

THE Quarterly

Rescue  Mission
of Trenton

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How the Rescue Mission of Trenton Saved a Military Father and Gave His Son Closure



Two retired military veterans at The Mission's recent VFW event (see page 7).

“Your father has been put away. I’m not going to take you to see him. Don’t ask about seeing him.”

That’s what John’s mother told him and his two younger siblings amid ongoing mental health struggles that their father was experiencing. John was just a teenager when he received the news that he would never see his father again. “When you’re 13 years old, you’re not really up to speed on what these things mean. We were just told that he’s not doing well and that he had regular appointments with a psychiatrist and it went from there,” John said.

John’s father, John Sr., was entirely removed from his life—no visits, no phone calls, no letters.

John Sr. was in the United States Navy during the Korean War. Stationed

on a military vessel off the coast of South Korea, the military veteran worked in the engine room. John Sr. went from active duty to the Navy Reserves following his time in Korea, working at the Navy Yard in South Philadelphia. John recalls his father bringing him onto the ship for the Navy’s family days when the ship would do laps around the Delaware River to give military children the Naval experience. “I had a good relationship with [my father] and my younger siblings did too. To me, my father was an upright, hardworking man who was trying to do the best that he could for his family,” John said.

John and his family lived in Mercer County’s Hamilton Square, a suburb of Trenton about six miles east of the capital city. In addition to his military service, John Sr. worked at Bell Telephone company and a local gas station to be able to

provide for his family. On a rare day off, he would use the time to play baseball catch with his children. Somewhere along the line, John says his father began experiencing mental health challenges.

“If I had to guess, knowing what we know today, I wonder if there was a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) situation going on,” John said. John Sr. was officially diagnosed with schizophrenia and in 1970, John Sr. was forced out of the home and into a psychiatric hospital. John’s parents divorced, his mom sold their childhood home and John and his siblings completely lost touch with their father.

“We didn’t know where he was,” John said. “I’m sorry that things turned out the way they did. It was certainly not the wish of anyone. I would just thank [my father] for teaching us respect and the idea that you have to go through life and be a good person,” John said.

Life continued for John. He married his wife, Patricia, thrived in his career as an appraiser working with cities and school districts, and gave back to his community through mentorship and philanthropy. While on-site in Connecticut, John received a call from his mother who at the time was working at Helene Fuld Medical Center, now called Capital Health Regional Medical Center, about the status of his father.

“My mother had a long-term job as a receptionist at the emergency room of Helene Fuld. He was taken to that hospital, and she knew that he had been brought through... and that he had died there,” John said. In 1995, John Sr. died of a stroke. John left his work site in Connecticut and traveled to Trenton to visit his deceased

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How the Rescue Mission...

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John's father served the U.S. Navy during the Korean War.

father in the hospital, his first time seeing him in 25 years.

After the death of his father, he began to learn more about what he had been doing in the more than two decades since he last spoke to him. "The Rescue Mission provided [my father] shelter, food, and a place to participate in working. When he died, The Mission, led by Mary Gay Abbott-Young, took care of all his funeral arrangements," John said.

The Mission gave John Sr. a home and a sense of community when he needed it most. When he died, because of his service with the U.S. Navy, The Mission was able to secure a burial at a veteran's cemetery in Ocean County. "At that time, my wife and I decided that we wanted to, as an act of gratitude for taking him and also as thanks for taking care of his funeral arrangements, that we would provide out of gratitude an annual gift in his memory," John said. "I would like to thank them for the fact that they opened their doors for my father as well as hundreds of other people in all kinds of situations."

Every year for 31 years, John and Patricia, commit an annual gift to The Mission as a thank you for taking care of his father in life and in death. Both John and Patricia also committed a planned giving to The Mission in their will.

"Regardless of who you are, every-

body has some kind of a story. There's no such thing as the perfect little family. We all face various challenges," John said. "With the current state of our country... it seems that there's not

a lot of compassion for those less fortunate. I just think that in our own small way we're trying to recognize that places like The Mission are completely needed and beneficial."

