

Coming in August



Debra Dihoff, NAMI North Carolina's executive director, will speak at the 7 p.m. Tuesday, August 21 meeting of NAMI Western Carolina at

Mountainhouse, 225 East Chestnut St., Asheville.

Since beginning work last November, Deby has brought a definite energy and passion to her position, reaching out to effectively communicate the needs of the mental health community to legislators, the media and state membership.

And in September



Asheville Citizen-Times columnist and author Susan Reinhardt, known for her bodacious sense of humor

and more recently her battle with depression, will be NAMI Western Carolina's speaker at 7 p.m. Tuesday, September 18. More on Susan's appearance on Page 7

To our NAMI friends: thank you for your kind-

Our family was overwhelmed by the outpouring of sympathy and help following John's sudden death on July 11. John and I were privileged to know so many compassionate people because of NAMI, especially through Family-to-Family classes and teacher-

More on our state's tragic loss of a great man and advocate can be found at NAMIWNC.org

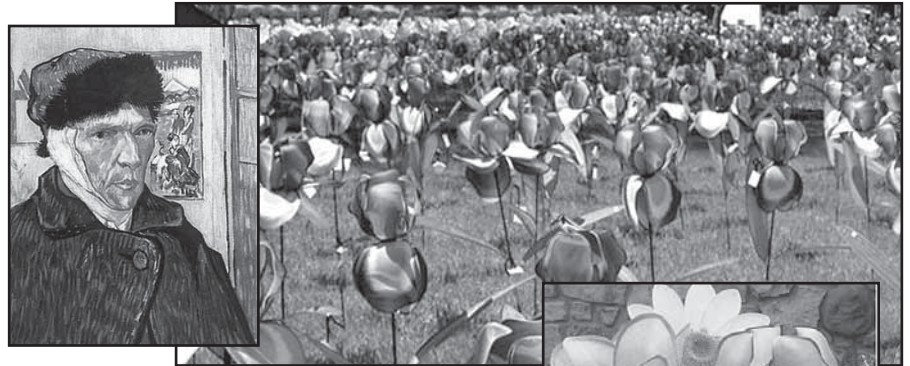
training sessions.

While it was evident that John



was a professional teacher, more significantly, he truly cared about people and treated everyone with kindness and respect. John was completely in tune with NAMI's mission of advocacy, education and support. Thank you, NAMI friends, for your love and support.

– Florence Rowe



Celebration of Courage

Once again this year, more than 1,000 artificial irises, tulips and daisies will line Biltmore Avenue as NAMI Western Carolina, in partnership with Mission Hospitals, sponsors The Celebration of Courage September 7 and 8 on the lawn of Mission's St. Joseph campus.

Conceived and developed by NAMI Wake County, with the first installation organized and

held in spring 2005, the 45-inch tall flowers have since been installed in cities across North Carolina, including the General Assembly lawn, to help raise awareness of mental illness.

The exhibit is a three-dimensional representation of Vincent Van Gogh's famous work, "The Irises," painted when he was institutionalized for mental illness.

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NAMI members learn about homelessness in

By Dave Rowe

About 600 people live on the street in Asheville, and about one-fourth of them have severe and persistent mental illness. That's what Amy Sawyer, Coordinator of Asheville's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness, said at a recent NAMI-WC meeting, adding "and a lot of others have mental health issues, too."

One aspect of the city and county funded plan is for outreach workers to attempt to establish rapport with homeless people in need of mental health services and refer them to sources of help, a process Sawyer called "challenging." From there, the outreach workers continue to work with the person, including helping them overcome the obstacles to obtaining medication. "Those medications' cost is so high, and a lot of our people don't have Medicaid or Medicare," she said.

Sawyer noted that Asheville's homeless population is on the rise. "The economy isn't good for a lot of people—there are a lot of foreclosures," she explained, "and mental health reform (privatization) has divorced a lot of people from services." "There's a myth about the homeless," Sawyer also said, "a lot of people think that they commit crimes, but they're more likely to be victims of crime."

