Volunteering is not a one way street. The volunteers who join us at Back Bay Mission allow the Board and staff to implement our mission of strengthening neighborhoods, seeking justice and transforming lives. Volunteers, on the one hand, support the staff in Back Bay Mission being more than a “hand out” resource to the people we serve, thereby, increasing the staff’s capacity to offer resource options that can move our clients forward to long-term sustainability. The volunteers, on the other hand, have the opportunity to broaden their understanding about people in poverty by learning about their daily challenges for survival and the barriers to their movement out of poverty. Also, Volunteers can deepen their awareness of our shared humanity, as well as nourish and deepen their capacity for compassion. Long term volunteers typically coordinate the weekly mission camper visits and their activities in the Micah Center, Client Choice Food Pantry and work with Housing Recovery staff on Rehab projects. They assist in making sure that the weekly campers experience the full scope of BBM programs. These long term volunteers join us for one to three months. We have several “permanent” local volunteers who support the BBM mission in the reception area, the food pantry and in the Micah center. We also have local volunteers who work with the Bridges Out of Poverty initiative serving as mentors and on the steering committee. We are profoundly grateful for the 800 volunteers that come annually from congregations across the country and the local volunteers who serve with us daily. These volunteers make a difference in the lives of the clients that we serve and make a difference in their home communities as a result of their volunteer experience. The volunteers who choose Back Bay Mission as a place for service support our mission in strengthening neighborhoods, seeking justice, and transforming lives not only in Mississippi; but in their home communities as well. As a result, we all experience a greater sense of our connection to the rich tapestry that is humanity.

Executive Director,
Alice Graham

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to Rev. Alice Graham, PhD. for being named one of the Top 10 One Coast Community Leaders. Dr. Graham received this prestigious award for all the work she has done and is still doing to strengthen and grow the Mississippi Gulf Coast. She is truly deserving of this honor. Join us as we say congratulations!

Pictured (from left to right): Craig Steenkamp, Shawn Sullivan, Rev. Alice Graham, PhD. Everette Lewis, Kairah Roseau, Kenney Washington, Ashlee Beaver, Laura Payne

Table of Contents

Reflections From The Executive Director .................................. 2
Volunteer Corner ..................................................................... 3
22 Biloxi .................................................................................. 4
2018 National Conference on Ending Homelessness and Capitol Hill Day ........................................... 5
Gazebo Conversion ................................................................. 6
Coming to a Church Near You! or How About to Yours?.. 7
Creative Expressions Making a Difference ................................. 7
My husband Bob and I have had the opportunity to volunteer at Back Bay Mission for a week a few times. We had wonderful long-term volunteers. Hulen and Will Brown were here for a couple of our visits. They have such a love for what they do. They made us feel so welcome. We then met Pam and John Small. Turned out they are from Evansville, Indiana, the same place we are from. Pam’s attitude of joy and love is infectious. John worked on the construction sites, as Will had. I knew nothing about construction but, they were willing to let me learn with kindness and patience. They empowered me and others to step out of our comfort zones.

During our visits—Bob and I both thought long term volunteering would be great—but could we do it? Both Hulen and Pam encouraged us. I was very intimidated by the idea of using a computer. I have worked outside for the past 25 years—delivering mail. I was scared at the idea of sitting in an office all day long. I thought I would do better on the construction site. Why? Well, I didn’t know much—if anything about construction. But I love talking to people. I kept telling Bob—’Maybe I can do a week or so—and then we can switch off.” Turned out that Benji—the construction assistant manager was wonderful to work for. He said “Ask me anything. I am glad to help.” He wasn’t lying. Patience is his middle name.

I found out that I could get my work done and still have time to help at other places on campus. I knew I loved working at the Micah Day Center from the weeks I volunteered. So, I got to know the people who work there. I loved the fact that each person that walks in the door is treated with dignity and respect. The guests are not told what they “should” be doing. They are welcomed wherever they are in their lives. I have family members who have struggled in their lives. I can only hope they were able to find a place like the Micah Day Center in their town. Each person who works at the Day Center is diligent in their desire to better others’ lives. They take time with each person, listen to what is going on and then they work together to see what can be done to make things better.

I also had the opportunity to see what the people in the administration building do daily. There is an unbelievable woman there named Twila, the emergency assistant case manager. She is the first person many people see when they walk in the door. Most guests who come in are trying desperately to keep their heads above water. They are looking for assistance to keep their electricity on, to keep their children fed. There are so many other things that people need—so many, that luckily many of us, get to take for granted. Twila calmly and while giving the guest the dignity they deserve, directs them to where they can find solutions. I got the opportunity to work in the same office that she works in and see what she does. She is amazing. She was able to stay focused for hours at a time—from one person’s worst time of their lives to the next—and each was given her utmost attention. I found that each person in the admin. building had the same attitude of respect and care for the guest that walked through the door.

