

# THE Quarterly

Summer 2021

**In this issue,** as we face the ongoing challenges of keeping those we serve safe during this pandemic, we share stories of struggles and successes.

## The Sound of a Smile



Ron McEwen "strayed," as he said. Then found his way back home.

Ron McEwen's laughter echoes through The Mission's Thrift Store.

As he calls across the room to ask Maria how she is doing, what you hear is his smile.

And Maria, who has been coming to the Thrift Store "forever," as she says, brings a basket with scarves, ties and belts over to the register, calling out, "Hola, amigo, mio!"

Unabashedly, she adds, "This man, Señor Ron is wonderful. He is a great friend, one of the best people I've ever met in my life. He is why I love coming here. He lights up this place."

Laughing easily, Maria adds, "He even tries to speak poquito Spanish." Holding his thumb and index finger apart,

**You can't help but wonder how someone like Ron always seems to be so upbeat and positive. "It wasn't always that way," he says, without hesitating.**

Ron's eyes light up, as he insists, "Poquito. Yes. Poquito."

It is not unusual for Ron, who is being honored as The Mission's Inspiring Alumnus, to have Motown music softly playing in the background. "I've got sunshine on a cloudy day." Nodding his head, as if in agreement, Ron says, "I have joy." Then he clarifies, "Happiness comes and goes. But joy comes from above. I ask for joy every morning when I wake up. And I count my

blessings at the end of every day." He adds, "Weeping may endure through the night, but joy comes in the morning."

You can't help but wonder how someone like Ron always seems to be so upbeat and positive.

"It wasn't always that way," he says, without hesitating.

**1** Ron McEwen, The Mission's Inspiring Alumnus, shares insights into his story of redemption.

**2** Deborah Dorman and Corrine O'Hara, The Mission's Volunteers of The Year, bring vibrance to The Shelter.

**4** Students from The University of Pennsylvania help three residents see new possibilities in themselves.

**6** Princeton University graciously donates over 8,500 meals to The Mission this summer.

## Receiving Much More Than We Give

The vibrant, colorful weavings of Kente cloth, dating back hundreds of years, carry deep meanings of spiritual strength, peace, love, harmony, protection, royalty, harvest and renewal. For those who have been displaced, Kente colors represent a celebration of their roots and of overcoming struggles.

Corrine O'Hara and Deborah Dorman were drawn to those colors as they offered to bring in their own painters to help create a more joyful, warm, energetic, and hopeful feeling in The Shelter.

Prior to the pandemic, Corrine and Deborah, who are being honored as The Mission's Volunteers of The Year, had been coming to The Shelter for several years together, serving dinners, and, as Deborah said, "We would leave and be on the verge of tears because there was so much love and joy being shared in The Shelter. It was like we had been given a gift of being invited into someone else's sacred community."

Corrine added, "Every time we left, we always felt like we received so much more than what we gave. The Mission

is a place of such warmth, compassion, respect, love, support and kindness."

Each time they came to serve, Niki Graham, The Mission's Manager of Community Outreach, said, "They would call and ask what they could bring that would be needed. Then they would show up with food, and clothing for dozens of clients. And, often, there was a generous check included."

Once the pandemic struck, though, and volunteers were not allowed to come to The Mission, Corrine and Deborah asked Mary Gay Abbott-Young,



*Deborah Dorman and Corrine O'Hara, The Mission's Volunteers of The Year, sending love with Matthew Painting's Milton Sandy and Oscar Velez.*



The Mission's President, if there was something they could do that could brighten the lives of those who were experiencing homelessness during these trying times and staying in The Shelter.

As Deborah said, "We just asked, *What can we do? What is needed?*"

"Giving the inside of The Shelter a more vibrant, warm and cheerful feeling has been on our 'wish list' for a long time," said Mary Gay. "But there always seemed to be more pressing and immediate needs that required our attention. So, I mentioned that the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs had just provided us with funding to update the floors. Then Deborah and Corrine became enthused about having the entire inside of The Shelter painted to provide a brighter, more upbeat feeling."

From that conversation, The Shelter started taking on new, vibrant, Kente colors.

Once Corrine and Deborah were vaccinated, they selected the colors for

**"One of the real gifts I received was the wonder of realizing how connected we all are."**

the day center, dining room, kitchen and hallways. Then they hired their own painting contractors and, wearing masks, they oversaw the changes.

