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Dear Friends of Unity Acres,

Many weeks have passed since our last newsletter, which was mailed in early December. Then we were in the midst of our annual and customary preparations for Christmas: Advent Wreath and Candles taken out of storage and placed in our Sacred Heart Chapel; special meals planned and served for Christmas and New Year's Day; decoration of the Dining Hall and the main sitting room in 'B' Building; the sorting and packaging of the many gifts donated for the men. (For Christmas Eve, the menu has returned to an old tradition, established some years ago by Tina P. – Spaghetti and Meatballs! This year, Peg and Loretta were assisted by Elby and me in the distribution of the men's presents, while Bear gave each of the men one of the new pillows that had been received from Saint Leo's in Holland Patent.) In the week prior to Christmas Eve, Father Jones and Robert K. visited our men who are currently in nursing homes in Oswego and in Syracuse, and brought to each man they visited their Christmas gifts, which included in particular some very beautiful quilts, which had been donated some time earlier.

Thanks, as always, to all who helped make possible our celebration of the Holidays.

During the months of November and December, we also customarily 'gear up' for the rigors of the upcoming winter in frozen, snowy Orwell. This year, however, we've lived through a winter that largely wasn't. With the early arrival of warm weather – the frost is out of the ground, and the ground is dry – the schedule for accomplishing some of our usual spring-time outdoor clean-up has advanced by at least a few weeks, with the raking and clean-up of yards, the filling of pot-holes in the driveway, the collecting and hauling-away of limbs broken off of trees, and so on, already being well underway.

Masses of spring flowers in front of 'B' Building have been in bloom for several days already, and are visible from the Chapel. Crocuses have already, for the most part, past their peak. Daffodils are currently in full bloom. Ed Westman is gardener *emeritus* at Unity Acres, and has been responsible, in the main, for the creation over the course of many years of this beautiful spring garden. Currently, Rick B has taken on the task of keeping up with the tasks of weeding, separating, pruning, transplanting, etc. Last fall, Rick identified a viable sapling oak tree in the former cattle enclosure just north of the Star Building, and transplanted to an open location in the lawn just east of the Infirmary (now known as 'C' Building). This was to fulfill Bob Belge's idea back in 2007 that we should plant an oak tree as a living memorial to Larry Oakes – our stalwart yard- and maintenance man – who died suddenly in February 2007.

Despite relatively easy weather, the winter months are often difficult one for the men and the staff, as we struggle to cope with ill-health, the ever-present temptations of alcohol and drugs, continual anxiety over a malfunctioning boiler and our super-annuated potable water service, exhaustion from over-work, and finally the 'cabin-fever' that sets in with shorter, colder days. At such moments, the aims and principles and commitments, the means and the ends, of Unity Acres seem to be at cross purposes: hospitality, welcome and openness against community, safety and security. Upon his first admission to Unity Acres, each new resident is asked to agree to abide by a few rules – such as no fighting, no drinking, no stealing, and so on – that constitute what we might call 'community norms'. These basic community norms, which have been developed and refined over the years, in order to help preserve our mission in the face of on-going change over the years, are in place to assure that Unity Acres remains a safe and peaceful community for our residents.

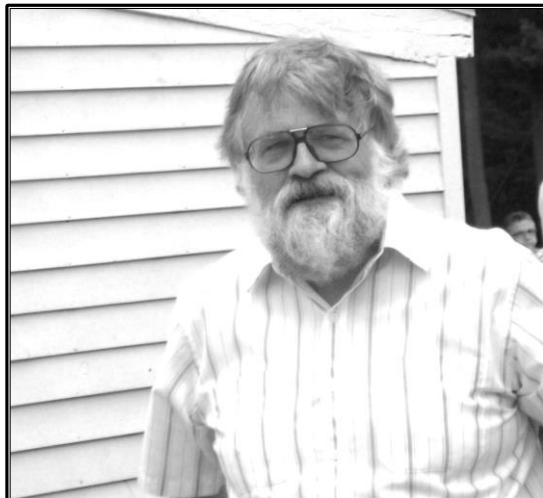
New residents to Unity Acres frequently contact us when they are in need of shelter, or safer and more secure shelter than what they can currently access, or they need ‘to get away’ from alcohol, drugs, or other negative circumstances present in their current situation.

When we learn that one of the men is in violation of the rules at Unity Acres, we feel obliged to allow the consequences of such violation: namely, that one who has been drinking or fighting, who has been creating dissension or endangering the basic safety of others, the one who has been putting in peril the basic peace and harmony of the community, must leave, if only for a relatively short period of sixty days.

