

RENEWAL NEWS

SPRING 2021 EDITION
VOLUME 26 ISSUE 1



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LOVE WILL WIN!**

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HAVE OUR BACK**

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"I CAN ONLY GO UP FROM HERE!"

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COMMUNITY RENEWAL

CONNECTING PEOPLE • CHANGING LIVES • TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES



51,816

MEMBERS OF THE WE CARE TEAM (PEOPLE CONNECTED TOGETHER THROUGH CARING)



3,500+

CHILDREN AND YOUTH HELPED THROUGH FRIENDSHIP HOUSE PROGRAMS



1,700

TRAINED HAVEN HOUSE NEIGHBORHOOD BLOCK LEADERS



262

CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN FRIENDSHIP HOUSE PROGRAMS IN 2020



148

STUDENTS HAVE EARNED THEIR HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY DIPLOMA AT THE ADULT RENEWAL ACADEMY



44%

AVERAGE DROP IN MAJOR CRIME IN OUR FIVE FRIENDSHIP HOUSE AREAS



10

FRIENDSHIP HOUSES LOCATED IN 5 TARGET NEIGHBORHOODS, WHERE AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS, ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMS, AND OTHER COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES ARE HOSTED

Community Renewal connects people from all walks of life to restore safe, caring and vibrant communities. We restore hope and renew the spirit of cooperation among neighbors, businesses, churches, schools and other groups.

We envision a world where every person is safe, loved and fulfilling their highest potential in the community.

HOW WE DO IT: We focus on three prime strategies:

RENEWAL TEAM: The team works citywide to unite individuals, churches, businesses, civic groups and others as caring partners building a stronger city.

HAVEN HOUSE: Volunteers unite neighbors on the block where they live. They place "We Care" signs in their yards and bring neighbors together through various activities.

FRIENDSHIP HOUSE: These are homes built in low-income areas and lived in by Community Renewal staff who help turn impoverished neighborhoods into havens of hope.

DONATE TODAY!

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WWW.COMMUNITYRENEWAL.US

and click on the **DONATE** link

OR

use the envelope in this newsletter to make your donation **TODAY!**





FRIENDSHIP HOUSE FORMED A FIRM FOUNDATION FOR GRADUATING SENIOR

The blueprint for Lajarvis Agnew's future came into focus at a Community Renewal Friendship House.

A 2021 graduating senior at Shreveport's Byrd High School, Lajarvis has been active in the Highland neighborhood Friendship House Kids Club and then Youth Club for about 10 years. That decade provided a solid foundation for him.

"If I wasn't in the Friendship House, I think I would have been a real troublemaker. I would have been real selfish and self-centered and not caring about other people's feelings. But at the Friendship House I learned how to be a good person and how to be a person you can respect," he said.

"I used to get in trouble a lot, but I have learned that I do not have to solve problems with my fists and I don't always have to have a bad attitude toward everyone."

Lajarvis says the Friendship House helped him overcome the peer pressure and challenges that face all teenagers.

"One important thing I learned is that people may call you a monster or a loser or a failure, but that doesn't mean that's what you are. You have a chance to prove everyone wrong as long as you are willing to try. Even when you are at your lowest moment, always keep your head up so that you can see a way out or see a better way to go," he said.

"I've learned to be a better leader and not always be a follower. Everyone in this world has something to offer, even if they are walking down the darkest path they can, they have something to offer if they are willing to change."

Lajarvis is willing to listen and learn and that helped him develop the confidence he has now.



This is a place where you can learn the building blocks you need in life. It's a place where you feel safe"

-- Lajarvis Agnew

"Whenever I feel like giving up, I always weigh my options. I think about who I would be disappointing and what I could be losing. My grades would always go up and down. People would look at my grades and say it doesn't look like you are going to make it through high school.

"I remember a teacher telling me in middle school that I wasn't even going to make it to the eighth grade. But here I am – in my last year of high school and getting ready to graduate! And every time I look back and I wonder – Wow, what would have happened if I would have given up!"

