

RENEWAL NEWS

SPRING 2019 EDITION
VOLUME 24 ISSUE 1

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MY FUTURE WITH
HOPE AND CONFIDENCE"**

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25 YEARS OF CARING

MANHATTAN INSTITUTE AWARDS CIVIL SOCIETY FELLOWSHIP TO SHARPEL WELCH

WWW.COMMUNITYRENEWAL.US

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COMMUNITY RENEWAL

CONNECTING PEOPLE • CHANGING LIVES • TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES



51,600

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



2,079

VOLUNTEERS GAVE **39,398** HOURS IN 2018



3,500+

CHILDREN AND YOUTH HELPED THROUGH FRIENDSHIP HOUSE PROGRAMS



1,625

TRAINED HAVEN HOUSE NEIGHBORHOOD BLOCK LEADERS



353

CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN FRIENDSHIP HOUSE PROGRAMS IN 2018



130

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



52%

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.



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WWW.COMMUNITYRENEWAL.US
and click on the **GIVE** link

OR

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



Amanda McGarrity and Nashawna Joseph see that one friendship can have a big impact.



POWER OF ONE FRIENDSHIP HAS MANY BENEFITS

Amanda McGarrity and Nashawna Joseph are both raising children and leading busy lives with many commitments. But they found time to become another example of how Community Renewal is connecting people, changing lives and transforming communities.

Both women shared from the heart at this year's Women of Community Renewal Valentine's Luncheon, saying that an investment in others is one that can pay many dividends.

"Community Renewal brought us together in friendship to make positive changes in the community and created a sisterhood that is priceless and is a blessing," Nashawna said. "When I had to drop my son off for the first time at day care, I cried like a baby. And who did I call? I called Amanda and she calmed me down. I never knew how much I would need this sister along this road."

Amanda said that when she was asked to serve with Community Renewal, she wasn't sure how she could add that to her busy schedule. "But I knew in my heart that God was leading me down this path," she said.

"I was pushed in ways that I never thought that I could be. I gained confidence and encouragement. Even if you have super busy schedules but it's on your heart to give back, Community Renewal has so many opportunities. Getting involved can

be as simple as making sandwiches or stuffing envelopes."

They are also seeing how personal relationships can lead to better relations on a bigger scale.

"I think of genuine connection as a cure to the troubles we face in our neighborhoods," Nashawna said. "When you really speak to the heart of people and share their concerns as well as their stories



I think of genuine connection as a cure to the troubles we face in our neighborhoods."

– Nashawna Joseph

through authentic connection, it's a game changer because you create a recipe for lasting positive results affecting everyone involved.

"Connection makes such a huge difference because this opens the doors to turning the obstacles we face into opportunities for growth and more community engagement, and this is what is necessary to continue changing lives and the world we live in."

Amanda said that Community Renewal reminds her of the TV show *Cheers*, where everybody knows

your name and everybody is ready to give you a hug.

"Through Community Renewal I became more comfortable with public speaking and event planning. CRI paved the way for me to become a Family Readiness Group leader through the military. My husband is in the Army National Guard and it can be a huge task to bring families of the soldiers together when they deploy. But Community Renewal has given me that confidence.

"If you desire to make a difference and be part of the loving CRI family, but you think you don't have the time or the confidence, I am living proof that God has ways of opening your heart and your mind. All I wanted to do was make a difference – and look at the difference it has made in me."

Nashawna has also been surprised at how much she has been blessed by giving to others.

"I have tried to be a mother and a mentor to kids in the Friendship Houses. I wanted to be the change, but I didn't know how much they would change me," she said.

"We all carry a light inside of us. How sad would it be if we only let that light stay inside. You can be part of Community Renewal in your own special way. We all have light to offer up to create more community, more family, more sisterhood, more friendship."



Community Renewal Founder Mack McCarter shares his vision with New York Times writer and author David Brooks, left, and Shreveport Mayor Adrian Perkins, center.

The Women of Community Renewal Valentine's Luncheon filled the banquet room at East Ridge Country Club.



The Junior League Kids in the Kitchen volunteers teach nutrition and exercise to a Friendship House Kids Club.



Servicemen and women from Barksdale Air Force Base spent the afternoon with children at our Barksdale Annex Friendship House.

Volunteers know how to bring smiles to the Friendship House.



Shanna Durr and LaToya Amos head up the Women of Community Renewal in 2019.