A Former Baseball Star Hits a Grand Slam in Life



Deshawn Spears moves into new Rescue Mission home as the House Manager.

Deshawn Spears was only 16 years old when he first used crack cocaine. An aspiring baseball star, the teenaged North Trenton native caved to environmental pressures and was sent on a decades-long path of addiction, homelessness, and incarceration.

Deshawn grew up on Stuyvesant Avenue, a well-known neighborhood in North Trenton. He lived with his mother and his older sister and attended Gregory Elementary where Deshawn recalls he and his sister achieving perfect atten-

dance missing no days of school nor showing up late. The Stuyvesant-Prospect neighborhood was fun for Deshawn growing up—just walking distance from Cadwalader Park where Deshawn would often play baseball with the neighborhood kids. Even without his father in the home, Deshawn remembers his childhood being one of fulfillment.

It wasn't until he and his family moved to the other side of the city that things became more challenging. In his early high school years, Deshawn and his family moved to East Trenton's 'Miller Homes'. Before it became Rush Crossing Apartments in 2014, Miller Homes was

a public housing community that was notorious for poverty, crime, and drugs.

The crack epidemic in the inner cities of America in the 1980s is well documented, and Trenton was no different from the major cities affected by crack cocaine. An already vulnerable city was decimated by the drug causing a massive spike in crime, drug related arrests, and addiction. Cities across the country were flooded with the newly discovered drug creating an underground industry of dealers and users. Deshawn was both.

"I started in 1986 when I was 16 years old," Deshawn said. "I was selling [crack] and so many people were coming for it. I was curious why people kept coming back for this stuff." Deshawn said he and his friend who dealt crack with him were speaking about people's addiction to the drug when they decided to try it themselves. "I asked him, 'Why do people keep coming back for this? Do you want to try it?' I wonder if he would've said 'no' would I have been in this position," Deshawn said. The first hit of the viral drug sent Deshawn down a path that would take decades to climb out of.

"I couldn't get to practice because I wanted [crack] more than I wanted baseball. And I was a young guy. I wasn't really thinking straight or nothing like that. I just know that that's what I wanted was the drug life," Deshawn said. The Junior High School Three student found himself becoming the person that he used to sell drugs to—neglecting responsibilities, disregarding his goals, and fully conforming to the life of a person experiencing addiction.

10 years into his addiction, Deshawn would experience the hardest tragedy of his life. In 1996, Deshawn's mom suffered a severe health complication that left her brain dead. Deshawn was in jail at the time and was granted compassionate leave to visit his mother in the hospital. "I got caught with a little bit of drugs. At the time I was in the workhouse. I was in jail and I was mad because I couldn't see her," Deshawn said. "They let me go to the hospital when she was on her death

bed, but they said she was brain dead. She could hear me, but she couldn't open her eyes or anything."

The then 26-year-old found out about his mom's death during a phone call from jail. "That phone call was devastating. I just lay in my bed all day crying. I couldn't be there for her. It was terrible."

The loss of his mother worsened his addiction after getting out. Deshawn admits that her death amplified his drug use—going in and out of recovery programs for years with no intention of staying sober. For the next 16 years, Deshawn was fully immersed in his addiction to the point where his biggest advocate had a difficult decision to make.

Deshawn's sister usually let him stay at her place from time to time as he proved to be a good babysitter to her two kids while she was working. But his

"I couldn't get to practice because I wanted [crack] more than I wanted baseball. And I was a young guy I wasn't really thinking straight or nothing like that. I just know that that's what I wanted was the drug life,"

addiction had gotten to a point where she no longer felt comfortable allowing him access to her kids or to her home. "My downfall was my sister. My sister always let me in the house when I needed to come in. My sister used to always say, 'boy, what are you doing? Get in here, wash your butt, get something to eat.' I remember this clear as day in 2012. I was sitting in my car, and my sister was coming up. This time, she wasn't even looking at me. She just kept walking like she was going up in the house."