Asked what happens to the homeless in frigid temperatures, Sawyer responded, "The shelters try to fit as many people as they can, but there isn't room for everyone." According to Sam Everett, Director of the Asheville-Buncombe Community Christian Ministry's shelter, the lack of space for Asheville's



roughly 600 homeless people is acute. "There are about 200 beds," Everett said, "250 at most."

A series of meetings in 2004, which included a representative of NAMI-WC, created the plan to end homelessness in Asheville, which operates as part of Asheville's Afford-

able Housing Coalition. The plan, instituted in 2005, has, according to Sawyer, found living space for 100 clients, about one-third of whom live in two apartment buildings built with plan resources, which pay the rent initially. "Right now," she said, "you need to be making \$8.50 an hour to get a one-bedroom apartment; if you're making \$7.50, you can get a one-room efficiency."

Thanks to Sawyer's informative talk, NAMI-WC members gained

Sheriff Duncan updates NAMI on CIT Training for officers

Buncombe County Sheriff Van Duncan and Major Scott Bissinger were on hand at NAMI Western Carolina's July meeting to update members on progress with Crisis Intervention Team training for area law officers.

In addition to the Sheriff's Department, others involved with the CIT initiative are A-B Tech, NAMI Western Carolina, Buncombe County, the City of Asheville, the Asheville Police Department, Western Highlands Network and Mission Hospitals. The CIT planning committee next meets August 25.

CIT provides specially selected patrol officers with 40 hours of training in mental health issues so they can respond effectively and appropriately to people experiencing psychiatric crises.



Van Duncan

Celebra-

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The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) has adopted the iris as a symbol of hope and courage.

Sponsor or purchase a flower for \$25 to support NAMI Western Carolina. Sponsoring gifts of \$50, \$100, \$200 or more are welcomed. Or make a tax-deductible contribution for any amount.

Contributions to NAMI Western Carolina should be mailed to Jim Pitts, 21 Allesarn Rd., Asheville, NC 28804

For further information, please contact Jim at irises@namiwnc.org or (828) 258-5359

Tracy Mixson honored as 'Local

Raleigh – In the midst of concerns over local mental health issues, the Asheville-Buncombe area was well-represented June 21 in Raleigh as professionals and volunteers who provide exemplary care and support to people with severe and persistent mental illness were honored.

The Coalition for Persons Disabled by Mental Illness (CPDMI) recognized advocate Tracy Mixson of Asheville and the community support treatment team of RHA Behavioral Health in Buncombe County as "Heroes in the Fight" against mental illness.

The program recognizes and celebrates the heroic work of

many people who fight for better mental health and better lives on a daily basis in their community. It honors only seven winners in five categories: Healthcare Professionals; Community Supporters; Psychiatrist; Media Professional; and Treatment Team.

To further honor the "heroes," Eli Lilly and Company makes a \$500 donation in the names of each individual or team to a non-profit mental health organization, chosen by CPDMI. Award-winners are nominated by their peers within their local mental health community.

Presented with the Individual Community Supporter Award, Mixson works as a certified peer specialist

for CooperRiis Healing Farm, a recovery-based program for people with mental illnesses and emotional disorders. She also volunteers with the local chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), helps facilitate its bipolar disorder support group, and coordinates its free educational, anti-stigma program, "In Our Own Voice: Living with Mental Illness." Mixson was selected earlier this year as the North Carolina delegate to the Social Security Beneficiary Summit, commissioned to help improve work incentives for people with disabilities.

Only in business for seven months as an area mental health provider,

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Tracey Turner and her bears heading to Mem-

NAMI Western Carolina member Tracey Turner and her bears will be heading to Memphis in late August for a presentation of The Emotion Project to law officers, judges, attorneys, government leaders, advocates and many more attending the National Crisis Intervention Team Conference.



Sponsored by NAMI Western Carolina, Tracey is the only presenter from North Carolina of the more than 80 who will participate in the conference. The conference will look at the development, implementation, advancement and effectiveness of Crisis Intervention Teams and highlight innovative strategies for integrative approaches to the diversion of individuals with mental illness and co-occurring disorders from the criminal justice center.