Operation HOPE Director Deidra Robertson was invited to speak with Mayor Adrian Perkins and School Superintendent Lamar Goree for a special program at University Elementary.



ECONOMIC IMPACT

According to the Louisiana Center for After School Learning (LaCAL), a juvenile in the criminal justice system can cost up to \$150,000 per year, while a quality after-school program costs approximately \$1,500 a year per student. LaCAL also says that for every \$1 invested in high quality after-school programs, taxpayers save \$3, and even more if crime reduction is factored in. Thank God and three caring men that Corion is not a burden on society, but is becoming a productive member of society.

Caring Partners STOP TEEN'S PATH TO JAIL

Corion Thomas was with the wrong friend at the wrong time in the wrong place. The friend pulled a gun. A man was robbed. Police were called. Corion was suddenly one step away from spending 18 months in a juvenile detention center, charged with being an accessory to an armed robbery.

But thanks to a group of men connected by caring, Corion is now in a good place in his life, heading in the right direction – when he was almost headed to a jail cell.

Corion, who is now 18, is a great example of how Community Renewal can change lives and transform communities when we connect caring people.

"These men are such a blessing. I had someone I could depend on and I didn't have that before," said Corion, who graduates from high school this spring.

"They showed me there's more to life than the bad things I see in the neighborhoods. I am maturing and I feel like I got it now and I am going down the right road. I have a lot of hope now."

Corion's childhood was very unstable, moving across Shreveport, living with this

relative or that relative with his two brothers and sister. Trying to fit in wherever he could, he made some friends who turned out not to be friends at all. One of them unexpectedly robbed a man and when police officers came,



I feel like I got it now and I am going down the right road. I have a lot of hope now."

- Corion Thomas

Corion was arrested too because he was at the scene. He was only 16.

Attorney Jim Madison was appointed to the case and as he investigated, he learned that Corion was a quiet teenager, lacking in confidence, who needed a positive father figure in his life. Madison knew just the person to fill that role – Emmitt Welch, community coordinator at the Allendale Friendship House. Welch went to court to speak on Corion's

behalf and Judge Paul Young agreed to place Corion on 18 months probation, as long as he stayed involved at the Friendship House under Welch's supervision.

"He had never been in trouble before, but he had quit going to school and was throwing away his life," Welch said. "I had compassion for him, but we are tough when we need to be. I gave him standards and a level of expectancy. I told him if he sees trouble, to go the other way. And he is going the other way."

Corion enrolled in the Adult Renewal Academy's welding program and he now plans to enroll in the welding classes this fall at Northwest Louisiana Technical College. Red Ball Oxygen provided welding equipment that Corion has used in his training. He thinks that would make a fine career.

Corion's story is one of redemption, connection, caring partners and hope. It's a story of renewal. And there are many other Corions walking our streets today, young men and women packed with potential but getting lost in the environment around them. But with the help of more partners connected by caring, we can reach them, too!

YOU CAN **HELP!**

Your donation today will help more young men and women like Corion! Use the enclosed envelope or make your gift online at www.communityrenewal.us. Thank you!

PARTICIPATE IN THE CROQUET CLASSIC AS A
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20TH ANNUAL

CROQUET *Classic*

9 a.m.
Saturday
27
APRIL



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GRAB YOUR PARTNER AND SIGN UP TODAY FOR THIS FUN FUNDRAISER FOR OUR ADULT RENEWAL ACADEMY! MORE THAN 130 ADULTS HAVE EARNED THEIR HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY DIPLOMA THERE! LIVES ARE CHANGED AT THE ARA AND YOUR SUPPORT WILL HELP MANY MORE! REGISTRATION FOR A TWO-PERSON TEAM IS \$200 AND YOU CAN SIGN UP ONLINE – AND GET MORE INFORMATION – AT WWW.COMMUNITYRENEWAL.US.

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ONO'S HAWAIIAN GRILL, BEAUTIFUL MUSIC AND FABULOUS FELLOWSHIP
– ALL FOR A FANTASTIC CAUSE!*

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Rowdy Vasquez credits a team of educators and mentors connected by caring for helping him move from a place of negative beginnings to a positive future.

"The love and compassion here is amazing. The atmosphere is amazing. They gave me such encouragement and were always uplifting me. That motivation kept me going," he said.

Rowdy is speaking about the Adult Renewal Academy, an outreach of Community Renewal which offers life-changing education to adults of all ages. More than 130 adults have now received their high school equivalency diploma through the ARA, including Rowdy, who passed his test last Dec. 18. He was ready to do cartwheels when he got that news. But for much of his life, education was a very low priority.