Deshawn thought that a final plea promising to seek help for his drug use would persuade his sister to let him in

the house, but there was nothing that would change her mind. "I was like 'Sis!' She turned around and looked at me. And I was like, 'I'm about to go back [into a recovery program] and she was like 'okay,'" and she walked up to her door and opened her screen door and she shut it. "After that point, I said to myself, 'I can't do this because now I have nowhere to go,'" Deshawn said.

Through the years, Deshawn had been through The Mission's recovery program a few times, but he admits that he never intended to stay clean. It wasn't until his sister removed him from her life 26 years into his addiction that he finally saw that he needed to make a permanent life change.

Now experiencing homelessness, Deshawn found a safe space at The Mission's shelter. He successfully completed his recovery program and was hired by The Mission as a peer specialist providing support to others experiencing similar situations that he had. Today, Deshawn was hired to be the house manager of The Mission's newest property on West State Street, just a three-minute drive from the home his mother raised him in on Stuyvesant Avenue. "She would love me. She would love the man that I'm turning out to be," Deshawn said tearfully. Deshawn's mom never got to see him as a now stable, sober adult. With that in mind, he wants to make sure his clients' families don't experience the same thing he did.

"My goal is to try to steer them to go on the right path and stay on the right path. People talk about, 'I want to get home to my mom, I want to get home to my sister, I want to get home to my kids. They need me.' Yeah, they do need you out there. They really do. But you can't worry about getting back out there to them if you can't even get yourself right," Deshawn said. "It's been 14 years [sober] for me. I had to change a lot of stuff I was doing, and the first thing was my mind. I had to change the way I was thinking, how I was moving. I knew it was all about me nobody else."

Rockefeller Foundation Taps Rescue Mission in New Philanthropy Effort

The Rockefeller Foundation made a major donation to The Rescue Mission of Trenton in May. The Rescue Mission of Trenton took a trip to the headquarters in Manhattan to receive the sizable donation after the globally recognized organization chose to partner with The Mission to support its community efforts.

"The Rockefeller Foundation's donation of women's clothing and men and women's professional attire will be made available to The Rescue Mission's clients as well as local families in need.



The Rockefeller Foundation partners with Rescue Mission in global philanthropy efforts.

The Mission is the latest beneficiary of the Rockefeller Foundation's 5-year, \$1 billion philanthropic investment. The Mission is looking to

scale its relationship with the Rockefeller Foundation to fund future projects benefiting the greater Mercer County Community.

Senator Andy Kim Tours the Rescue Mission of Trenton

In April, New Jersey Senator Andy Kim paid a visit to the Rescue Mission of Trenton to take a tour of the campus and participate in a roundtable discussion with staff and clients. The visit comes amid federal cuts to

"Organizations like the Rescue Mission of Trenton are transforming lives and providing critical services to unhoused populations."

public health benefits that previously uplifted The Mission's drug and alcohol addiction programs.

"Organizations like the Rescue Mission of Trenton are transforming

lives and providing critical services to unhoused populations. I visited them to learn about their work and hear what challenges they face. We must continue to invest in care for every single New Jerseyan," said Senator Kim in a social media post. "I got the message loud and clear. I'm going to continue to fight for this down in [Washington] D.C. to be able to make sure here in Trenton and frankly across this country and the state they get all the support they need."



From left to right, County Executive Dan Benson, HomeFront CEO, Sarah Steward, Senator Andy Kim, Rescue Mission of Trenton CEO, Barrett Young, Trenton Mayor, Reed Gusciora

Rescue Mission of Trenton Opens New Sober Living Home in West Trenton

In July, the Rescue Mission of Trenton opened its newest sober living home on Trenton's historic West State Street.

The Mission's newest sober living home the spacious 4,200 square foot residence features seven bedrooms and four and a half bathrooms and is half a mile away from scenic views of the Delaware River and walking distance to the city's well-known Cadwalader Park.

In its effort to provide ongoing support as residents pursue independent living, certified peer specialist Deshawn Spears, a former client who now works for The Mission, will act as the house manager.

"My goal is to help someone get to the point where I'm at. Because I know how hard it is out there. It's a struggle," said House Manager Deshawn Spears.