Today Lajarvis is an inspiration to younger students.

"I walk through life now looking for the right way. There is a wrong way, but I am always looking for the right way. If I am faced with a big challenge, I am the type of person to walk head-first into it. If you need help, I am there if you need a hand. And I always try to comfort people in their time of need."

He has a definite design for his future now.

"I hope I can go to college. I would like to work in architecture or engineering. I would like to own my own company and draw up blueprints for new buildings in this city," he said.

Whatever he does, he will always support and recommend the Friendship House.

"This is a place where you can learn the building blocks you need in life. When I come here it's like a home away from home. It's a place where you feel safe. It feels like one big happy family," he said.

"I'm thankful for the patience they have with us. Even if we get loud and rowdy, they still hold their hand out and are ready to accept you. I really appreciate that because they got me through a lot. I'm grateful for everything they have done for us because it made a big difference in my life. I feel like I can do something to help other people now and not just do something for myself."



Dear Friends,

I want you to know that I am writing to you, and to our entire team, straight out of my own heart and soul. And so I am thanking you ahead of time for reading my words and taking them into your own heart and soul. Today, I am sharing with you my absolute conviction that together we are the answer to the disturbing challenges and uncertainties facing America. And I mean it. Please read below why I am so certain.

When we set out to renew our city and our country twenty-seven years ago, we committed our lives to be guided by one single purpose: “to partner together to make our city and our nation a caring family where every single child can be safe and loved.” We dedicated ourselves to “give all that we are and all that we have” to make that purpose become a living reality.

Now here we are. We are facing massive challenges all around us. And ahead of us are dark uncertainties. We appear to be divided as never before. But there is something more that I am seeing. There is a longing in every single person I have talked to over the last two years. Each and every one of them has expressed the deep desire that we could “come together” and bring a new unity to our city and land. What is our answer? Is there an answer?

Here at Community Renewal, our answer is a resounding, “YES!!” I have seen with my own eyes that our single purpose to unite all of us as a caring family has actually produced that purpose which we have pursued with all of our heart, mind, and strength. We are rich and poor, young and old, male and female, black and white and brown, and we are Republicans and Democrats and independents. And we are UNITED in our Cause of Caring.

Here is the great Truth: By pursuing loving unity through caring for all and for each, we have had that very purpose PRODUCED in our midst!!! The PRODUCT of Community Renewal is UNITY. We learned that our methods of loving, and our model of caring, can actually start, grow, nourish, and sustain true UNITY of hearts and souls in a wonderful community of caring. And now we have a way to share true unity with our whole city and all of America. As I write

these words it is happening now.

Please help us continue to grow and to share this fabulous gift of true UNITY by giving your best gift of support today. Your gift will be doubled as part of our Spring \$300,000 Matching Gift Campaign. We are living the answer together and I have never been more hopeful in my life.

With Gratitude and Love,

Mack

Founder & Coordinator

DOUBLE YOUR DONATION!

Use the enclosed envelope or donate online and your gift will be doubled as part of our **Spring \$300,000 Matching Gift Campaign!**

GO TO OUR WEBSITE AT

WWW.COMMUNITYRENEWAL.US

and click on the link

SPRING BRINGS NEW HOPE!

NEIGHBORS ENJOY FOOD AND FELLOWSHIP AT BLOCK PARTY

Easter weekend brought beautiful weather and a renewed sense of hope for many in our community this year. Our Friendship House coordinators in the Allendale neighborhood saw it as the perfect opportunity to have their first block party in more than a year.



It was a simple event with plenty of food, fun and fellowship. That's all it took for these neighbors to feel like a community again! Adults reconnecting, children playing and everyone smiling!



Thank you to Riverpark Church for providing 3,000 eggs with candy for the Easter Egg hunt! And thank you to everyone who helps support our 10 Friendship Houses in the Shreveport-Bossier City area!