"The result," Mary Gay added, "is transformational. And to think that it took place while the pandemic was still raging. Corrine and Deborah's work is a beautiful testament to what can happen when people truly care and become involved."

"The next step we're thinking about is getting some Trenton artists, along with people staying in The Shelter, to do murals in the sleeping areas. We are looking to do the women's section next. Perhaps with poems, also. And possibly

something that could change seasonally," said Corrine.

Deborah added, "We see The Shelter as a large canvas – reflecting the hope, optimism, and transformations that occur there."

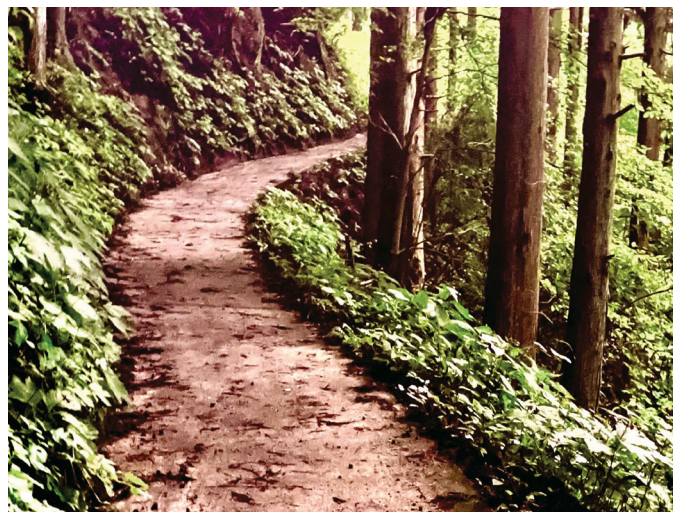
Reflecting on her experiences volunteering at The Mission, Deborah said, "One of the real gifts I received was the wonder of realizing how connected we all are. When you have those glimpses of our connectedness, that is when your heart opens. Just listening to someone else, hearing their story, seeing what needs to be done, each of those are opportunities for us to connect with each other."

Corrine added, "When we first came to help serve dinner, it was daunting because I'd never been in a shelter before. But I got over that quickly because The Mission is so accepting and full of love and hope. It was so easy to be with everyone. Just looking someone in the eye and saying, 'Hello.' Trying to be as present as possible. Now, it grounds me to walk into The Mission. There are those moments when you meet someone and connect. And it is wonderful. It is a welcome reminder to care for one another, and to give, and to be kind."

On the ride home, after volunteering at The Mission, Deborah said, "We often wonder what happened to some people who we met earlier, but were not there this time. And we hope they are doing well."

She added, "The lesson I get from serving dinner is, 'I am blessed to get up today.'"

Pausing, Deborah added, "But,



*A scene of nature, like the mural Deborah and Corrine placed on a wall in The Shelter, can invite someone into a new frame of mind.*

**"We would leave and be on the verge of tears because there was so much love and joy being shared in The Shelter."**

please, we do very little compared to what The Mission does. We are here to highlight what The Mission does for all of us."

"Yes, please," Corrine agreed, "We want the light to be shining where it deserves – on The Mission."

### You can make a real difference.

By volunteering, you become part of the life force of The Mission – lifting the hearts of those who are experiencing homelessness, as you share your talents, connect in real and meaningful ways, and reinforce how we are truly all in it together.

### Volunteer today.

We'd love to hear from you. Reach out to Niki Graham, *Manager of Community Engagement*, at 609.695.1436. ext. 129

# The University of Pennsylvania Helps Residents at The Mission Start Their Own Businesses

S ometimes in a conversation, a spark will fly. And it will ignite new possibilities.

That's what happened seven years ago when Barrett Young, The Mission's Chief Executive Officer, was earning his Master's Degree at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Policy and Practice.

Charlotte Ren, Ph.D. shared with Barrett an embryonic idea she had to help teach people who were incarcerated how to become entrepreneurs.



*Antonio Richardson-Jones*

Barrett immediately became enthusiastic and told her, "I'd love to help make that happen...in any way."

From that conversation, the Penn Restorative Entrepreneurship Program was conceived.

Since then, more than 30 of The Mission's residents have gone through this groundbreaking program, including three who just graduated.

