back some of the same love and support she has received. "I want to figure out ways to enhance the lives of others," she says, "I want to be a person people can come to and that others depend on and trust." She also hopes someday to own her own cleaning business.

Property Renovations Present Volunteer Opportunities

Lower Lights is excited about generous support from businesses like National City Bank, Nationwide Insurance, and Wal-Mart for capital improvements on our housing properties. Renovations are well underway and we are seeking groups to assist with projects ranging in skill and cost. If your group is interested in helping, contact Dave Stoffel at dstoffel@lowerlights.org or call our office.



ANNUAL REPORT

In order to better steward financial resources in this time of budget constraints, we are making our recently published 2008 Annual Report available **by request only**. Please email us if you would like a printed copy of our annual report. Digital copies are available to view and print on our website.

A NEW FACE

Lower Lights Ministries is happy to welcome David Stoffel to our team as Director of Volunteer Services. Dave leaves a long career in civil engineering, believing God has called him into full-time work in the nonprofit sector. Dave has served as a Lower Lights volunteer for years and is active at Reynoldsburg United Methodist Church where he serves with his wife Paula.

We look forward to Dave adding his special capacity of organizing teams and project management, as well as his willingness to serve others, to make our volunteer department stronger.

Anna Feeny, who precedes Dave as Director of Volunteer Services, will be taking a full-time position with the Franklinton Literacy Initiative later this summer. We are excited to continue serving alongside Anna in this exciting, new opportunity.

KROGER REWARDS

Interested in helping Lower Lights each time you buy groceries? Contact Heather at hhofacre@lowerlights.org for information on how you can link your *Kroger Rewards* card to support our organization.

Join us for our 5th Annual *Celebration of Hope* Banquet

This year we are making several changes to our annual banquet, including changing location and times. We are pleased to announce that the banquet will be held **Friday, November 6th** at the **Firefighters Union Station 67** (located on West Broad Street next to Spaghetti Warehouse.) We are thrilled to host this event in the Franklinton neighborhood using this beautiful, historic train station, as well as making the date more convenient for you.



As in years past, **Cabot Rea of WCMH *NBC4*** will serve as emcee. The night will feature special music, auction, and special testimonies of God's transformative work. Registration and ticket sales will be available later this summer. Please watch our website for more details.

Lower Lights Ministries is a faith-based, non-profit organization established in 1991 to promote the well-being and development of our community by **partnering together as loving neighbors** - moving people from "get" to "give," and thus restoring Franklinton to a thriving neighborhood.

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