"My goal is to try to steer the people that come in here to go on the right path and stay on the right path."

Last year, more than 120 clients successfully transitioned from The Mission's emergency shelter into independent living.

"I think if people live in a dignified way and get the support they need, they're going to thrive when they leave here. And when they come, they're going to feel a sense of hope and a sense of community. That's what we're going to provide," said Chief of Supportive Services, DuEwa Edwards-Dickson.



Mayor Reed Gusciora and Deshawn Spears cut the ribbon. From left to right: Miquia Delvalle, Du'Ewa Edwards-Dickson, Councilwoman Crystal Feliciano, Deshawn Spears, Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, Mayor Reed Gusciora, Sam Lane, Mercer County Commissioner Sam Frisby, Councilwoman Teska T. Frisby, Taraun Tice McKnight, Esq., Barrett Young.

NJ to Fund "Peace Park" Honoring Harlan Joseph

Harlan Joseph grew up in Trenton's Ewing and Carroll neighborhood, dedicating his teenage years to his community. His advocacy for Trenton came through Mercer County Friends and the Trenton Mayor's Youth Council where he worked until graduating from Trenton Central High School and studying Theology at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. On April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated—an incident that quickly sparked outrage in Trenton and compelled the college sophomore to return home. Five days later, while trying to quell peace during the riots, 19-year-old Harlan was shot and killed by a police officer. The officer was never charged.

In 2018, the Rescue Mission of Trenton led by then-President Mary Gay Abbott-Young, and current Rescue Mission of Trenton CEO, Barrett Young started planning a memorial park in honor of the late civil rights activist. In collabora-

tion with Mercer County, the City of Trenton, Michael Graves Architecture, Princeton University, and the New Jersey Conservation Organization, the project has been approved by the state with \$1.7 million dedicated to the project via the Green Acres Program. With funding now in place, the Mission and its partners look forward to getting started.

"Nearly sixty years ago Harlan Joseph gave his life while trying to defuse violence in our community. We're proud to work alongside the City of Trenton, Trenton Rescue Mission, and an incredible team of volunteers to build a park that will honor his legacy and ideals. With the support of NJDEP Green Acres funding, we're excited to get to work and realize this vision," said Mercer County Executive Dan Benson.

"My aunts Sharon and Janet, my father Oscar, and grandmother and step grandfather I'm sure are looking down on us proud of this moment," said

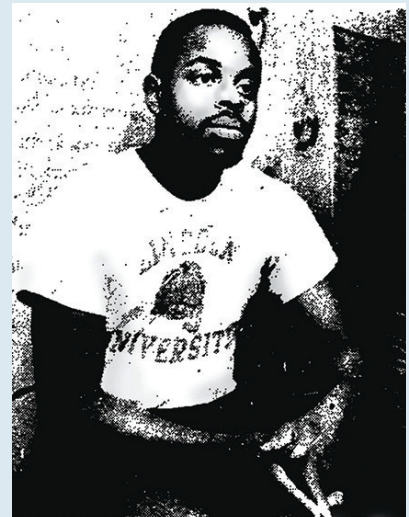


Photo of Harlan Joseph in *The Times of Trenton* following his death.

Makeda Joseph, the niece of Harlan Joseph. "I look forward to hearing about the design process this fall, and I cannot wait to one day stand in that park and feel what it means."



Trenton Thunder Strikeouts for Community

Mission staff at recent "Good Deed Day" event at Trenton Thunder Ballpark

Trenton Thunder Awards Rescue Mission of Trenton in Annual Donation Campaign

The Rescue Mission of Trenton was the recipient for the Strikeouts for Community program started by the Trenton Thunder baseball team last year. The MLB Draft League team announced in May that The Mission was chosen as its 2026 partner with a performance-based donation going to the organization at the end of the season.

For every strikeout this season, the Trenton Thunder will donate 10 dollars to The Mission. Last year, The Thunder threw 659 strikeouts in its 76 games, raising \$6,590 for the Capital Area YMCA. The donation is in partnership with First Bank, Stark & Stark PC, and Fulton Bank.