Tracey, diagnosed with bipolar and anxiety disorders, began The Emotion Project as a way of visualizing and coping with her own illness and now gives the

presentation for the insight into mental illness it offers others, certainly an invaluable insight to law officers and others working around mental illness.

Also known as "The Bear Lady," Tracey began The Emotion Project as part of her therapy at New Vistas Behavioral Health Services. Her bears convey the wide range of emotions she has felt as a result of her illnesses – anxiety, depression, loneliness, despair, insecurity and sadness, as well as joy, hope and happiness.

"It is my hope, no, my intention, that Emotion Project presentations will sensitize people regarding the realities of mental illness and to help de-stigmatize it," she says.

Combined with Tracey's personal story, of the good life in Chicago's advertising world to flipping burgers for those she used to work with, the bears help create a powerful connection to those unaffected by mental illness through the common denominator of emotions.

For more information about The Emotion Project, contact Tracey at 285-8910 or email at traceyt@buncombe.main.nc.us. For more information on the upcoming conference, visit: <http://cit.memphis.edu>.

Report from San Diego National Con-

By Jim Pitts

The NAMI National Convention plays an important role in building our grassroots movement. The San Diego meeting, held June 20-24, confirmed the growing vitality of NAMI. Persons came from all 50 states and a variety of nations across the globe.

Four members of the NAMI WC affiliate – Joe Cowan, Jamil Pitts, Sharon and Jim Pitts – attended numerous information packed and inspirational sessions. Books and pamphlets too heavy to carry in our bags were shipped home so that we can share with other NAMI

members.

There are numerous examples of NAMI National's focus on strengthening communications and coordination between the three levels of NAMI, local affiliates, state organizations and the national office. Perhaps the most important program announcement is that of NAMI Connection, a new national recovery support group for people with mental illness that is being introduced over the next three years across the country. NAMI Connection is open to all adults with mental illness, regardless of their diagnosis. Recov-

ery support groups will be run by trained facilitators living with mental illnesses who are at a point in recovery where they want to "give back to others." NAMI's goal is for people with mental illness to have a recovery support group any day of the week, no matter where they live, by the year 2010. In 2007, 15 states are participating in the roll-out of the NAMI Connection program. These states are California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, and South Carolina. The states for years two and three will be an-

Sing-a-long with Richard Sackett

NAMI member and guitarist Richard Sackett welcomes people in the mental health community to a sing-a-long of various folk, gospel and contemporary tunes from 7 to 8:30 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 13, in the community room of the North Asheville Library, 1030 Merrimon Ave., just south of Beaver Lake.

The informal sing-a-longs began in April and will continue the second Thursday of the month. While there is no fee, donations will be accepted.

"No skills are required," explained Richard, a mental health therapist with 25 years of hospital experience, who is volunteering to lead the sessions. "This is a soft sell approach in a relaxed, comfortable atmosphere. People are welcome to share a song or a poem if they'd like. Or if they prefer to just listen, that's fine. We provide songbooks for everyone." Richard hopes the group will expand. Transportation is a challenge for some who would like to participate. If you can help with this or for more information, call him at 777-0783.

Heroes

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the four-person team from RHA Behavioral Health in Buncombe County took home the Treatment Team Award for its outstanding service to its community. The group serves more than 500 people with mental illness in Western North Carolina, and was honored for its responsibility, dedication, and passion for its work with clients.

Groups joining CPDMI to honor the "Heroes in the Fight" were Carolina Legal Assistance; Governor's Advocacy Council for Persons With Disabilities; Mental Health Association in NC; NAMI North Carolina; National Association of Social Workers, NC Chapter; NC Association for Behavioral Health Care; NC Community Support Providers Council; NC Council of

**September 1 meeting
cancelled due to Labor Day
Holiday weekend.**

Contact Numbers For Western Highland Network

Western Highlands Network, 356 Biltmore Ave., Asheville, NC 28801, www.westernhighlands.org manages mental health, developmental disabilities and substance abuse services in Yancey, Transylvania, Rutherford, Polk, Mitchell, Madison, Henderson and Buncombe counties.

