

The History of Project Rescue

For over 12 years Ronnie & Jeanie taught Bible classes in the Martin County Jail and in the Mental Hospital in West Palm Beach, Florida. We saw the inadequacy of this approach and began thinking of a better way to change lives. Ronnie was strongly motivated by his experience and the fact that someone brought him the Gospel at the most difficult time in his life.

We began to dream of having an in-house program where people could come and stay for the extended period of time required to actually overcome their addictions and change their mindsets. In the providence of God, we sold our house in Florida right before the housing bubble burst. We almost doubled what we had paid for the house. We paid off our debts and moved to Georgia where we lived rent free in the preacher's house. As a result, we were able to put our money in CDs and were drawing almost \$5,000 a year interest for the first two years we were there. Our dream of an in-house program started to become a reality in our minds since we knew that money was there and available for use.

We started looking for property and watched and dreamed about an apartment building on Forrest Avenue. While this process was ongoing, we met on several occasions with the City Manager and the Fire Chief regarding our plans for the facility. We held our breaths for a good while since they were not an easy sell. After much discussion and study of our plans, they gave us the go-ahead. We agonized and prayed through the ups and downs of purchasing that facility. Finally, we were told it had been turned over to the bank, and it would take years to get it all cleared up. In despair, we turned our attentions elsewhere. A duplex was located in a perfect location, so we made an offer which was accepted. Right before we were to close on that duplex, we got a call from one of the realtors we had been dealing with. She informed us the Forrest Avenue apartment building was going up for auction on the county courthouse steps the next day. She said she had nothing to gain from sharing that information with us, but she knew how much we wanted it and that it was to be used for a good cause. We jumped for joy!

Ronnie arrived early the next morning and stood on the courthouse steps for 4 hours waiting for the attorney representing the Forrest Avenue property to arrive. Several other properties were announced and sold during the course of the morning. The crowd who had been present earlier, thinned out, and by the time the Forrest Avenue property was announced, Ronnie was the only bidder. He bid one dollar over the starting bid and was awarded the apartment building of our dreams. Jeanie's sister was in town to celebrate their mother's birthday that day. When Ronnie called with the news of the auction, Jeanie hurried to the bank to get the check. On the way, she called the bank manager who had been informed earlier we would need a check in a hurry. By the time Jeanie arrived at the bank, the manager had closed two of our CDs and prepared the check Ronnie was waiting for on the courthouse steps. The bank manager quickly told Jeanie, "I had to charge you \$900 for early withdrawal on one of your CDs, but I have waived the \$1,000 penalty on the other one. You can consider that a contribution to your work." The whole family came to the courthouse steps where we had a great celebration while the final papers were being drawn up. The phrase of that day was "Congratulations! We are now the proud owners of thousands of roaches."

The next day we closed on the duplex. Suddenly we went from nothing to two facilities. The two-story apartment building had been empty for about 18 months so it was in a terrible state of disrepair. The duplex was in better shape but also needed extensive cleaning, flooring, window replacement, painting, and a variety of other demanding jobs. We plowed into that work with enthusiasm. At first it was just the two of us doing all the work. We had to hire out some of it, but it was primarily our project. Kim helped a lot when she wasn't working. We were able to get one side of the duplex clean and ready. What an exciting day it was when the truck pulled in with all the furniture we had selected. The drapes were hung, pictures were on the wall, flowers adorned the table, and a theme of "Italian chef" was carried out in the kitchen complete with a string of plastic garlic on the wall. It was beautiful, and we were thrilled. Our first program member was about to arrive from Alabama. We prepared a fruit basket for his arrival. You would have thought he was a celebrity.

We began to spread the word about our facility. We spent a lot of time in marketing and traveling to inform congregations of the new program that was now available. The program grew quickly. It was great to have some more hands to help with renovating and repairing. We all worked together like a big family. We sang, we laughed, we bled, we cried - it was a growing experience for all of us. While all that was going on, Ronnie was teaching them the Bible, and the program began to grow in leaps and bounds.

Of course, in addition to caring for the guys, there was the extensive administrative work that had to be done. We had never been involved in anything like this before, but we managed to form a corporation on our own. Then we began the process of obtaining our tax-free status. That was a challenge beyond anything we had anticipated. Winnie (the IRS agent) made us jump through so many hoops, we began to think it was impossible. At the beginning of the process, she sent an interrogatory with 30 questions. Each one required hours of research to answer. As the months went by the interrogatories contained less questions, and we started to think it might be doable. Ronnie spent hours with Winnie on the phone, going round and round with all the details. Finally, we received a letter in the mail that made us quake in our boots. As we opened it, we prepared ourselves for the news we had been turned down. When we saw the words, "We are pleased to inform you . . ." we jumped for joy. We had been approved! Then there was the Federal third-party Check Agreement we had to obtain. Then there was the complicated accounting system to set up for all the program members. A local CPA (who was a member of Alcoholics Anonymous) volunteered to prepare our 990. Insurance of every description had to be obtained. There were mountains of details to handle regarding the set up and maintenance of the corporation in addition to caring for the needs of the program members.