"I dropped out of school in fifth grade because I broke my femur bone on a dirt bike. My father just wanted me to work and I never did complete one more grade," Rowdy said.

"Then later I got into alcohol and then drugs and the pit just got deeper and deeper. I got arrested seven times. I went to jail at age 18 and I was thinking then – this is the beginning of my downfall."

Rowdy, now 24, said his thoughts were

clouded and he was living in deception, believing he was better off behind bars. He actually missed being in jail when he completed his sentence. "When I was there, I didn't have to worry about being homeless or hungry," he said.

Fear started to swallow him, though, and Rowdy sought help at the Eagle Creek Recovery Center. He planned to complete the three-



I no longer look at the future with dread. I look at my future with hope and confidence."

- Rowdy Vasquez, ARA graduate

month program and move on, but Rowdy gave his life to God there and then joined the staff. Today he is operations director.

The Community Renewal team that supported him at the Adult Renewal Academy gave him the skills he needed to take on responsibility and the courage to share his testimony. Although he has completed his ARA classes, he often returns to the classroom to give the morning devotions and encourage the

students.

"Now I have a sense of accomplishment and I have confidence. The caring teachers made such a big difference. Relationships and community are so important. We all need help and encouragement," he said.

"I set my mind on the prize and my vision gave my pain a purpose. It doesn't matter how hard it is – it matters how much you want it. When God is on your side, nothing is impossible."

Rowdy's plan now is to enter Bible college in the fall, earn a master's degree and join the pastoral staff of a local church.

"I have realized everything is in my grasp and before I felt like everything was out of reach," he said. "I no longer look at the future with dread. I look at my future with hope and confidence."

YOU CAN **HELP!**

Your support of Community Renewal will help more people like Rowdy.

Make your donation at
www.communityrenewal.us
 or use the enclosed envelope.

Thank you!



Paige Hoffpaur, in white top, and friend Barbara Zaffater, in red top, helped arrange a Christmas outing for Cedar Grove teens to Southern Trace, where she encouraged them to dream big, set goals and never give up.

Layers of Selfishness Fall Away WHEN PURPOSE IS FOUND

Paige Hoffpaur, running a successful business and living in a prestigious Shreveport neighborhood, looked to have it all.

But those were some of her darkest days.

"I was disheartened and depressed because I had put ambition before friendship. I was not the kind of person to call anyone unless it was for a business deal," she said. "I was selling real estate in Southern Trace, but I needed purpose in my life."

During this time she was introduced to Community Renewal. She came on a tour and saw how people connected by caring had something that she was missing.

"I saw that I was very selfish and there is no joy in that. I was caught in a lie of trying to make a name for myself," she said.

"But something in me was telling me that I needed to live outside myself. And God put me on a journey that I have been walking out with Community Renewal for 16 years. And now I am asking people to come along on this journey. I find my life when I am serving others in my community. Pouring it out has become one of my greatest sources of joy."

Paige and others who joined her in Southern Trace have organized very successful block parties and holiday events. They have raised

funds for the Community Renewal Friendship House in Cedar Grove with 5K races. They have bought school backpacks for the Cedar Grove youth and last summer paid for 42 of them to attend a Christian summer camp.

But Paige is quick to say that she sees needs in all types of neighborhoods, from



I was disheartened and depressed because I had put ambition before friendship. I was very selfish and there is no joy in that."

- Paige Hoffpaur

Cedar Grove to Southern Trace, and that everyone benefits when there are mutually enhancing relationships.

"People who have money can still have a poverty spirit if you don't have a purpose. You can be locked up in your own ambition and self-centeredness and loneliness," she said.

"We all have a purpose to love our neighbors as ourselves. I have been transformed and now

we are building highways and bridges that are love in action. We have realized that we are intricately linked and we all need to offer that bridge of friendship. We can give hope now."

Paige, a wife and mother of two, shared her story at last year's Haven House Rally and she often shares with people who come to Shreveport to learn more about Community Renewal. She has recruited many friends to also get involved as Haven House leaders – residents who volunteer a little bit of their time to connect residents and build friendships on their street.

"Haven House is fueling my fire. We have truly just begun. What is God's intention for our community? It is love because He is love. As I began walking with Community Renewal, layers of selfishness began to fall off of me as I decided to take action on my block and have a block party. And I had never done that before. I was completely an island unto myself," she said.