For routine needs or daytime emergency, call 828-225-2800 or 1-800-951-3792 (toll free).

For emergencies after hours & weekends, call 828-252-4357 or 1-800-951-3792.

Advocacy works; NC enacts mental health

By Florence Rowe

Finally – after years of advocacy – mental health parity will go into effect in North Carolina July 1, 2008. Although limited and not covering substance abuse, parity still is a significant step forward because it requires health plans to cover mental illnesses on the same terms as all other disorders.

On July 27, Gov. Mike Easley signed the Mental Health Equitable Coverage Bill and issued this statement: “This legislation ends what has effectively been a form of discrimination in the health insurance coverage of those with mental illness. Requiring insurers to provide the same coverage for co-payments, doctors visits and hospitalization means patients will be treated fairly, whether being seen for physical or mental illness.”

As NAMI advocates, we take issue with the last part of the Governor’s

statement, “whether being seen for physical or mental illness,” since a mental illness is not a character flaw but a physical disorder that affects the brain. All quibbling aside, we are highly encouraged that mental health parity, although limited, will be mandated and allow people to receive treatment. For many, this means they can be employed.

Too often, insurance companies allow different co-payments for mental and other physical illnesses. This results in limited coverage for people with mental illness.

North Carolina’s parity bill will address this disparity by covering bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, paranoid and other psychotic disorders, schizoaffective disorder, schizophrenia, post-

traumatic stress disorder, anorexia nervosa and bulimia.



The Asheville Citizen-Times reported that NC legislators, to satisfy Blue Cross and Blue Shield of NC, agreed to require full coverage for only these nine specific disorders that the insurance company claimed make up 82 percent of mental health patients. Treatment for other mental disorders would be limited to 30 doctor’s visits and 30 days in the hospital per year. Although people with mental illness often self-medicate with alcohol and illegal drugs, substance abuse treatment is not included NC’s parity bill.

The costs of untreated mental illness and addictive disorders are expensive and wide-ranging. The President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health estimated the U.S. loss of productivity for

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Ground Zero: A social group for con-

Ground Zero is a social group for consumers by consumers. In the past the only groups available for consumers are in a support role.

While it is possible to meet others in support groups, there is really not that much available time to actually socialize. More often than not, someone will find someone new at a support group that they want to have a conversation with but are cut off by the structure of the support meeting.

Ground Zero provides consum-

ers with the opportunity to meet each other in a fun atmosphere for friendship and fellowship. This group will allow consumers to get out of isolation and not be dependent on family members to get out of the house and have fun.

Meeting location and activity will vary each month. At each event group members will decide where to go for the next meeting.

Future events may include but are not limited to: picnics/cook-outs, roller-skating, hikes, poker

night, pool playing, hobby sharing, go-karts at Fun Depot, volleyball, Frisbee golf, book discussion, and possible group travel to theme parks etc. The group’s first picnic was held August 11 at The French Broad River Park.

There is no cost to become a member of Ground Zero. The only requirement is that of having a formal diagnosis of a mental illness.

Ground Zero will meet on the 2nd Saturday of each month. To join Ground Zero, just call John at 828-398-0211 or send an e-mail to ground-zero-zen@charter.net. Contact information for each member will be held private.

Help promote an authentic portrayal of schizo-

NAMI is asking advocates to promote "Canvas," a movie with Academy Award winner Marcia Gay Harden and Emmy Award winner Joe Pantoliano, to be released in theaters in October. Praising the film for its "accurate, balanced and compassionate" portrayal of a family transformed by mental illness, NAMI honored the film with an "Outstanding Media Award."

"Canvas" is marked by intense, tragic emotions, touches of humor and an enduring spirit of hope," said NAMI executive director Michael Fitzpatrick. "It is one of the few films that is authentic in its portrayal of schizophrenia."