To qualify for this ten-week intensive experience, Barrett, who serves as a co-founder of the program, helps select participants based on several criteria, including the depth of their commitment to recovering, their belief in themselves, and their entrepreneurial passion.

They then receive guidance from graduate students and professors at Penn, which leads to their developing a business plan, which they present to a panel that includes possible investors.

One of the earliest graduates from the program was Curtis Kitchen, who freely shares, "It is extremely hard for people with addictions and criminal

backgrounds to get a job. So, creating your own business was a new pathway that none of us had ever considered or knew the first thing about before we walked on to the University's campus."

After he went through the program, Curtis and his wife Brandy, who is also a former addict, were able to write a business plan to get a small business loan, which allowed them to become owners of their own auto repair shop. "Five years before this, I was sleeping under a bridge, wishing I would never wake up the next morning. And now we've hired a full-time employee who is also in recovery."

This year, the three residents from The Mission developed plans which could open up new doors for them.

Before coming to The Mission, Aage Skerstad said, "Being locked up was the only thing I knew how to do." For more than half his life, he had been incarcerated. "But as I was doing time, small pieces of myself were dying off. And I started to feel like if any more died off, there

wouldn't be anything left of me."

When he was selected to be in this year's program, Aage said, "It was like I finally had an opportunity to change my life."

His business plan focuses on helping seniors prepare to scale back their lives by giving their belongings to others in need.

"We will connect people who are downsizing with people who would really appreciate having, for instance, gently used clothes or furniture," Aage explained. "The approach is ecologically sound," he added. "We will be recycling someone's past for someone else's future."

Aage said that beyond learning how to write a business plan, among the many things he came to understand was the importance of having a 60-second elevator speech "to explain why someone might need my services." Then he learned to refine his five-minute presentation "for those who were more interested."





Brandon Lee Burris



Aage Skerstad

"My business plan is a reflection of who I am," he added, smiling. "That idea of taking something old, the shell of something, and giving it a fresh start... that appeals to me."

Antonio Richardson-Jones said that his time at The Mission had been spent "taking a personal inventory." He explained, "The counselors helped me think about myself in ways I never did before. It was a time of coming to terms with my mistakes, realizing what I had to change, and seeing myself differently."

When he was accepted into Penn's Entrepreneurial Program, Antonio said, "I couldn't believe it. I never had an opportunity like this before." He added, "Then when we started working together, it was nerve wracking because it was so challenging. At first, I thought it might be too much. I was doubting myself. But they were very accepting and encouraging. And they inspired me to set new goals for myself."

Antonio's business plan is to provide transportation for people who

**"Throughout their lives, people have told them that they are failures. And they have defied that description. They've shaken that label. And they have shown themselves – and others – what they can do."**

need to get to non-emergency medical appointments. Researching the need, he identified a geographic area where he would focus, along with potential health care facilities with whom he could partner. Then he analyzed his start-up costs, researched the competition, and created a pricing structure that would be profitable.

Antonio now plans to move into a

Recovery House in Trenton, get a job, and attend Mercer County Community College. "It is important for me to start someplace new," he said, "where I will be surrounding myself with different people than where I came from."

With a newfound sense of hope, he added, "From there, who knows?"

Brandon Lee Burris said, "Being at The Mission has been a time of rebuilding belief in myself...and coming to trust that things can be better."

His business plan focused on creating a Recovery House in New Jersey that would "serve the LGBTQ+ community, where residents who are committed to their own and to each other's recovery would receive support, and where the environment would be free from discrimination and judgment."

His research underscored a clear need, as there are not any LGBTQ+ Recovery Houses in the Tri-State area. "The closest one is in Ohio," he discovered.

What Brandon said he learned most from the students *continued on page 6*

# Princeton University Donates More Than 8,500 Lunches and Dinners to The Mission

"We are exceedingly grateful to Princeton University's Campus Dining, Human Resources, Office of Community and Regional Affairs and John H. Pace, Jr. '39 Center for Civic Engagement for providing meals to those who are homeless and those who are in recovery treatment at The Mission," said Barrett Young, Chief Executive Officer of The Rescue Mission of Trenton.

"The University's Summer Food and Nutrition Program will be providing The Mission with more than 8,500 meals during four weeks this summer," he added. "All of our hearts are lifted at The Mission by the University's generosity, compassion and commitment to address food insecurity, particularly during this pandemic which is challenging us all like never before."