How could I not love the opportunity to be a part of this energy. I am very humbled to be able to be a part of an organization that treats each person with the love, dignity and respect that all of us deserve. This was my first time being a long-term volunteer. I found, just as Will and John were showing me on the construction site, I can do amazing things. I hope that I can show others, who volunteer on a weekly basis, that we all can change the world we live in, here in Biloxi—as well as our hometowns. We can face everything and rise.
22...the number of people you as a congregation supported and encouraged to go to Biloxi. To represent South Congregational Church through hard work, determination and selflessness. I will be honest I was eager and nervous about the trip. A few folks I knew, some I didn’t and ALL I had never shared bunk space with or sat around in sweats drinking coffee but after 24 hours, we quickly settled into our routine and my anxiety began to fade away.

Both on the job site and in the Dorm, we worked together. Broken up into different groups, never complaining or avoiding a task but challenging ourselves and getting out of our comfort zones. OK, I love my comfort zone! I built it myself to house just me! Then I saw a quote this week that read, “Life begins at the end of your comfort zone” Well, we all broke out of our comfort zones in Biloxi. We used saws, scraped candle wax, built scaffolding, talked with homeless people we may never see again, did strangers laundry and washed down bathrooms after their showers. Hopefully allowing them to feel human and decent for at least one day.

We made someone smile, feel loved, laugh and maybe feel hopeful. Those are the gifts Biloxi gave to me. Sure, I gave my time and physical energy but the people, both my dorm mates and those I helped, filled me up with a sense of joy and hopeful outlook in this challenging world we live in.

22 people made a difference in lives of many. 22 became family and now have a lifelong bond.

When I hear the number 22 I will think of it differently and I hope you do too.

We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for giving us this experience.

22...a number...not one that has ever had specific meaning for me. Not a birthdate of a family member, not a jersey number of one of my girls. It was just a number like so many others and I never gave it a second thought.

Until Biloxi. Then I started to look at it differently trying to see maybe 22 meant more. Maybe 22 was the amount of pennies a homeless person might need to buy a cup of coffee. Maybe it was the $22 someone needed to pay their mortgage, so they weren’t late...again. or maybe it would buy gas to get to their new job that enabled them to feed their children.

22 people made a difference in lives of many. 22 became family and now have a lifelong bond.

When I hear the number 22 I will think of it differently and I hope you do too.

We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for giving us this experience.

Julie Bennett (right) and high school daughter, Allie.

SHRIMP BOIL

The Pleasant Hill Community Church, UCC sponsored a successful “Shrimp Boil” to raise funds for the Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, MS. Pictured from Left to Right: Members of the Church, Sharon Weible and Mary Ruth, Chair of the Event, dish out servings of shrimp prepared by Lorretta and Dave Heigle who brought their equipment from Ohio to boil the shrimp.
Rev. Alice Graham, PhD., Sarah Boone and Kirsten Hebron attended the Alliance to End Homelessness Conference in Washington, D.C. It was a motivating week of facilitating change in the homeless community while working to find innovative solutions to ending homelessness. This conference boasted over 2000 individuals from direct service provider, funders, health care workers, government leaders, and guest speakers.

Dr. Graham, Sarah and Kirsten attended different breakout sessions that were directly proportionate to the services they are providing to get the most out of this experience. A few examples of sessions Kirsten and Sarah took part in are: Ending Homelessness through Employment, Improving Cross-Program Outcomes Through Education and Homeless Services, and You’re Hired! Ending Homelessness through Employment. Dr. Graham, in her role as Executive Director, found it important to hear how other organizations structured their programs in the effort to meaningful effective interventions for those experiencing homelessness and those who are about to be homeless.

The final day of the conference was Capitol Hill Day. Kirsten and Sarah met with Senator Roger Wicker and Congressman Palazzo’s staff, Laura Burkett Deputy Legislative Director while Dr. Graham met with Senator Cindy Hide Smith. They had the opportunity to talk about Back Bay Mission and the services and support we are offering to the community while rallying for the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

This conference allowed the participants the opportunity to be a part of a movement of change and a chance to see a new perspective on our government. Back Bay Mission is proud to be a part of change each and every day here on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. We are humbled by the people, organizations and churches that make it possible.
When Back Bay Mission first moved to our current location at 1012 Division Street in Biloxi, we utilized several buildings that were already here and built several to suit our needs. These buildings included bunk houses, showers, dining room, and a gazebo for the use and enjoyment of our work campers. All these buildings (apart from the administration building) were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. When we rebuilt the Mission campus, we built stronger, safer, more user-friendly buildings for the work campers and our homeless guests. One building that retained the original look and feel of the prior buildings was the gazebo.