"We're thrilled that the Trenton Thun-

der selected us for this year's Strikeouts for Community. For the Thunder to recognize the work we're doing at Rescue Mission and want to be a part of it means something special to us. The Trenton Thunder and the local community are

"The Rescue Mission of Trenton does extraordinary work every day supporting individuals and families facing some of life's greatest challenges."

tightly bonded, and we know it means something to our city that our legacy franchise is doing the work to support those who need it most," said Rescue Mission of Trenton CEO, Barrett Young

"The Rescue Mission of Trenton does extraordinary work every day supporting individuals and families facing some of

life's greatest challenges. By providing food, shelter, recovery support, and a path forward, the organization is making a meaningful difference across the Trenton community. We are proud to support that work through the 2026 Strike Outs for Community Program" said First Bank President and CEO, Pat Ryan in a press release.

"We're thrilled that the Trenton Thunder selected us for this year's Strikeouts For Community. For the Thunder to recognize the work we're doing at The Rescue Mission," said Rescue Mission's CEO, Barrett Young. "With the success that we're seeing on the mound and the impact we're making in our community, it makes perfect sense for us to continue this great initiative with three outstanding local organizations."

Making its debut in 1994, the Thunder had Major League Baseball Double-A affiliation from 1994-2020 with the Detroit Tigers (1994), the Boston Red Sox (1995-2002), and the New York Yankees

(2003-2020). In its years with the Yankees, Hall of Fame players like Derek Jeter and Alex Rodriguez made brief stints on the Thunder lineup during injury rehabilitation. According to the team, the Thunder have drawn more than 11 million fans in its 32 years as a franchise and has donated more than \$9.5 million in "goods, services, and monetary donations" through its Grand Slam We Care Foundation.

"We're thrilled that the Trenton Thunder selected us for this year's Strikeouts for Community For the Thunder to recognize the work we're doing at 'the' Rescue Mission."



Fans stop by The Mission's table

Serving Those Who Served

The Rescue Mission of Trenton was largely founded on the principle of serving United States military veterans as they transitioned back home after the war. The "Greatest Generation" defended our country with honor, but unfortunately many came home struggling to find job opportunities, misdiagnosed while experiencing trauma from the violent nature of war, and oftentimes in need of a safe place to call home. The Mission stepped up for veterans in their time of need, and now more than a century later, The Mission continues to provide care for veterans.

Following the 250th anniversary of the United States' independence, The Mission's Mercer County Community Wellness Center, the Mercer County Veterans Services and the New Jersey Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) hosted dozens of servicemembers to The Mission's campus showing appreciation for their sacrifices and providing essential resources and information related to veteran benefits



Retired U.S. Army Commander Luddie Austin gives a speech at The Mission's campus.

and military services.

This event was designed to introduce veterans throughout Mercer County to the Wellness Center and the services and supports available to them. Looking ahead, the Center will serve as a dedicated gathering place for veterans by hosting ongoing veteran-focused sessions and programming facilitated by Commander Luddie Austin of the New Jersey VFW.

"This is going to be a safe space for veterans," Commander Austin said during the event. "The VFW with other volunteer organizations... we advocate on behalf of all veterans."

"This is going to be a safe space for veterans," Commander Austin said during the event. "The VFW with other volunteer organizations... we advocate on behalf of all veterans."

We want to welcome you all. Down the line we're going to try to do things like 'coffee with a veteran'... so you can be aware of all the resources that are out there for you."



Three VFW members help distribute goods to local veterans.



SAVE THE DATE!

The 22nd Annual Miniature Golf Tournament

Honoring Rue Insurance President, William M. Rue Jr.
Friday, September 18th
Doors open at 11:30 AM



Register Now



rescuemissionoftrenton.org



The Annual Miniature Golf Tournament is The Rescue Mission of Trenton's biggest fundraiser of the year. Register today to be a tournament sponsor and a participant in this year's fun while helping us continue to fight for our community. Every

contribution is a hot meal, a warm bed, and a new opportunity for those who need it most. Be a Mission Maker and have some fun doing it. **Scan the QR code to register today!**