"I was very happy when I found out the University would be willing to fund the program again this summer," said Cristian Vasquez, Director of Retail and Catering Operations. "Not only does this secure employment for our Campus Dining employees during the summer, but it also allows us to produce nutritious meals to support our local community organizations who are assisting individuals and families in need."

He added: "I know how important this is for all of us in our community, especially as we come out of this pandemic that has affected so many individuals and families in ways we couldn't have imagined."



*Members of the Campus Dining Team finish preparing lunches and dinners for Princeton University's Summer Food and Nutrition Program.*

Barrett said, "We are so very thankful to be in this together with the caring and generous leaders at Princeton University, and look forward to collaborating together in ongoing ways in the future."

## The University of Pennsylvania Helps Residents at The Mission Start Their Own Businesses

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and faculty at Penn was "to make your business plan stand out to possible investors by highlighting how they can receive a clear return on their investment."

Some of the investors were particularly intrigued because Brandon had identified a need that was not being addressed. Among the suggestions he received was for him to gain experience operating a Recovery House that already existed. By his personally overcoming the daunting day-to-day challenges of running a Recovery House, they suggested, their interest would be strengthened. He was also encouraged to see if an established Recovery House might be drawn to invest in this niche that spoke to a clear need.

Pete Taft, a member of The Mission's

Board and an advisor to this program, said, "This curriculum marries the head and the heart, the aspiration and the

**"An embryonic idea to teach people who've been incarcerated to become entrepreneurs led to a partnership between the University of Pennsylvania and The Mission."**

hard work that is needed to succeed as an entrepreneur." He added, "The next step is: How can we help them find the funding?"

Thomas Duffin, Executive Director of the Penn Restorative Entrepreneur-

ship Program, agreed, "Long after these presentations are over, these individuals will need support and resources. And we want to be there for them. We want to explore: *What connections can we help foster – at both Penn and through our connections in the community?*"

Barrett Young said, "Thinking about their futures, working with students and professors to refine their plans, then formally presenting their plans was a transformational experience for Aage, Antonio and Brandon. It changed their perception of themselves. Throughout their lives, people have told them that they are failures. And they have defied that description. They've shaken that label. And they have shown themselves – and others – what they can do."



# The College of New Jersey Bonner Scholars Create Virtual Thrift Store With All Proceeds Going To The Mission

Kennedy Ferruggia and Josh Simpson, two Bonner Scholars at The College of New Jersey, have created a virtual Thrift Store for students – with all proceeds going to The Mission.

Twice a week they post on Instagram vintage or unique clothes they've selected from The Mission's Thrift Store. Then they steam the items and place them on hangers, pictured against a chalkboard (with words slightly erased in the background).

They call this very stylized approach "The Thrift Project" – with students purchasing gently used clothes for somewhere between \$6 and \$12.

As Kennedy explained, "We used to

**"They select unique clothes from The Mission's Thrift Store, then steam them, place them on hangers, photograph them against a chalkboard, then post them on Instagram where students purchase them for between \$6 and \$12."**

have Pop-Up Shops on campus, which were well attended. But, of course, because of the pandemic, we are not able to do that. So, instead, we created this online project, which has become very popular."

You can see their handiwork on Instagram at TheThriftProjectTCNJ, where they have nearly 500 followers.

With each purchase, she added, students also receive some information about



*Kennedy Ferruggia and Josh Simpson are helping the environment, while helping to feed those who are hungry.*



The Mission, along with a personalized Thank You note, recognizing that they are helping the environment by lessening textile waste, while also helping to feed individuals who are hungry and house those who are experiencing homelessness.

Barrett Young, Chief Executive Officer of The Mission, said, "Our heartfelt thanks goes out to Kennedy and Josh for their dedication, their compassion, and their unique ability to connect The Mission with college students, and to spread the word about how we are here to help anyone who has nowhere else to turn."



Learn more at:  
[TheThriftProjectTCNJ](https://www.instagram.com/TheThriftProjectTCNJ)

# Restaurants Are Helped, As They Feed Those Who Are Hungry

**T**he New Jersey Economic Development Authority has provided The Mission with a very generous grant to help cure pandemic-related hunger.