WE KNOW OUR NEIGHBORS HAVE OUR BACK



Antwan and Tanesha Butler naturally want a safe and caring environment for their three young boys – and they are willing to put in the effort to make it happen. That love for community led them through friends to Community Renewal.

“My hope for the city is for each individual to use their talents and resources to connect with others and contribute to the growth of the city. Let’s do what we can with what we have,” Tanesha said.

Pastors of Dream Big Leadership Church in West Shreveport, the Butlers signed on as Haven House leaders with Community Renewal a few years ago. Haven House leaders are neighborhood volunteers who go through training and then reach out to connect residents in caring. They have been in ministry for six years and live in a diverse neighborhood in Southwest Shreveport.

“I was impressed that Community Renewal puts its heart, soul, time and energy into the community. That is so needed because that is the future of our city, the future of our next generation,” Tanesha said.

“I love the concept of people coming together to help. I really do believe in the village mentality. It does take a village to raise a child.”

Antwan knows from personal experience just how vital it is for people to know and help one another.

“I’m a former foster child, so I understand the importance of the community being involved. I’m here because somebody cared,” he said. “To have people willing to be a source of hope is just phenomenal.”

Antwan and Tanesha see their neighborhood as an extension of their church. That means loving and caring about people as the Bible teaches – loving your neighbor as yourself.

“Let’s get outside these four walls,” she said. “Instead of just preaching to one another, we have to get out and reach the people who need love and who need a hand up. We need

to see each other, face-to-face.

“We have a Harvest Fest and we have candy galore because that’s what they want. However, when they come we offer them much more. We offer them love and relationships.”

Tanesha and Antwan want to see the Haven House philosophy applied not only to neighborhoods, but to churches, schools, businesses and other groups. “We just believe in reaching out and not just for one day. It’s building relationships with people,” she said.

People have become more isolated than in past generations and then Covid-19 added to the challenge of connecting with neighbors.

“I think the pandemic caused a lot of us to move back into that mode of social isolation,” Antwan said. “But in our neighborhood, we were all trying to find things to do and our neighborhood kind of opened up and we made some new relationships.”

The key was having the willingness to make the effort.

“That’s always been important and now we need to do more of that. In our neighborhood we look out for each other and I like that,” Antwan said.

Tanesha said she also likes the fact that their neighborhood has different races and people of different ages and backgrounds. One day her young boys visited an elderly, white neighbor, not even concerned about any differences between them.

“It’s a close-knit neighborhood and I feel very safe. It’s like the way things used to be

when I was growing up, when if a neighbor saw you doing something, you better be doing the right thing,” Tanesha said.

“I just love the camaraderie we have. If someone new comes in, we make it our business

to meet them and welcome them. That makes it a safer environment. We know our neighbors have our back. That’s the philosophy of Haven House. I am a support for you and you are a support for me. And we can make this a beautiful community.”



“I am a support for you and you are a support for me. And we can make this a beautiful community.”

***-- Tanesha Butler,
Haven House leader***



Springtime means the children active at our 10 neighborhood Friendship Houses can go outside again for some fun exercise. Thank you to all of our Friendship House sponsors and donors!



Students at Loyola College Prep once again provided dozens of baskets of food for residents in our low-income neighborhoods. The annual donation is part of the school's FAiTH Day. Friendship House coordinators deliver the baskets to residents they know are in need.

A homemade cookie makes an afternoon at a Friendship House even sweeter!



Love your neighborhood! It's just that simple!



Have you seen our newest videos? Just go to our home page at www.communityrenewal.us to take a virtual tour, hear Voices of Renewal and see more of our latest inspiring videos!



ARA GRADUATE: “I CAN ONLY GO UP FROM HERE!”

this year. The ARA was established to help students like Machalyn earn their diploma and get on the highway to success. Some 150 adults of all ages have earned their diploma at the ARA, which meets at various neighborhood locations in Shreveport and Bossier City.

