

That Special Woman

Giving Back...Life After Addiction



Shari Shaver, founder of Rebekah's House

By "Jo" (Linda) Giovannoni

I often joke that I'm addicted to chocolate. After speaking with Shari Shaver, founder of Rebekah's House, I was reminded that addictions are *not* a laughing matter.

Shari, in recovery since 1999, knows all too well the obstacles involved in putting your life back together. She believes a Higher Power brought her to the Addictions Treatment Program in Waukegan, and then to Serenity House in Addison. "That was the hardest year of my life," Shari said. "I had to face all my demons. I worked with counselors and a lot of women in the Program. They shared their struggles...some worse than mine...and it helped me realize there could be life after addiction."

Shari walked out of Serenity House a different woman ... a woman with a plan that included God and giving back to others. Rehabilitation and detoxification facilities are vitally important but there are challenges to face once you leave. Changing old habits, certain old acquaintances and hangouts top the list for staying clean-and-sober. "I didn't know what to expect when I thought of facing the world...sober," Shari said. "There were tough times—but I leaned on the program and God, and to my amazement, it was well worth it beyond my wildest dreams! Three years into my sobriety I married Paul. He's my rock. Paul's been there for me and for Rebekah's House from day one, even though at times it's been hard on our marriage." Shari's 31-year-old daughter, Christina Marquez, is the Executive Director at Rebekah's House. Shari also has two sons, Patrick 26 who helps at fundraisers and Shawn 29.

Rebekah's House was created to help women adjust to life after initial rehabilitation during the vulnerable transition period. This non-profit

Christian organization began in 2003, initially out of Shari's home. "Many women come to us unemployed and homeless," Shari said. "They've exhausted every avenue and often...we're their last hope." Rebekah's House filled a continuum of care that was non-existent in McHenry County to women in recovery.

Saying it's hard to quit an alcohol or drug addiction is an understatement. It's even more intense when you're hooked on both. "When a woman is ready to change her life, and surrender totally to the program and God ... she's on the right path," Shari said. "God is our biggest resource. He saves us all if we only give him the chance." Requirements for residency are two weeks of continuous sobriety, one-on-one counseling and a sincere desire to change. The women make a ninety-day commitment but may stay for up to two years. "Our five beds are full and we have an ever growing waiting list," Shari added.

"The women might get tired of hearing me say—You'll make it! ... or ... Where there's a will there's a way," Shari said. "But, it's the truth! For example—twenty-one year old Megan, our 5th resident, stayed on as our house manager for six months. Now, she's in college and speaks at meetings letting others know they too can make it. Megan is an inspiration to women coming into the house. I'm so proud of her and many others." Every opportunity she gets, Shari speaks to women in treatment centers. "I speak from my heart," Shari said. "I know where they're coming from and I remember how scared I was facing the unknown."

Transportation is a big obstacle. "Ninety-five percent of the women not have a license or car," Shari said. With a grant provided by McHenry County Community Foundation, Shari started "Rides For Recovery". A mini-van was purchased to transport the women to and from appointments.

Rebekah's House Outreach Program supplies personal, household items and clothing for women and their children, once they return to independent living. The Outreach takes "Faith Baskets" (when available) to treatment centers that provide necessities like toiletries, phone cards, inspirational messages or books, AA meeting information, etc. "Last year, Poplar Creek Church said they were taking on a project and asked how they could help," Shari recalled. "I told them about our Faith Baskets. Originally they offered 20. I broke into tears when I picked up 70 baskets. You can't imagine how much something like that means."

Shari and her house manager, Michelle B., have 31-years sobriety between them. "All of us at Rebekah's House are volunteers," Shari said. "Any monies received go toward upkeep and supplies." Shari works a part-time job for Dr. Kearns, a Naprapath. Naprapathy, a form of natural healing, goes along with Shari's newfound philosophy on her personal healthcare.

Located in Crystal Lake, to date, 44 women have benefited as residents and more than 450 through the Outreach Program. "There have been many tears and memories shared in this little house!" Shari said.

For more information on volunteering, donating needed items or funds for Rebekah's House, contact: www.rebekahshouse.org or call 815-477-7203, or e-mail rebekahshouse@aol.com.