

Remembering Matt Devenney

On June 18th, the Stewpot community gathered in the courtyard outside of the dining room to remember the life and witness of Matt Devenney, who was shot and killed here at Stewpot 30 years ago this year. His compassion, servanthood, and courage left a permanent mark on Stewpot, one that still inspires and strengthens us today, even those of us who did not know him. At that service, the Rev. Luther Ott, one of Stewpot's former Executive Directors, shared the following words about his dear friend and mentor:

Janet and I had the privilege of knowing Matt. Today we celebrate his life, as Jill so elegantly stated. We also remember Matt's family. I love the picture that was sent out on the invitation for us to be here: Matt's son, David, who was maybe two at the time, and his wife, Kathy, just a wonderful, giving woman. This is a day to remember and celebrate Matt's life, but it is also a day for us to offer our support and prayers for Matt's family, who still miss him very much. We all miss him.

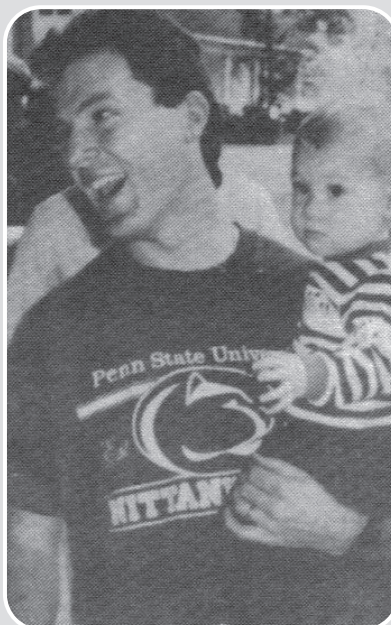
When Matt visited my Sunday School class once, he was asked, 'How do you stay faithful?' 'I go back to the Word,' Matt said, 'to what Jesus said.'

'Give us an example,' someone responded.

Matt said, 'Memorize some verses. There is one that you can memorize - just one short verse - and you can count it for two. Because no less than twice, in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says, "Learn what this means: I desire mercy, and not sacrifice." Jesus was quoting the prophet Isaiah when he said this. And Matthew recorded Jesus saying that no less than two times in his gospel. So, we might want to think about that for a minute.

'What Jesus is telling us is that the externals of religion don't make any difference. All this theology of sacrifice, and to make ourselves feel better. That's fine up to a point, but what is really good, and what it is really Jesus, is when we show mercy. What God desires is mercy, and, sisters and brothers, we need some of that,' Matt said.

Thanks, Matt, for embodying so beautifully the meaning of those verses, and in such a way that your witness continues to echo through the years. We love and miss you.



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Faith meeting needs in our community



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Stewpot

Faith meeting needs in our community

A Newsletter of Stewpot Community Services

Summer 2021

DIRECTOR'S CORNER



Stewpot Summer Camp wrapped up last week. I cannot describe the joy that the kids and teens brought back to our campus with their laughter and playfulness and love after a long “winter” of pandemic living.

For safety, we kept camp small. Out of concern for what was lost during virtual schooling, we started camp for the little ones after JPS wrapped up theirs. But we still packed in as much as we could: field trips, playtime, sno cones, museums, games...and just plain old being together. And, all reports are: It was the best summer yet.

In my conversations with the camp staff, it was clear that camp was healing for everyone. Our students and staff were all burnt out from the stresses of virtual learning over the past academic year. But, as summer camp unfolded, “what was lost was quickly regained,” as one staffer put it. “I could tell that they did not take camp for granted,” another said. “Camp gave me some hope,” one of our directors observed.

In May, we wrapped up another project that gives us hope: the renovation of the bathroom at the Billy Brumfield Shelter for Men. These enhancements create a safer, more functional, and dignified space for our clients. Please read more about this project in the following pages. Also in this newsletter, we share how COVID partnerships have enabled us to expand meal deliveries to seniors in central Mississippi. All of this is possible because of generous donors, smart partnerships, and dedicated staff.

Speaking of dedicated staff: Stewpot has not been spared from the massive changes sweeping through America's workforce. Two more of our long-time staff members have

left for other opportunities: Rhonda Tomlin and Michelle Bingham. We give tribute to them and welcome our newest staff members in this newsletter.

And finally, we remember Matt Devenney. In June, we marked the 30th anniversary of his death, and the impact he had on defining and sustaining our work together at Stewpot. Luther Ott offers some words of remembrance. As it turns out, Matt's life is just as compelling and inspiring now as it was then.

As Matt so often quoted from the Gospels (but more importantly, he lived): “God desires mercy, not sacrifice.” Mercy is what we hope we show when we create a safe, welcoming, and fun place for children and teens; when we ensure that homeless men can shower with dignity; and when we work together to deliver meals.

This is the work that we all make possible, as we each give of our time, talents, and resources to our neighbors in need. Thank YOU for all you do for Stewpot.