He said it has the potential to touch the general public even more than the movie, "A Beautiful Mind" because it focuses on the experience of an average family, rather than that of a Nobel Prize-winning mathematician.

Please contact the Oprah Winfrey show and ask that the director and cast of "Canvas" be interviewed on her show before its release date. By promoting the movie, Oprah can help educate millions of people about the real-life experiences of families who battle schizophrenia. Emphasize the powerful, authentic performances, and



Marcia Gay Harden in "Canvas."

that the movie was inspired by the director's personal family story. Ask her to preview the film at www.canvasfilm.com.

Email her at oprah.com or better yet, write a personal note to:
Ms. Oprah Winfrey
The Oprah Winfrey Show – Harpo Productions

Parity

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mental illness is \$63 billion annually and that mental illness is the second leading cause of absenteeism.

Actually the cost of mental health coverage is very small. The actuarial firm of Mcilliman and Co. reported that based on actual cost data of implementing parity, "many states have discovered that overall health care costs increased minimally and in some cases were even reduced."

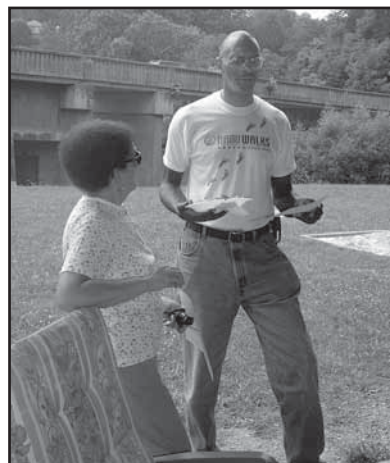
The NC General Assembly and mental health advocates are to be commended that the mental health parity bill has passed. What a posi-

Writers Needed

Your help is needed in producing this newsletter. Some stories assigned or article suggestions welcomed. If interested, email news@namiwnc.org

Picnic 2007

AA few moments captured from the NAMI Four Seasons-NAMI Western Carolina August 5th picnic in Recreation Park, Asheville.



A reluctant farewell

NAMI Western Carolina is losing two of its most valuable members as Rosemary and Tom O'Keefe have moved to Dahlonega, GA, to be closer to Rosemary's son Jeff and his wife who live near Atlanta.

Tom, who served for a number of years as NAMI's treasurer, was a wise and invaluable steward of NAMI's money and certainly he and Rosemary were folks to roll up their sleeves and pitch in when volunteers were needed.

In his letter of resignation, Tom mentioned how much he and Rosemary will miss Asheville and "especially all of my NAMI members and friends." To which his NAMI friends can only reply that we'll certainly miss the O'Keefes deeply as well.

At the July Board meeting, board member Ron Kellis offered to step in to fill the empty Treasurer's post, an offer that was gratefully accepted and approved by the board.

Volunteer thanks

Thanks to new NAMI member Helen Wadino, who has taken over the job of updating the calendar on the NAMIWNC.org website.

The calendar can certainly grow to be a valuable asset for NAMI Western Carolina, so please refer folks to it and send calendar items to calendar@namiwnc.org.

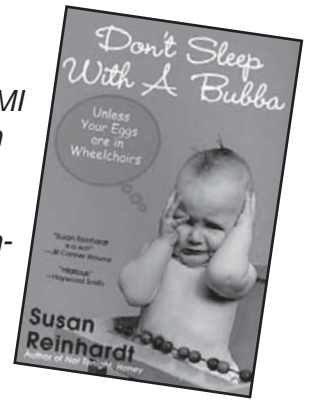
Bele Chere

Also thanks to the volunteers who helped selling Bele Chere

Membership

During the months of August and September, NAMI members are asked to put an added emphasis on helping increase our membership.

Simply put, we're all recruiters and the more members recruited, the greater our strength and the greater the support and advocacy we are able to offer.