"This is the greatest journey of my life. We all need to keep doing this and even in greater measure. We are here for such a time as this and we need to be instruments in our neighborhoods of God's love. We are believing that God is going to do a miraculous thing in the city, block by block."



TAKE A TOUR!

Join us for a 90-minute tour and see how you can get involved in

*Connecting People
Changing Lives
Transforming Communities*

APRIL 18 – NOON

MAY 16 – 4:30

JUNE 20 – NOON

JULY 18 – 4:30

AUGUST 15 – NOON

SEPT. 19 – NOON

OCT. 17 – NOON

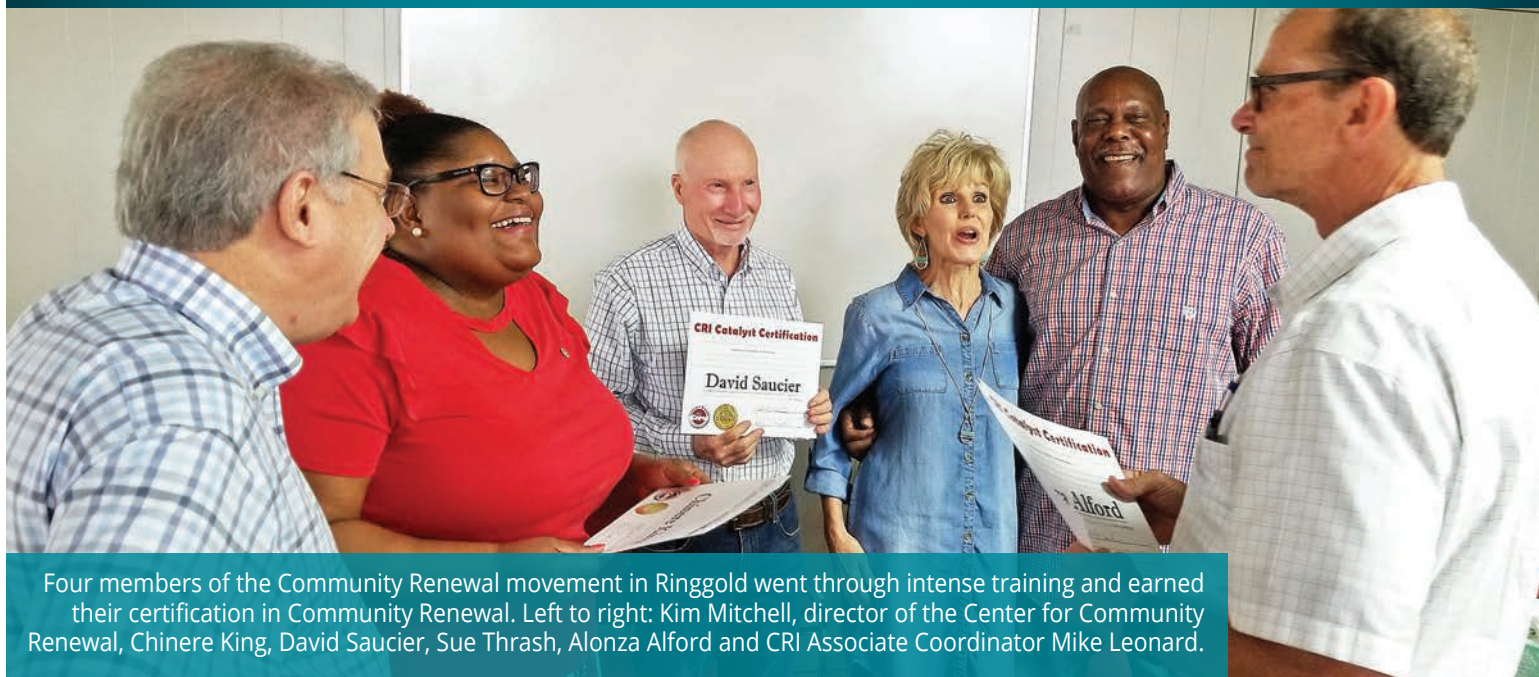
NOV. 7 – NOON

DEC. 5 – NOON

All tours are on a Thursday and begin at our office at 838 Margaret Place; noon tours include a free lunch. Call us at 318-425-3222 for more information. If you have been on a tour previously, bring a friend and come again to see what's new!