Barrett Young, Chief Executive Officer of The Mission, explained, "This new project is providing The Mission with funds to purchase meals from local restaurants. It is an inspiring way to both feed individuals in our community who are hungry, while also supporting local restaurants who have been struggling to stay open through this pandemic."

Each participating restaurant agreed to provide 200 meals a day to The Mission.

In addition to providing high quality meals that those who are staying at The Mission would not usually receive, this innovative program has also been a lifeline for many restaurants in our community.

Jenny Leon, Owner of Trentini's at 635 South Clinton Avenue in Trenton, said, "This program is a huge support, helping me and my employees to survive." She sighed, then added, "It has really been about survival. The times have been really tough."

Trentini's, a cozy restaurant offering both Italian and Spanish delicacies, suddenly became empty when the pandemic struck, Jenny said. "All the offices around us have been closed. So, we did not have anyone here for lunch, which was when most of our customers came. And, for dinner, we've been closed for a year-and-a-half."



*Jenny Leon, Owner of Trentini's, said, "This program is helping me and my employees survive."*

**"Still, I understood that while I was having a hard time, there were many more people who didn't have enough to eat."**

So, her 14 employees became six, as she switched to just delivering meals to people's homes.

"Still, I understood," she said, "that while I was having a hard time, there were many more people who didn't have enough to eat."

Jenny added, "That is why I was thrilled when we were able to partner with The Mission. This program has helped us to keep our doors open. Otherwise, I don't know if we would have made it."

Smiling, she said, "Thank God we are working together with The Mission and that, together, we are helping people who do not have enough to eat."

In the meantime, customers are slowly coming back to Trentini's, Jenny said. More than 80% of her business, though, is still from people who are either picking up or asking for deliveries. "I hope more and more people will get vaccinated," she said. "That is the only way we can open up everything and get back to where we were before the pandemic."

**"It is an inspiring way to both feed individuals in our community who are hungry, while also supporting local restaurants."**



## In Memory of Artoria Dee Frazier

"It is with great sorrow we learned that Artoria Dee Frazier, the Founder and Executive Director of Women with Voices Charity, passed away suddenly," said Barrett Young, Chief Executive Officer of The Mission.

"Artoria has been a dear, compassionate and enormously generous contributor to The Mission since 2018," he added. "Throughout that time, she has brought thousands of meals to our door. Her memory will continue to inspire us here at The Mission."

The week before she passed away, Artoria called Niki Graham, The Mission's Manager of Community Engagement, to see if she could come by to serve her

always generous donation of wonderfully prepared meals.

As the pandemic raged, Artoria said she became even more committed to feed those who have nowhere else to turn. Her personal goal, she said, was to feed 800 people a month.

### **What kept her going?**

Artoria told Niki, "Covid-19 has had a tremendous impact on all of our lives, but the most dire impact is seen in impoverished communities, where people already do not have access to some of the most vital resources."

Niki said, "We will always remember Artoria sitting and sharing meals with

those she served, engaged in deep conversations. And they all knew that her food was made with love. We will miss her dearly."



*Artoria will be remembered sharing meals with those she served, engaged in deep conversations.*

## Remembering Phyllis Marchand

"Phyllis has always been a source of pure inspiration for me," said Mary Gay Abbott-Young, President of The Mission. "She was caring, loving, and passionate."

"A consummate leader, Phyllis knew how to collaborate, always moving in the right direction, always making things happen, always letting those around her know that they were part of doing the right thing – whether she was helping those in need or saving the Earth," Mary Gay added.

As a member of The Mission's Advisory Council, she never missed an event, and was always one of the first to be there with her wonderful way of being a catalyst for change – connecting, advising, encouraging, helping to move things forward, and celebrating.

"I will miss her warm, winning smile, her unwavering commitment, her endurance, her sense of hope and her eternal optimism," Mary Gay added. "She made this world a better place."

As The Mission's dear friend and long-time advisor Irwin Stoolmach-er said so beautifully, "Phyllis was an incredible person – charming, cheerful,

**"I will miss her warm, winning smile, her unwavering commitment, her endurance, her sense of hope and her eternal optimism."**

caring, compassionate and competitive (she completed 19 marathons). Throughout her 22 years as an elected official in Princeton Township (*including 13 years as mayor*), she displayed her leadership skills, problem-solving tenacity and a sustained commitment to constituency service. She also served with distinction on many charities involved with the environment, helping the truly needy among us, as well as a variety of issues directly affecting women."