During the winter months, especially, temptations of alcohol or drugs, and tensions among the men seem to be at their greatest. This year has been no exception, and we have had to send a few men away from Unity Acres during the last several weeks and months. The competing needs of the men – food, clothing, shelter for those otherwise homeless *versus* security, sobriety and harmony – are at such moments poised the one against the other in acute tension. There are always uncertainties and regrets in these instances: perhaps we are making a mistake in sending someone away; perhaps the person concerned might have responded positively to closer attention and greater concern, more compassion, more dialogue. Or perhaps we have allowed a negative situation to drag on far too long in the naïve hope that everything will turn out all right in the end. Either way, in these circumstances, we are rending hearts, not garments (Joel 2, 13).

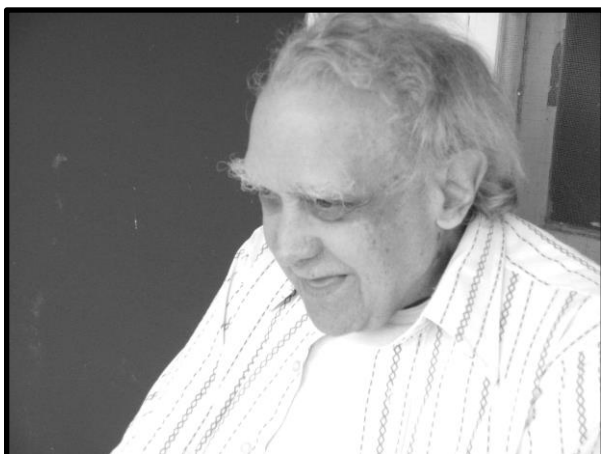


STEVE POWERS



LARRY HIMES

ROBERT GARRISON



We have mourned the deaths of three residents of Unity Acres since December: LAWRENCE HIMES, STEVEN POWERS, and ROBERT GARRISON. Larry died very suddenly in his room in ‘A’ Building on Saturday, January 14. He had been living at Unity Acres since September 2008. Larry served as our weekend receptionist, stationed in the phone room in ‘B’ Building, answering the phone, taking messages and so on, during the daytime hours on Saturdays and Sundays. Larry’s brother and sister arranged for the funeral to be conducted in Oswego, with Father Jones officiating. Larry will be buried at North Scriba Cemetery during the Spring.

Steve Powers died in his room in ‘B’ Building during the early morning of Sunday, January 15. He had been admitted to Hospice on the 11<sup>th</sup>, so his death was not unexpected. Steve was greatly helped by Tom H., who acted as his care-giver, administering medications, keeping him comfortable, and providing Steve reassurance through his continuous presence during those last days. Thank-you, Tom! In early 2004, Steve himself had been able to take on the role of care-giver for Norm Zigenfus, in the days and weeks before Norm’s death. Steve had been in residence at Unity Acres, on and off, since 1995, and continuously since the spring of 2010. He had been houseman in the dorm for a time during the ‘90s, and was a gentle, caring man, and loyal to his friends.

Bob Garrison died at Saint Joe's Hospital on February 29. He had been sent to hospital a few days earlier, complaining of difficulty breathing. Bob was one of our last 'old-timers'. He was from Waterloo, and had worked as an attendant at Willard State Hospital. Bob used to help Father McVey by going on 'rounds' twice daily at noon and after dinner seven days a week, and distributing medications to the men who needed assistance in that regard. Bob had been in residence here nearly continuously since 1981, with the exception of an admission to Sunrise Nursing Home in Oswego during the winter of 2009-2010, subsequent to an earlier hospitalization. Funerals for both Bob and Steve were celebrated at Unity Acres, in our Chapel, burial will be at our Saint Martin de Porres Cemetery later this spring.

*May it please you, O Lord, to grant to Larry, to Steve, and to Bob a place of refreshment and everlasting blessedness. May it please you to give them joy and gladness in your kingdom, with your saints in light. We beseech you to hear us, good Lord.*

Stephen Dickhout

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## Prayer: Reasons for the Seasons of Lent and Easter

Loving God, the Lenten Season will soon usher in the glorious Easter Season. As we praise and thank You, may we more deeply feel the meaning, the reasons for these Holy Seasons.

--For instruction: that we may re-learn the tragic reality of sin, and repent of it with contrition, and not despair. *"Have mercy on us, O God, for we may sinned."* (Psalm 51, 1)

--For a deeper faith in Your love: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not die but have eternal life."* (John 3, 16)

--For a renewed hope: *"And this hope will not disappoint us, for God had poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, Who is God's gift to us."* (Romans 5, 5)

--For a spirit of joyful thanks, that we may be an Easter people, our Alleluias from deep with, strong and singing the glory of God: *"This is the day the Lord has made! We will all be glad in it."* (Psalm 118, 24)

Why Lent? Why Easter? God's love. May all our helpers and friends enjoy a glorious Easter Season.

Father Robert Jones