Over time, we realized that the gazebo was not utilized so much by the work campers as by the homeless guests that populate the area around Back Bay Mission. This was allowed until it turned into a liability for the mission. That, combined with the fact storage is perpetually in short supply, led to the decision to enclose the gazebo to create a storage facility for the Micah Center programs.

During the summer of 2018, with the help of some really HOT workers from Connecticut’s Newtown Congregational UCC, the relatively new but already “aged” Gazebo became the newest example of the leadership of Craig and Benji and their talent for building and reclamation usually expressed in renewing housing to help meet the needs of displaced area residents. That HOT refers not only to the activity and enthusiasm of these strong teens and their leaders but also to the weather. This team worked in shifts of 20-30 minutes, switching places with those in the cool and comfortable Mission House dormitory and dining hall to keep the work going ALL DAY!

The conversion was further accomplished with youth and adult volunteers from Bethel UCC, Bethel, ME; Little River UCC, Annandale, VA; Zion UCC and St. Peters UCC, New Baden and Okawville, IL; and Long-term volunteer Wil Brown.

The exterior is designed to architecturally match the Micah Center and Mission House. In addition to being physically closer to the Micah Center, the new storage facility will enable better organization as it is designed specifically to accommodate materials for the Clothes Closet, the Home At Last program, and Micah Day Center.
Carol Merriman and Paul Longstreth are our Church Relations Associates for Back Bay Mission. They travel around the continental US telling the story of Back Bay Mission and the good work being done today. Through their adventures they have been able to reach many churches.

Their summer and fall schedules have included Wisconsin and South Central Conferences Annual Meetings, St. John’s UCC (Rosenberg TX) and St. Paul’s Presbyterian Church (Needville, TX), Clergy and Association meetings (Houston, Heart of Texas, New Orleans), First Congregational UCC, Eagle River, WI, shrimp boil St. John’s in Genoa, OH, Community Church Haskins, OH, shrimp boil and preach at first Congregational New London, WI, Grace UCC Wausau, WI, Roberts UCC Roberts, WI, looking forward to finagling a few more in Wisconsin.

Carol or Paul would revel in the chance to come visit and perhaps speak at your church. They are waiting to inspire your congregation to give, schedule a mission trip, and join with others for one purpose: Helping our fellow man. All denominations are welcome at Back Bay Mission. Our work has spread across the Gulf Coast, and the impact of our growing programs are helping improve the lives of many.

Back Bay Mission could not do the work we do without the help of individuals like you and congregations just like yours. Talk with your Missions Teams, pastors, and other like yourself what want to see how much more can be done when we all get involved.

**COMING TO A CHURCH NEAR YOU! OR HOW ABOUT TO YOURS??**

**CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

The first Creative Expressions class in June was attended by two guests, a volunteer and two interns. The project for the day was making a mask that represented us as a superhero. We each received a white mask and could use glitter, pipe cleaners, felt, sequins, feathers, and small, multicolored pom poms to complete the mask. One of the guests who is usually quiet at the Day Center broke out of his shell a little bit by talking with others during the class and a glimpse of a smile was seen. The other guest shared stories with the group and was enthusiastic about decorating the mask. When we were done, we presented our mask to the group and described the meaning behind the mask and who our superhero will protect. Everyone was supportive and provided positive feedback. The masks were very colorful and brought enjoyment to the group.

“ART ENABLES US TO FIND OURSELVES AND LOSE OURSELVES AT THE SAME TIME”

The second Creative Expressions class in June was attended by three guests, a volunteer and two interns. The project for the day was to pick a copy of a painting that was provided and paint their interpretation of it on Acrylic paper. We got to work, and we talked about what colors we were needing and getting help from one another on ideas. Words of encouragement and support were given during the class as well as redirection when it became overwhelming for some. They stayed on track and some of the guests even shared some stories from their past. After everyone was done with their painting we shared our paintings with the group. Some in the group commented on how interesting it was to see the actual painting and the interpretation, with some being very similar and others very different. When we were cleaning up one of the guests stated that the class was the most fun he had in a long time. He stated that he wasn’t sure about attending the class but was glad that he did. The next day he continued to express how much fun he had in Creative Expressions class.