He added, "It brought a smile to my face when, on Tuesday, March 30 at around 10:15 a.m., the funeral procession for Phyllis passed the corners at the intersection of Witherspoon/Paul

Robeson/Wiggins Street in Princeton as dozens upon dozens of fans of Phyllis gathered with personal placards to wave and clap as the procession moved toward Princeton Cemetery. It was a demonstration of the intense love and affection that a thankful community felt toward their beloved 'mayor for life' – the indomitable Phyllis Marchand."



*Phyllis playing miniature golf at our last pre-pandemic Adam Shanks Annual Fundraiser.*

## Grateful to All Who Donated to Our Annual Fundraiser

"While the pandemic, once again, kept us from inviting our donors to The Mission's only Annual Fundraising Event – a miniature golf tournament we hold in honor of Adam Shanks – we were thrilled that so many individuals and organizations helped us to exceed last year's goal of \$50,000," said Barrett Young, Chief Executive Officer of The Mission.

While we wish our donors could have been here with us, instead, our donors participated in The Mission's only Annual Fundraiser by sponsoring an individual who is staying in our Shelter or in our Behavioral Health Center to play a round of miniature golf on their behalf.



*Barrett Young, The Mission's Chief Executive Officer, shows players how to finesse the course.*

Then our donors received a photograph of the individual they sponsored, along with a personalized thank you

note. We saw this as a small way of connecting those we serve with those who have continued to support us during this pandemic.

"All of those donations immediately helped us to feed those who are hungry, house those who are homeless, and provide opportunities for those who have nowhere else to turn," Barrett added.

Hopefully, we will be able to get together next year.

"In the meantime, we are very thankful to our donors who continue to support those who are most vulnerable in our community – particularly during these most challenging times," said Barrett.

## Welcoming Back Volunteers

"With clear signs of hope and optimism, we are carefully, yet enthusiastically, welcoming volunteers back on site," said Barrett Young, Chief Executive Officer of The Mission.

"Of course, for the safety of our volunteers, our staff, and of those we serve, we will continue to strictly enforce CDC guidelines, which have helped to keep us safe during this pandemic," he added.

Niki Graham, Manager of Community Outreach, said she has been receiving many requests recently from individuals and groups who want to come back on site and volunteer in person. "Being able to help others is so meaningful," she said. "Many people, in particular, like to help by serving meals at lunchtime or by organizing clothes in our Thrift Store or by helping someone prepare for the GED."

As Dolapo Olusammi, an Associate Scientific Director at Bristol Myers Squibb, who helped serve lunch and painted with her colleagues a few months before the pandemic began last year, said, "It was inspiring to hear from so many people who are finding hope and being helped at The Mission."



**David Sardar and Therese Byrne**, two highly-accomplished executives, both with international experience, have been volunteering and sharing their expertise as welcome members to The Mission's Grants and Development Teams. "We are very grateful for their insights, which are helping us to organize our work more effectively and to see our opportunities in a new light," said Mary Gay Abbott-Young, President of The Mission.

**In addition to helping serve food, if you have expertise in any of these areas, we would love to hear from you:**

- Health and Wellness, Exercise, Meditation, Smoking Cessation, Cooking, GED Training, and Financial Planning.
- At your work/school/or house of worship, you could also: Organize a Clothing Drive; or Sponsor a Dessert Night

**To learn more about ways you or your organization can volunteer, call Niki Graham at 609.695.1436 ext. 129.**



## The Sound of a Smile *continued from page 1*

"I grew up in the Church," he explains, "But I strayed."

Prior to straying, Ron says, "My life was idyllic. I grew up in Princeton. It was a university town, with lots of opportunities. And my parents taught me solid values." Then he went to St. Augustine University, a private historically black college in Raleigh, North Carolina, which was founded by Episcopal clergy in 1867 for the education of freed slaves.

"Going to school in the south, in the late 60's and early 70's, was a whole new experience for me. Prejudice was open, out front, and everywhere. The KKK had huge billboards welcoming new visitors," he shares, his eyes widening at the memory.

Still, at the University, Ron was surrounded by astounding teachers, who had a profound influence on him. "This was right after Dr. King was killed," he said. "So, this was where I learned my Black History."

When he returned to this area, Ron started a family, and joined the Iron Workers Union Local 68. Everything seemed to be going well.