Before we knew it, we were bursting at the seams. We began to dream again about a 6-unit apartment building next door to our church building. Ronnie spoke to the owner off and on through the years. She had considered selling it several times, and then would change her mind. She finally put it on the market, but we did not have the funding to purchase it. She really wanted us to have it since she was aware of our work and she and Ronnie had developed quite a telephone friendship. A church in Tennessee learned of our situation through one of the elders coming for a visit. He was so impressed that he went back to his congregation and called an elders' meeting. On a Wednesday night after church, the phone rang. It happened to be Ronnie's birthday. Jeanie answered the phone and this elder was excited to tell her the elders had decided

to donate \$50,000 toward the purchase of that facility. We were in shock since we had no idea this was in the realm of possibility. We were so thrilled, we couldn't sleep that night. However, as we began to look into financing, there was no bank that would give us a loan on commercial property at that time - even with a \$50,000 down payment. We tried several avenues unsuccessfully. The owner tried to help us, but we just couldn't come up with a way to pull it off. When the church in Tennessee heard of our plight, they volunteered to finance the remaining \$120,000 so we could purchase that apartment building. Again, we were in shock and could not believe our good fortune. The purchase was completed, and we again began the renovating and repairing process. Soon the building was sparkling and ready to furnish and decorate. As soon as we completed an apartment, it was filled with new program members. They came from all over the country. At one point in Georgia, we had as many as 29 members in the program! We tried to help women, but soon learned that women need to be at a separate location.

The work was very challenging but so satisfying. Ronnie was exhausted but had never been happier. It was what he had always wanted to do. Our family helped financially from the beginning. In addition to our interest free loan of over \$140,000, we gave monthly support to the program and supplied all kinds of needs for the guys from our personal belongings. Both our daughters gave generously to Project Rescue, both in finances and time. Jeanie's parents gave generously every week, and her dad taught classes regularly. Jeanie's sister gave several large lump sums when we would get into financial difficulties. The Christmas before our big move to Alabama, she gave \$1,500 and Dawn & Jeremy Harrison (daughter and son-in-law in Murfreesboro, TN) gave \$5,000. Jeanie broke into tears on that occasion with relief and gratitude.

Charles and Martha Baggett visited Project Rescue Georgia a few times. Charles wanted to start a similar program in Alabama. He persuaded Ronnie and Jeanie to move the program to Alabama. We (Ronnie Crocker and 5 Project Rescue program members) arrived in Alabama in January of 2011. Jeanie stayed in Georgia taking care of loose end business and personal matters. Charles and Martha Baggett opened their home and allowed the men and me to stay with them. It was an enormous task to move 8 apartments of furniture, kitchen supplies and washers, dryers, plus three vehicles from Georgia.

In March of 2011, Jeanie and our daughter Kim and granddaughter Marlee arrived, and we moved into our present facilities at 179 Cave Spring Road, Decatur, AL. We enjoyed a beautiful 19 acres, made possible by a wealthy couple and their children. We lived in the main house which was surrounded by 12 two and three bedroom apartments.

We moved Jeanie's parents, Bill and Gerry Nicks into the Terrace Assisted Living facility, which was about a mile away! At 91, Bill continued to teach a daily class to the program members.

One of the greatest accomplishments was establishing a new board of directors, thanks to the diligence of attorney Calvin McBride, a deacon at Beltline. We can't say enough about the work he has done so quickly and efficiently. The 501(c)3 corporation we had established in Georgia has expanded to Alabama with all the i's dotted and the t's crossed. Regarding the apartment complexes in Waycross, Georgia, Jeanie and I turned over all three facilities to the Board of Directors, along with \$10,000 from our Georgia bank account.

In Alabama, when we moved into the main house, all the apartments were occupied by renters. While we were still getting settled in the house, the first renter moved out and apartment #1 became available. We immediately diverted our attention from unpacking our belongings and attacked that apartment. It required some major cleaning - carpets, oven, refrigerator, cabinets, bathroom and several coats of paint. After a few days of group effort, it was sparkling and ready for David Wallace to move into. David was our house manager and a valuable addition to our staff. He joined us from Georgia soon after our arrival here. He shared his apartment with several men over the last couple of months.

Gradually, other apartments opened up so we repeated the above process several times. We were blessed to have program members with many talents so they were able to do the work. This kept us from having to hire professionals from the outside. We experienced some hard and difficult growing pains during our first few years in Alabama. Thanks to God and several good, strong, wise, and spiritual Christian men, we survived those years!