SPIRIT IN THE HOUSE SHINES BRIGHT AT VILLA ANNUAL PICNIC

Historically, the weather has played a leading role in determining the success of Veritas Villa’s Annual Picnic, but while the rain kept at bay and humid skies prevailed, it was the bright, sunny spirit of brotherhood and fellowship that stole the show on July 25, 2009 when over 500 Villa alum, friends and family turned out for The Villa’s 36th Annual Picnic. It was a day-long celebration of sobriety complete with fun, games and in the tradition of The Villa, plenty of delicious BBQ fare.

The day’s events included a range of games from the annual horse shoe toss to a scramble of activities for the younger set, organized by Jane B. of the Women’s Program and assisted by Villa alum, Carol H. Kids danced to the spinning tunes of the DJ, made giant bubbles and even marched in a “Sober” parade, complete with colored banners and a riotous hoopla of crashing cymbals celebrating life without drugs or alcohol.

Custom was observed with a 4:00 pm Speaker Meeting led by Tom B. who began the proceedings by introducing Chelsea M., a recent first-time “graduate” of the Women’s Program who, in addition to recounting her Villa experience, is credited with having coined a new phrase to add to The Villa lexicon when she described her too frequent meetings with Jim Cusack as feeling like she was about to be “cucified.” On the contrary, she found the conversations with the Villa founder, productive and enlightening to say the least. Joseph G. who celebrates his Jewish heritage with as much zeal as he does his 982 days of sobriety and Kevin J., with almost 7 yrs., spoke with reverence for The Villa’s allegiance to AA’s democratic principles as put forth in the Preamble. Tana B. recited her gratitude poem written for Jim and Sue Cusack, thanking them for their care and concern for her during her stay in Treatment. The Men’s Program’s Frank M. presented his friend and colleague, Tom D. with a one year medallion, and two plaques were presented recognizing Jerry S. of the Men’s Clinical Team and Al F., Manager-The Rockaway Halfway House for their dedication to helping The Villa fulfill its mission.

Jim Cusack capped the afternoon’s events with a poignant, heartfelt message of encouragement and hope for the future of, not just The Villa, but Recovery in general. He suggested, as he has been known to do in the past, that the future success of the Recovery movement is rooted in a revisiting of basic Program principles. Jim is a self-proclaimed advocate of a “Back to Basics” approach to healing and wellness. The 36th Annual Veritas Villa Picnic was a demonstration, not just of Recovery at work, but Recovery at its best.
Gotcha! Again:
A Family Affair To Honor Jim’s 80th

Little did Jim Cusack know an encore was in store to celebrate his 80th Birthday. No sooner had the guest of honor and his over 300 admirers, comprised of staff, friends and colleagues, recovered from the excitement of surprise party number one on April 18 at The Villa, than wife, best friend and business partner, Sue began preparing Jim for operation “Gotcha! Again.”

Soon after finishing touches for The Villa party were complete, Sue resumed her role as party planner to orchestrate another celebration to commemorate Jim’s ushering in what has become known among octogenarians as “the New 60.” Jim is no exception. His verve and zest for life are what keep him going along with his undisputable love of family and his mission.

Those who showed for the April 25 surprise celebration in Connecticut know him as “Uncle Jim” because the guest list included Jim and Sue’s relatives. It was a family affair where on Saturday, April 25, in a banquet room in a Connecticut inn, three generations of family members convened to pay tribute to “Uncle Jim”. The Connecticut location was no accident. Sue had selected a site equidistant for attendees, most of whom are from the Tri-state area. A handful of guests had to travel a bit farther, however. When, at Sue’s insistence, the couple arrived in Connecticut for a much needed weekend of R and R, they immediately ran into relatives from Des Moines. Far fetched as it was, the meeting was chalked up to coincidence. Apparently, Jim bought it or at least acted like he did. Regardless, Jim was convinced he would have to spend the next few days playing host to his niece and her family, until they informed him they had a flight booked for the morning of the 25th. Of course, they never made it. Instead, the night of April 25, they showed up at the banquet hall to take their places among over 30 more of Jim’s relatives in eager anticipation of his arrival.

Much to Sue’s delight, operation “Gotcha! Again” came off without a hitch. Jim walked into a banquet room expecting to be seated with Sue at a quiet corner table for two, but was met instead by shouts and squeals from loving family members, ranging in age from 10 and under to 80 and over. Tribute was paid, speeches were made, relatives who hadn’t seen one another in years were reunited and friendships were rekindled. Unfortunately, a few family members who very much wanted to be a part of the festivities couldn’t make it due to illness, but they were there in spirit. The power, beauty and love of family filled the room that night and at its center: “Uncle Jim.”
Congratulations to Sue Heath who was promoted to Admissions Director effective July, 2009. She will retain her Special Projects responsibilities in addition to overseeing the workings of Admissions. Bonnie Ab-Ale, while handling In-Take on a daily basis, will assume the responsibilities of Admissions Counselor.