RINGGOLD RESIDENTS FIND HOPE IN COMMUNITY RENEWAL



Four members of the Community Renewal movement in Ringgold went through intense training and earned their certification in Community Renewal. Left to right: Kim Mitchell, director of the Center for Community Renewal, Chinere King, David Saucier, Sue Thrash, Alonza Alford and CRI Associate Coordinator Mike Leonard.

By David Saucier and Chinere King

co-leaders of the Community Renewal
movement in Ringgold

Every day, when members of the Ringgold community drive through our town they are reminded of the numerous empty buildings which were once thriving businesses. We find ourselves with limited employment opportunities, an influx of drug activity, young people with no high school diploma or skills, and no economic base. This has resulted in a drastic decline of revenue for the town.

Up until nine months ago, concerned citizens had no idea of where to begin addressing these problems, but they knew something had to be done to save our community. We had nothing to lose when Kim Mitchell, director of the Center for Community Renewal, extended the invitation to join the CRI team on a Monday morning. So, six of us journeyed to Shreveport not realizing the life-altering path we were to embark on.

During our first CRI all-day experience, the excitement started to flow among our group. Every time a program was shared the consensus was "We need that." Girl Pearls and Young Kings for our adolescents, adult literacy and vocational skills for the young people, block Leaders to build relationships, and Friendship Houses give support with rearing our children: Yes! Ringgold needs that and much more. We could see a very tangible

solution that would transform our culture and bring us together. Something as simple as creating a system of positive relationships and caring for one another transformed entire communities and there was data to back it up. This could really work for Ringgold!

Since our first CRI experience, we have returned many times bringing new people, learning how to share the vision with others, and keeping ourselves motivated and focused. The staff at CRI has welcomed us as family. Kim and Mike Leonard, associate coordinator, toured Ringgold and quickly engaged us in deeper training once they saw our commitment level. We do not feel we are in this alone. Everyone has been so accommodating and supportive across all CRI departments and locations. We are truly humbled.

As we began knocking on doors and sharing the vision, we have been encouraged by the community's response. People welcomed us

into their homes and actively listened as we discussed the model. They, too, are excited to share their ideas of what the community needs. The conversation quickly becomes dynamic as we realize that we are ready to see positive change happen.

When we gather to plan and develop strategies, the positive energy and excitement is evident. Kim has warned us several times to focus on sharing the vision and not starting any major projects. While it has been tough to rein in our enthusiasm, we understand this is a marathon not a sprint. We need a deep group to sustain us and not get burned out. Although we are not formally engaged in a project, we encouraged our new mayor to sponsor a communitywide cleanup day. We are helping with project coordination and communication. Also, we increased our participation in activities that span different social and economic groups such as our food pantry and Relay for Life Cancer Walk. We hope to initiate a HiSET or skills program soon.

It is so gratifying to see the level of commitment and support of our local members. The team includes individuals from varied demographic and cultural groups. We have established a strong bond with one another. Our goal is to operate out of love and care as we provide insight into how to best serve various segments of our community which we may not have served prior. Our Renewal Team must be the example of change and unity among our peers.

If you would like to bring the
Community Renewal model
to your city or town, contact
Kim Mitchell, director of
the Center for Community
Renewal, at 318-425-3222.
This is a model that can
work anywhere!

MANHATTAN INSTITUTE AWARDS CIVIL SOCIETY FELLOWSHIP *To Sharpel Welch*



The Manhattan Institute of New York City has chosen Community Renewal's Sharpel Welch as one of three fellows for its 2019 Civil Society Fellows Program. The honor comes with a \$10,000 fellowship for her work at Community Renewal, where she serves as a community coordinator with her husband, Emmitt Welch, in an Allendale neighborhood Friendship House.

"Sharpel and her husband are bringing hope to a neighborhood where for many years people were just struggling to survive," said Annie Dwyer, the director of the Manhattan Institute's Civil Society Fellows Program. "The Welch's know these people—they are like family—and they are helping kids finish high school, get jobs, plan for the future, while also offering a safe, positive place to come after school."

The Manhattan Institute's Civil Society Fellows Program recognizes nonprofit leaders who are developing innovative solutions to America's most pressing social problems. Welch is one of three fellows who will participate in

the 10-month program that increases the visibility of nonprofit leaders nationwide, so others can see what is possible in their own communities.

Organizations like Community Renewal fill the gaps in the fabric of our local communities by providing programs or services that encourage healthy social norms, revitalize disadvantaged neighborhoods, help struggling individuals regain their confidence and livelihood, and more, the Manhattan Institute said.