Then, he says, "I started to stray." "I was apart from God," he shares. "I got involved in drugs. What started out as recreational turned into a huge problem for me." He pauses, then adds, "For a lot of years. More than I care to remember. Even though I knew God was calling me, I wasn't answering."

He remembers buying dinners on Fridays from Miss Mary, who sold them to raise money for a church in North Trenton. "She would always try to talk to me. But I wasn't listening. I was lost in my own world. And when you're there, you don't trust anybody. Even yourself." Shaking his head at the memory, Ron says, "You wouldn't have wanted to know me back then. I was not a nice person. I distanced myself from my children – because I didn't want them to see me like I was."



*Laughing easily, Maria said, "Ron even tries to speak poquito Spanish." His eyes lit up, as he replied, "Poquito. Yes. Poquito."*

### What helped Ron find his way again?

"After long enough, when you keep bumping your head against this wall, then that wall, and the police keep locking you up, you realize that your way isn't getting you anywhere," he says. "And you surrender."

Whether it was finally hearing Miss Mary's voice or some divine intervention, early in the year 2000, Ron knocked on The Mission's door. "I stayed in The Shelter, then went through The Mission's Recovery Program. Fernie Gaines (who went through the program and became The Mission's Director of Support Services) was my mentor. We talked a lot. And he walked the walk. He believed in me. And helped me to see my way."

Ron recalls, "Two years later, Mary Gay (The Mission's President) asked if I'd like to work here in the store. And I've been here ever since."

**With a smile that widens, he adds, "Serving is how I try to Let my light shine."**

Now, Ron is looking forward to getting on the other side of this pandemic for two reasons. First, so that children will be allowed back in The Thrift Store. "They add so much joy," he says. And second, so he and his fellow parishioners from Grant Chapel AME Church can participate again in a Tuesday night Bible Study group with people in recovery at The Mission.

"Being spiritual," he says, "it is a blessing for me to serve others."

With a smile that widens, he adds, "Serving is how I try to let my light shine."



Feeding those who are hungry, housing those who are homeless, and providing opportunities for all.

## Our Continuing Struggle Against the Fury of Covid-19

"Not a day has gone by, since March of last year, when I haven't paused and reflected about how, when life becomes most challenging, the best somehow always comes out in those who truly care for others," said Barrett Young, Chief Executive Officer of The Mission.

As the coronavirus became life-threatening, our essential workers selflessly overcame daunting challenges so they could continue providing warm meals, a safe place to sleep, and professional counseling to nearly 1,000 individuals who were experiencing homelessness – and came to The Mission last year because they had nowhere else to turn.

To remain open 24 hours-a-day, seven days-a-week, throughout this pandemic, our essential workers have transformed The Mission's entire operation. Heeding expert advice, we:

- > relocated some of our 41 tenants, so we could create a separate wing in The Shelter to keep our most vulnerable clients safe;
- > implemented CDC guidelines (wearing masks, sanitizing, social distancing and affixing plexiglass in



- dining and sleeping areas);
- > created a comprehensive telehealth program to continue providing counseling;
- > tested all clients and staff regularly; and worked closely with the Henry J. Austin Health Center whenever anyone felt ill;
- > collaborated with the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen to create a Warming Center to serve 60 additional people this winter;
- > were among the first shelters in our country to offer vaccines to those experiencing homelessness; and
- > helped 153 individuals move from our shelter to their own efficiency apartment.

We had no idea how we would possibly pay for all the changes we needed to make. We just knew what we had to do to keep those who had nowhere else to turn safe during this crisis.

So, we persisted – and believed.

Then, as we focused on the needs of those we serve, our hearts were lifted by the many philanthropic foundations and caring individuals who reached out to help. Your compassion and generosity let us know that we would come through this together.

Still, while there are reasons to be hopeful, we remain deeply concerned about an increase in the number of people in our community who could need our services. Many are facing possible evictions, which were delayed by the Governor's moratorium. And, with nearly one-out-of-every-three people in Trenton living in poverty, far too many of our neighbors are going to bed hungry.

Yes, there is still much to do.

***If you are in a position to help, you will be providing a safe place to sleep, along with three warm meals a day, medical referrals, behavioral health counseling, and the prospect of housing for anyone who knocks on our shelter's door.***