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 his dear friends, shared the following words about his dear friend and mentor:

Janet and I had the privilege of knowing Matt. Today we celebrate his life, if I’m elegantly stated. We also remember Matt’s family. I have the picture that was sent out for the invitation for us to do here. Matt’s son, David, who was maybe ten years old, 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 support and prayer 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, “Do you read the Bible?” 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 carry for the rest of your life. Because no less than twice, in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus says, ‘Learn at what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’” Jesus was quoting the prophet Isaiah when he said this. And Matt earnestly said saying that we have to do that twice in his gospel. So, we might want to think about what Jesus means.

“Just how can you tell us that the external religion doesn’t make any difference? All these things of sacrificial, and in some things, feel better. There’s fine up to a point, but what’s really good, and what’s really fine, 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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For safety, we kept camp small. One at a time. Matt’s life is just as compelling and inspiring as it was then.

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I saw it, as Jesus meant it, when we work together to deliver meals. A hot meal or groceries for people who are hungry • Safe Shelter for those who are homeless and vulnerable • A safe and nurturing environment for over 130 sick children and teenagers each year

**DIRECTOR’S CORNER**

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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 that you do for Stewpot.

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 show dignity with courage, and when we work together to deliver meals.
As we wish farewell to two long-time members of our Stewpot Family, we are also welcoming five new-friend faces.

**WARM FAREWELLS & NEW FACES AT STEWPORT**

Since our last newsletter, two more long-time Stewport staffers have left to pursue other opportunities. In May, we bid farewell to Rhonda Fournier, our Accounting Manager, as she joined CPA Group with our best wishes. While the war with Russia had 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 19 years of employment. As Director of Simo House shelter, Director of Special Services... and... title that did not make sense as the title was various across her tenure. Michelle also served as manager, mom, coach, and quite likely was one of our “Sassy Army brothers” 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 dedicated service to Stewpot, but more importantly, to the people we serve. Our best wishes are with you.

**Restoration Arrives at Billy Brumfield**

Since 1987, Stewport’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 usage, the salt problematics of which were the main bathrooms and showers.

In 2018, architect Taylor Poele at Dean & Dean Associates offered to help design a new space that included better air circulation and more privacy for men. Through the generosity of the Choctaw 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 and the community did all they could to help those in need every way. Once the contractors, architect, and planners felt safe to proceed, the project was restarted in March 2021.

In Taylor Poele’s own words: “This project focused on the complete renovation of the restrooms and shower facilities for the men of the Billy Brumfield Shelter. The new construction consisted of: new metal wall studs, flooring, tile Retro, acoustic 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 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 in place by the new Director of Volunteer Services at Stewport, Contrya McNealy.

McNealy states: “Brumfield volunteers for the Billy Brumfield Shelter were my first project as our new hire at Stewport. The volunteer portion of the project spanned about six days and included 222 hours of volunteer activities, including cleaning, painting, and refinishing 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 bathrooms is a small thing, especially to people who are homeless. The renovations have restored our ability to provide dignity, respect, and a healthier environment for 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. Critt, the Aging Program Director at Central Mississippi Planning & Development Inc. (CMPDD), reached out to Stewport to forge a partnership aimed at providing groceries to senior citizens within the city of Jackson. CMPDD had received a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Farmers to Families Project and needed to recruit an organization with the capacity to assist with the project.

Stewport was ready and willing to help. Stewport agreed to order, pick up, package, and pack 75 senior food boxes once a month for four months, beginning in March 2021 and ending in June 2021. Once the boxes 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.

Harley 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!