As part of our membership drive, Susan Reinhardt, Citizen-Times columnist and author of "Don't Sleep with a Bubba Unless Your Eggs Are in Wheelchairs," will donate and personally inscribe copies to the first 25 new members joining NAMI as of August 8 (or a book of member's choice if they already have her most recent).

Susan will be our speaker at the 7 p.m. Tuesday, September 18 NAMI-WC meeting. She'll talk about her battle with depression that is at the core of two chapters in her new book.

Please ask loved ones, friends, colleagues to help support NAMI in its efforts. Remember, membership is as low as \$3 for individuals with limited means, no stigma attached. Memberships paid now are good

Help us make a difference

Join tens of thousands of Americans dedicated to improving the lives of people with mental illness. When you join NAMI-WC, you also become a member of the national and state organizations, NAMI and NAMI-North Carolina. Membership includes the NAMI Western Carolina newsletter, the NAMI North Carolina newsletter, "Clippings," and the national NAMI "Advocate" (published quarterly).

I would like to be a member of NAMI-WC and am enclosing my check for membership and/or contribution.

\$35.00 One-year Membership (Individual and Family)

\$3.00 Open Door Membership for those with limited means

\$ _____ Additional Contribution

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Home Telephone _____

E-Mail _____

Mail checks payable to NAMI WC:, P.O. Box 8046, Asheville, NC 28814

NAMI Western Carolina is a 501(c)3 non profit corporation. All contributions are tax-deductible.

Return Service Requested

Support

NAMI WESTERN CAROLINA offers support, education and advocacy to families, friends and to all persons with a biological brain disorder/mental illness. NAMI WC monthly membership meetings are at 9:30 a.m. the 1st Saturday and 7 p.m. the 3rd Tuesday. (Use the side entrance.) Meetings are open to all and include support groups.

SUPPORT, GENERAL INFORMATION: Mary Lane
Travis: 298-1847, olg77tr@bellsouth.net

SUPPORT GROUPS: Support meetings for all are held following the general meeting at 9:30 a.m. the first Saturday of the month and following the 7 p.m. program on the third Tuesday of the month. All NAMI WC support groups offer peer-to-peer support; they are not led by mental health professionals.

MAGNETIC MINDS, Bipolar Disorder Support Group: Consumer support group only for people with a bipolar disorder diagnosis; meets at 7 p.m. the 1st & 3rd Wednesday monthly. Info: www.magneticminds.org. Co-facilitators: Betty Hall, b.i.hall@charter.net; Tracy Mixson, 232-0438.

NAMI-CARE: Support group by consumers, for consumers and about consumers meets at 10 a.m. the first Saturday monthly. NAMI-CARE stands for Consumers Advocating Recovery Through Empowerment. NAMI-CARE FACILITATOR: Marlene Wooten, 505-0438, marlenas333@charter.net.



EDUCATION AND OUTREACH: NAMI WC offers free educational programs and participates in a variety of health fairs, anti-stigma campaigns and mental illness awareness events. To request a speaker or the affiliate's participation, contact Jim Pitts, 258-5359, jimpitts1@mac.com.

NAMI FAMILY-TO-FAMILY EDUCATION: An empowering 12-week course of up-to-date facts and support for families and friends of persons with a diagnosed mental illness. Trained family members teach the 2 1/2 hour classes. The course is free with all materials provided. Classes fill up quickly and the class size is limited. For information on the next class to be offered in Asheville, call 299-9596 or email rohaus@charter.net.

IN OUR OWN VOICE: LIVING WITH MENTAL ILLNESS: People with mental illnesses tell their stories about learning to cope with the reality of their disorders while recovering and reclaiming productive lives in this brief, yet comprehensive, interactive presentation. IOOV includes video, personal testimony and discussion. IOOV PROGRAM COORDINATOR: Tracy Mixson, 232-0438, namiwc.voice@charter.net. Far West Counties: 524-1355; South West Counties: 884-6103.

NAMI NORTH CAROLINA HELPLINE: 1-800-451-9682

All meetings are held at Mountainhouse, 225 E. Chestnut Street, Asheville, unless otherwise indicated.