Francis Lovell III who has demonstrated a particularly keen handling of Managed Care cases will continue to specialize in this area as Managed Care Coordinator. Francis will also work more closely with the Men’s Clinical Team in his role as CASAC.

Chris Mensche has earned the title, Front Office Manager. Chris and her able staff, including Mary Andreasen (Transcription) and Mary Warren (Receptionist) will help maintain the professionalism and quality standards associated with Veritas Villa. The Night Staff will also report to Chris.

The Kitchen Crew added two accomplished cooks to its ranks recently when Ray Weber and Clint Rettenmaier began impressing a hungry clientele with their culinary expertise. Gene and Darlene still supervise and take a turn behind the grill, but the contributions to the regular bill of fare being made by Ray and Clint continue to receive rave reviews.

Villa CFO, Ray Bajada was joined by Daisy Carney who assumed numerous responsibilities as Financial Coordinator, assisting Ray in managing Veritas Villa’s financial affairs.

The Villa’s “Rose” Celebrates 90 Years-young

Rose Lewis took time from her busy schedule June 23, 2009 to celebrate her 90th Birthday at Veritas Villa. Surrounded by her daughter, Kathleen, son-in-law, Jim Yungel and other friends and admirers, Rose struck a pose for photographers and graciously expressed her gratitude for all the Happy Birthday wishes, congratulations and delicious cake, celebrating 90 years and her 30 year relationship with The Villa.

We love you, Rose. God Bless.

PICNIC THANKS FROM OUR FRIENDS IN PARK SLOPE

July 26, 2009 marked the continuation of a 26-year tradition upheld by our AA friends in Park Slope who board buses bound for The Villa to enjoy a Picnic and breathe country air, and enjoy sunshine, food and fellowship. Below is a note of thanks and appreciation for The Villa’s hospitality, courtesy of Carol Clouden of the Park Slope group:

We would like to let you know how much we appreciate Veritas Villa.

Love and fellowship was the order of the day and that’s what we felt from the minute our buses arrived until we departed. Coming to Veritas Villa for the past 26 years has been amazing.

Sharing with the staff and interacting with the clients was so much fun. We laughed, told silly jokes, played softball (bah…you guys won!), ate so-so-so much food, played cards and just had a thoroughly wonderful day.

You all have a very tough job to do every day, and overhearing some of the clients talk, it’s done with sensitivity, love and respect. I understand why you have so many alumni sober, healthy and living a good life, one day at a time. Words cannot express our gratitude for you and the staff.

Sobriety rocks!

Carol Clouden

We honor the memory of our brother Steve Lewis

...a very unique man who was a role model of courage, discipline, facing tough challenges, never giving up or giving in, living up to responsibilities… a husband, father and grandfather who took pride in his family… demanded the best of himself and those of us around him [never missed his walk on the Long Beach boardwalk on the coldest day], a talented artist who left us the gift of his treasured paintings, and thoroughly enjoyed his handicapping at Saratoga every summer. He lives on with us through every memory we share of his special life and has left his footprints forever on our hearts.

We love and miss you…

Jim and Sue and your Villa Family

Remembering Mary McDonald

Good Friend to The Villa for over 30 Years

Dr. Michael Picucci of the Institute for Staged Recovery and Authentic Process Healing pays tribute to his long-time friend Mary.

August 4, 2009

Dear Friends:

Mary McDonald, a very special friend to The Villa and so many of us, died early this morning of cancer and lung disease. Due to the daily loving support from John McCormack, her last days, weeks and months were relatively peaceful. John saw to it that Mary had the best care possible.

I’m reminded: At a retreat about 10 years ago when a dramatic grief ritual was experienced and folks were very emotional, Mary said, “I don’t get it. When they’re dead, they’re dead,” being her pragmatic self. One year later at another retreat, we had a silent morning walking meditation…in the woods around the lake at Veritas Villa. As soon as we re-entered the building and broke the silence, Mary grabbed my arm and whispered, “They’re not dead!” In the spirit of her revelation, I will always know that Mary is not really dead but living boldly in my heart, and in the hearts of many others.

Thank you for your thoughts, prayers and expressions in recent weeks.

In reverence,
Michael