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WARM FAREWELLS & NEW FACES AT STEWPOT

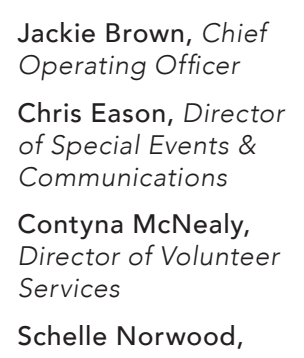
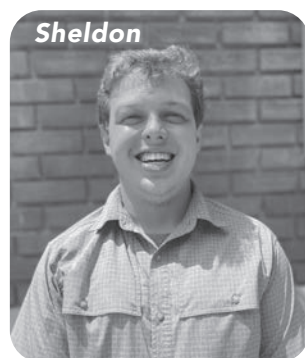
Since our last newsletter, two more long-time Stewpot staffers have left to pursue other opportunities. In May, we sent Rhonda Tomlin, our Accounting Manager, on to Horne CPA Group with our best wishes. While she was with us, Rhonda completed her bachelor's and master's degrees in Accounting at Jackson State University. She served Stewpot for eight energy-filled years that were also full of love and compassion for everyone around her.

In early July, we bid farewell to Michelle Bingham, our Director of Special Events and Communications, who is now employed at UMMC. Michelle served Stewpot in various ways over her 18 years of employment: receptionist, Director of Sims House shelter, Director of Special Events and (that title was filled in in various ways across her tenure!). Michelle also served as mentor, mom, coach, and Chief Encourager. She was one of our "Swiss army knives" because she did and could do so much.

Both of these wonderful women will be missed very much. Thank you, Rhonda and Michelle, for your dedication to Stewpot, but more importantly, to the people we serve. Our best wishes are with you.



As we wish farewell to two long-time members of our Stewpot Family, we are also welcoming five new friendly faces:



Jackie Brown, Chief Operating Officer

Chris Eason, Director of Special Events & Communications

Contyna McNealy, Director of Volunteer Services

Schelle Norwood, Accounting Manager

Sheldon Alston, Special Projects Coordinator

We know that each of these new staff members will help us further our mission and we are excited to have them join our team here at Stewpot!

Restoration Arrives at BILLY BRUMFIELD

Since 1987, Stewpot's Billy Brumfield Shelter for men has been offering emergency shelter, addiction recovery, and medical recovery shelter to about 500 homeless men each year. While the building is sturdy, certain parts of the Brumfield Shelter have deteriorated over the years due to heavy use, the most problematic of which were the main bathroom and showers.

In 2018, architect Taylor Poole at Dean & Dean Associates offered to help design a new space that included better air circulation and more privacy for users. Through the generosity of the Chew Foundation, funding was secured in 2019.

Then, COVID-19 happened, and like so many plans during that time, the bathroom renovations got put on hold while Stewpot staff and the community did all they could to help those in need stay safe. Once the contractors, architects, and planners felt safe to proceed, the project was started in March 2021.

In Taylor Poole's own words: "This project focused on the complete renovation of the restroom and shower facilities for the men of the Billy Brumfield shelter. The new construction consisted of: new metal stud walls, flooring, tile wainscot, acoustical tile ceiling, LED lighting, HVAC return and supply ducts, toilet fixtures, shower stalls, sinks, and paint."

By the end of the project, the entire bathroom was demolished and redone, and the sleeping area was cleaned out completely and refinished. The leaks that had plagued Brumfield in the sleeping area were fixed as well. The entire project only took the general contractors, Copeland and Johns, about eight weeks to complete.

Yet, as with many projects, it took more than a couple of hands to complete. It took a village! Many volunteers were put to work by the new Director of Volunteer Services at Stewpot, Contyna McNealy.

McNealy states, "Recruiting volunteers for the Billy Brumfield Shelter was my first project as a new hire at Stewpot. The volunteer portion of the project spanned about five days and consisted of volunteers cleaning, sanding, painting, and reassembling furniture. Members

from First United Methodist Church of Clinton and St. James Episcopal Church were eager to get involved. Both churches completed the bulk of the work, and it was inspiring to witness their excitement about volunteering again. Both groups expressed how special Brumfield was to them and the fond memories they have of serving the shelter."

Having a clean and safe place to shower and use the bathroom is no small thing, especially to people who are homeless! The renovations have restored our ability to provide dignity, respect, and a healthier environment to the men who need the Billy Brumfield Shelter. Many thanks to all who made it possible!



A NEW PARTNERSHIP WITH CMPDD: SERVING OUR SENIOR NEIGHBORS



As the coronavirus spread through American communities, public health officials underscored the heightened risk senior citizens faced from COVID-19. The message was simple: stay at home and avoid group activities.

However, these recommendations presented particular challenges for our older neighbors on limited incomes who lack access or funds for healthy food on a daily basis.

In January, Dr. Chelsea B. Crittle, the Aging Program Director at Central Mississippi Planning & Development Inc. (CMPDD), reached out to Stewpot to forge a partnership aimed at providing groceries to senior citizens within the city of Jackson. CMPDD had received a grant from the Nutrition Program Grocery Project and needed to recruit an organization with the capacity to assist with the project.

Stewpot was ready and willing to help. Stewpot agreed to order, pick up, prepare, and pack 75 senior food bags once a month for four months beginning in March 2021 and ending in June 2021. Once the bags were packed, they were delivered to senior citizens by CMPDD staff.

We have been reminded of many things during the pandemic, one of which is how much we can accomplish when we work together. COVID expanded our opportunities to form partnerships like this one, which multiply the impact of our individual agencies.

Helen Keller once wrote: "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." We appreciated CMPDD's invitation to do something so important for our neighbors. Thank you!



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