“Both of my parents came here. I have a friend who is like a sister and she came to the Adult Renewal Academy and I have a friend who is like a brother and now he is here. My family and my friends told me this was the place to go and they encouraged me to enroll,” said Machalyn, who attended classes in the Highland neighborhood.

“I loved my instructor. I could call her at any time and ask her any questions. She worked so hard with us. I would struggle with math and because of her that was the highest score I made on the test.”

Machalyn said she highly recommends the ARA to others.

“Some days were harder than others,

but it was always a welcoming atmosphere. They always let us know that we could do it and we should never give up. Everybody is smiling and they start the day with affirmations and I liked that. It felt like a second family because they care so much,” she said.

Machalyn gained so much confidence that she has already set other new goals and reached those also. She has completed training as a dental assistant and earned her certification. At the same time, she earned her driver's license. And she has been studying the benefits of enlisting in the military while also considering her options for higher education.

“I want to build a career in the military and I also want to be a dental hygienist. I will have to work hard, but that's never stopped me before so why would it stop me now? Whatever work I have to put in, that's what I'm going to do because that's what I want to do.

“I can do anything if I put my mind to it. I'm not going to give up. If one road stops, that doesn't mean that I can't begin another one. Why give up? I keep going because I know God will have something else for me.”

Machalyn says her life would not be the same without the ARA.

“I really thank everyone from the bottom of my heart. This was a huge stepping stone in my life. I was really lost and you all are helping me get to where I need to go and for that I can't thank you enough.

“I really am excited to transition into a young lady. I'm not going to stop. I want to travel and see the world and I want to be successful. And I want to help other people,” she said.

“Every goal that I set this year, I made it. Now I'm looking forward to a new list of goals. I can only go up from here!”

Battling the impact of the pandemic and dealing with various personal issues, Machalyn Victor felt overwhelmed in 2020. A diploma seemed almost unreachable – until she reached out to Community Renewal's Adult Renewal Academy.

“They had faith in me. I was going through a lot at the time and I didn't know if I could do it. But the more I came, the more encouraged I got. And I felt like, ‘Yes, I can do this if I don't give up.’

“I got more confidence because at first I did not know what was going on. I cried because I did not know if I was going to make it. But the more I came and the more they talked to me, the more my confidence went up,” she said.

“It all paid off when I got my test scores and I thought – I did it! I screamed because I was so happy!

Machalyn, who turns 18 in June, earned her high school equivalency diploma earlier



I'm not going to give up. If one road stops, that doesn't mean that I can't begin another one.

**– Machalyn Victor,
ARA Graduate**



**Use the
enclosed envelope**

OR

Visit our website

to support Community
Renewal and programs like the
Adult Renewal Academy!

NATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS

We are proud to announce the addition of new members to the National Advisory Board of Community Renewal International!



The Honorable **Margaret G. Kibben** was sworn in as the 61st Chaplain to the United States House of Representatives on Jan. 3. The Retired Rear Admiral is the first female chaplain for either chamber of Congress and was the first woman to serve as chief of Navy chaplains, serving from 2014-2018 in that role, and was previously chaplain of the Marine Corps.

We are honored to have these amazing servants on our team!



Michelle Briggs was the founding president and chief executive officer of the Avedis Foundation in Shawnee, Okla. She was instrumental in the formation of Community Renewal of Pottawatomie County there. A former bank president, Michelle also has extensive experience in the health care and nonprofit fields.



Shreveporters **David and Claudia Oliver** have been dedicated supporters of Community Renewal from Day One. David is a retired tax partner with Carr, Riggs and Ingram. They both have extensive community involvement, ranging from church and school to other nonprofits and events like the Red River Revel.



CARING PARTNERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Businesses and foundations are among our many treasured partners at Community Renewal, strengthening our mission and spreading hope throughout our community. In this issue we would like to recognize our friends at the Biedenharn Foundation and at AEP/SWEPCO.