"Relationships matter. Allendale used to be one of the worst areas in the city, but today, you're safe living next door to me because it's hard to rob someone you know, respect, and love," Sharpel said. "We're excited to partner with the Manhattan Institute, so that we can get the word out about this model to other distressed neighborhoods across the country."

As a Civil Society Fellow, program participants will gain the tools needed to enhance their organization's overall communications capability, including the skills and relationships necessary to become an effective spokesperson for their community, organization, and the issue that they work on. Fellows will receive training and assistance to complete monthly promotional activities that include writing op-eds, media interviews, speaking engagements, and more.

MAXIMIZE YOUR GIFT BY PLANNING AHEAD



Although Community Renewal needs your financial support year-round, this work is also long-term and will outlive us all. **Please remember us in your planned giving** – estate plans, wills, life insurance, financial investments, etc. You can leave a legacy that will live on and provide valuable support for this life-changing work.

Contact Jimmy Graves at **318-425-3222**
or jimmygraves@communityrenewal.us.



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a word from mack

FINDING OUR WAY FORWARD

Lewis Mumford, one of the great minds of the last century, once observed, “The chief enigma of history is ‘Why do we keep collapsing the societies we construct?’” He points to a mystery of the human condition, to wit: Over and over again we find ourselves caught in a cycle of begin; grow; flourish; decline; decay; and disintegrate, for whole cities and for whole civilizations. Put another way, we may spotlight the fact that we, as human beings, have never grown a large society that actually gets better and better endlessly and boundlessly.

Is it a pipe-dream to think we are capable of that achievement? Can we so live that our children and their children and all who are to follow can become living agents of an ever-renewed and renewing way of living with one another? The firm answer which I would give is a shout! “Yes!”

It is obvious that to have a “better society,” you must find a way to have “better” people. What do “better people” look like? We, at Community Renewal, define a “better” person with the description of what we consider to be “A Whole Person.” And here is our operative definition of a whole person: “A whole person is both Competent and Compassionate.” We have to walk a balanced life on those two legs if we are to journey to wholeness.

Now to be “Competent” means “Those who have the willingness and the ability to access and to appropriate resources within and outside of themselves which enable them to grow, actualizing their highest potential.” Competent persons are always growing in skillful living, spiritual living, social living, physical, emotional, and intellectual living. And “Compassionate” persons are “Those who regularly and consistently exercise their empathic nature seeking the ‘good’ of others as they do their own.”

So, it only makes sense that to have a society

on the road leading to wholeness, we must have human beings embarked upon and dedicated to tread that same luminous path. But the question of the ages is this: “How?”

Now here is a profound truth. We cannot become a whole person by ourselves, for ourselves, and only with ourselves! And while it is true that only we can choose to grow, it is also true that we cannot grow alone. I decide in isolation. It is an act of my will. I am responsible for choosing. But once I have chosen to “grow,” I can only mature in positive relationships with others. (The same Greek word is the root word for “perfect,” “whole” and “mature.”) Therefore human competency and compassion are inextricably connected to human relationships.

This is the entire thesis of Community Renewal. Society is a system of positive relationships. And relationships have rules. So we believe that cyclical societal collapse is not an enigma! It is a breakdown of relationships and it can only be understood by looking through the prism of the truths of human relationships!

If you wish to grow, then you must follow the absolute rules that govern caring and loving human relationships. That is why we believe that the most profound truth of all reality is found in the truth of the deep and devoted relationship which we call, “purposeful friendship.” Therefore we believe that we must rebuild the “relational foundation” upon which all society rests, then continue to nourish that foundation with intentional attention. That is how you stay in a relationship. It is a rule.

And when you stay in a caring and positive and purposeful friendship, you grow. And when you grow, you get “better.” Now we must apply these “rules” to whole cities. That is where Community Renewal and the partnership you bring is blazing a path which can be a trail for all to follow. This is a method that can be replicated in every city!



about **MACK MCCARTER**

Mack McCarter is founder and co-ordinator of Community Renewal International. A native of Shreveport, La., Mack holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in religion from Texas Christian University and a Master of Divinity Degree from Brite Divinity School.

He served as a pastor for 18 years in Texas before returning to Shreveport in 1991 to begin implementing his vision for community renewal. CRI was formally organized in 1994 and under Mack's leadership has grown into an organization which has received national and international recognition for its life-changing impact.



Many people have had their dreams crushed and through the power of friendship we give them the courage to dream again.”

- Mack McCarter