For more than 20 years, Sydney Biedenharn and her family have supported the work of Community Renewal. Most recently, the Biedenharn Foundation invested \$66,000 in the kids and youth of our 10 Friendship Houses. In the challenging year of 2020, the Biedenharn Family Foundation expressed their concern for these

students by funding new learning technology at the Friendship Houses, along with much needed facility improvements and a new van for transporting students.

In an effort to ensure that local students not be left behind in some of our most disadvantaged communities, AEP/SWEPCO awarded Community Renewal a \$50,000 grant to help sustain the vital Friendship House programs. AEP/SWEPCO has been a valued partner over the years and they stepped up again in usual fashion!

These grants are a wonderful investment in our community and we are very thankful for the caring partners who made them possible!

The Biedenharn Foundation believes in and prioritizes Community Renewal for many reasons! CRI's mission to intersect our community from the ground up, beginning with children, is the only way to drive communal change. All clichés aside, children are the future and there is no more impactful way to engage a community than to engage the future of it! In agreement with Matt 25:40, we see CRI as an example of "doing to the least of these, as unto the Lord." Above all, we believe in and trust the integrity of the leadership behind CRI and are blessed to provide resources to their mission!

— Ross Walker
son of the late Mrs. Sydney Biedenharn



YOU CAN HELP!

If you would like to help, you can make a donation in the enclosed envelope, donate online or contact Jimmy Graves, director of development, at 318-425-3222.

"Community Renewal has and continues to do amazing work in our community. From the very beginning, we knew that the lives of many would be improved as the result of Community Renewal's commitments. The success of the organization is the direct result of God working through the fine individuals at Community Renewal who have made it their mission to help those most in need. I encourage everyone to visit one of the Friendship Houses and observe the children thrive in the positive environment and enjoy the uplifting experience!"

— Brian Bond
vice president external affairs, AEP/SWEPCO

A L A M B B L E E D I N G

By Mack McCarter
Founder, Community Renewal

The police report must have had an antiseptic spate of spare words: "Somewhere in or around 8:30 p.m. on Saturday, April 10th, one Hannah Sheffield, upon turning into the Barksdale Annex Neighborhood from McElroy Street onto Evans Street was shot by a single round piercing the automobile's driver door and entering into the victims upper left torso piercing her heart. Miss Sheffield, age 29, expiring crashed her car into the bedroom of a neighbor's house."

Later information quickly came that would confirm a tragic case of mistaken identity in a revenge shooting where the unknown assailant knew that his intended target drove a white car matching Hannah's. So he shot at the car and it was a direct hit to our soul.

And that shot makes us ask anew the two fundamental questions that simultaneously anchor us and inspire us in the living of these days: Does Love really work? Does Love really win? Really!?

What in the world are we up against? We are living in a sand storm and a blizzard combined with a tornado, inside of a hurricane and we have run out of alphabetical letters to name it. Do we just shrug and call it: "Today's World," really? Say that one bullet was a .45 caliber round. That one bullet cost a total of 80 cents. Eighty cents. "Today's World." That is the reality in which we live. But it is not the solo story of Reality Itself. There is something incontrovertibly more. And to enter through the door to that Reality we must remember.

I remember 19 years ago, when Lonzo and Tina Sheffield, led by our brother Russell Minor, our Haven House Director, walked into our lives. They were Russell's neighbors and he knew they were powerful personalities who so embodied the love of God that they could light up the dark side of "Today's World." Tina was just out from the Air Force and Lonzo was still active. Both sergeants. And both magnificent servant-leaders. They joined us on the spot to be Friendship House Leaders. And with our other Friendship House leader,

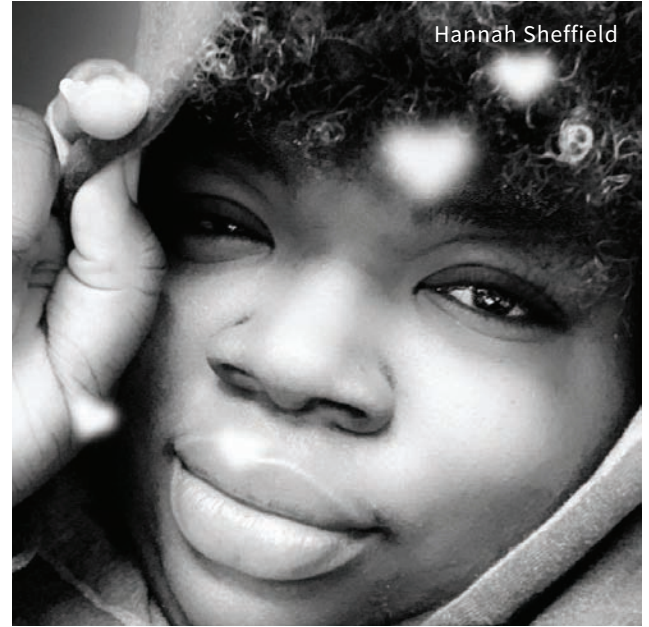
the incomparable, Manuela Standard and her husband James, they covenanted together to move into the Barksdale Annex neighborhood.

I remember 18 years ago, when Tina was standing in our newly constructed Friendship House's "Community Room." She was in a lake of shattered glass from shot-out windows with TV cameras blazing away, being asked a simple question by a flummoxed reporter. "Why are you coming here? It is the most dangerous place in Bossier City! And last night a gang shot out all of your windows! It is not safe!!!" ("Today's World!")

And Tina, without even a hitch in her speech, launched Light within lightning: "Not safe? Well, THAT is why we are coming! If it was safe, they wouldn't NEED us!!" Even the cameras themselves blinked. Lest I ever forget, that is the New Tomorrow lighting a new Reality of God's Love in the "Today's World." It is brought by human beings like you and me who are committed to Love because God first loved us!

I remember when Hannah first moved in to live in the Friendship House with Lonzo and Tina. Her biological mother tried to convince them that this pre-teen was essentially a cipher. I remember meeting her then. Downcast gaze, no smile, and so beat down she could only just breathe and much less exclaim. The forecast for her future life was a wall with no windows or doors. "Today's World" with periods punctuating it.

And I remember 400 years before Jesus, God breathing the Word into the words of Isaiah the God-Speaker. Go read them right now in Isaiah 61: 1-6. Because Lonzo and Tina and all of Community Renewal and her teachers and neighbors and new friends began to give her the



Hannah Sheffield

"Crown of Beauty" instead of ashes, and the "Oil of Gladness" instead of mourning, and the "Garment of Praise," instead of despair. And she became an "Oak of Righteousness."

Hannah blossomed in Love and flowered into the fruit of life, giving Love for all. She not only graduated, she went on to college, then post college. She became a consummate musician having to memorize the chords thus making her life a musical. Her smile was like a LED flashed in every tooth.

In "Today's World," it looks like we are "sheep to be slaughtered." But I remembered that there is another Reality that is a Light coming into the darkness, and the darkness has never understood it! It is the Light of God's Love in All of You. And that is the Hope of Glory.

And I finally remembered what John the Revelator showed us when he pulled back the curtain to reveal the ending of this great play of life. And we see a Lamb bleeding because of "Today's World." Yes, bleeding...but seated on a throne!! Love DOES work!! And Love WILL Win! And that is why we are going forth. If "Today's World" was safe, it wouldn't need us! Right Tina? Right Lonzo? Right Hannah? And they answer with each of you, "RIGHT!"





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A SIGN FOR OUR TIMES



Did you know that Community Renewal has a sign for our times?

IT'S A SIGN OF HOPE.

It's simple and it's powerful!

We Care!

You've probably seen these signs in yards across Shreveport and Bossier City. They also stand in yards in Washington, D.C., Boston, Austin and other cities. You may have one in front of your house. If not, give us a call at 318-425-3222 or stop by our office at 838 Margaret Place and get your We Care yard sign today!

Please turn to page 11 for this issue's "A Word from Mack" and his heartfelt column on "A Lamb Bleeding."