



Stepping Stones

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF EASY DOES IT, INC.

A Place to Call Home

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To some, Al Eckstrom is a gruff man, strong-willed and stubborn. To others, he is an angel, a life-saver, a genius. Yet, all who know him agree that he is a visionary whose perseverance and tenacity helped to establish one of the greatest places a recovering addict can find in Berks County - Easy Does It, Inc. (EDI).

Eckstrom sits in a meeting room in EDI's Walnut Street (Reading, Pa.) facility with two of his long-time friends, sharing stories and memories of the past 20 years since he founded EDI. His long gray hair frames a kind face, worn with years of hard work, determination and caring. Several small strokes have taken the use of his right hand and some of his thought process, but Eckstrom doesn't seem to be bothered by it, as he talks about coming up with the idea that is now EDI:

"Our AA meeting at 10th and Greenwich Streets had to relocate because the landlord was selling the building. I realized we needed to find a place to meet where we wouldn't get thrown out, but I also knew that AA forbids owning real estate. It wasn't long before we came up with the idea of starting a non profit group to own a building where AA and other 12-Step meetings could meet."



L to R: Rich Moore, Al Eckstrom, & Willie Copeland outside the EDI facility on Walnut Street in Reading, Pa.

Eckstrom had heard that Jack Longlott, the owner of Longlott's Tavern, was looking to get out of the business and sell. After working with John Elder, a local attorney who helped (on a pro bono basis) with the Articles of Incorporation, and arranging for the 501c3 classification and tax exemption status, Eckstrom jumped at the opportunity to purchase Longlott's Tavern. Easy Does It, Inc. was born.

From the time Eckstrom walked through the doors of AA, he had been told that the way to achieve long-term sobriety was by helping somebody else. This became his source of strength and inspiration, as he tried to start a social movement within the community to remove the stigma associated with recovery. He wanted others to recognize the power of the group and to latch on to the idea that together, addicts could accomplish things that they could never accomplish alone - most importantly, sobriety and a life of fun in recovery. For Eckstrom, his dream became a reality when the first 12-Step meetings were held at the Walnut Street facility in December 1988. (The anniversary date was set formally by the group as January 1989, and the doors have been open 365 days a year since then.)

Inherited along with the purchase of Longlott's Tavern were space where sober social events could be held and rooms to accommodate those in need of transitional housing. Eckstrom realized that beyond a permanent meeting place, EDI could become a safe transitional home for recovering addicts who were leaving rehab centers

(continued inside)

Inside This Issue:

- EDI Celebrates a Milestone
- Edi Recognized
- Join the 12/20 Club Today!



1st Annual Berks County Recovery Walk



On a beautiful sunny day in September, over 200 people gathered at Reading Area Community College (RACC) to begin the 1st Annual Berks County Recovery Walk. Sponsored by Easy Does It, Inc., Caron Treatment Centers, the Council on Chemical Abuse, and the Reading Public Museum, the Recovery Walk was designed to raise awareness and share the message with the Reading-Berks community that recovery from all forms of addiction is possible.

From RACC, through the streets of Reading and West Reading, walkers carried the message: "Got Recovery?" on their t-shirts. The 1.5 mile walk ended at the Reading Public Museum, where participants enjoyed food, drink, music, activities, and an open recovery meeting for all who cared to attend.

Featured on the front page of the Berks & Beyond section of the following day's edition of the Reading Eagle, the Recovery Walk spoke for itself. In an attempt to carry the message of recovery to the community, EDI and the other sponsors of the Recovery Walk helped to promote positive awareness of the benefits of recovery from addictions.



Easy Does It, Inc. "Making a Difference" 20th Anniversary Celebration Community Service Award Dinner and Benefit Auction

On Tuesday, December 8, 2009, EDI's "Making a Difference" 20th Anniversary Celebration Community Service Award Dinner and Benefit Auction will be held at the Leesport facility. A huge success in its first year, the Auction will once again offer everything from exotic excursions and trips, antiques and art, golf outings, and much more.

EDI will also take this opportunity to recognize the recipients of the 2009 "Making a Difference" 20th Anniversary Celebration Community Service Award, Paul Roedel (retired president and chief executive officer of Carpenter Technology) and Ned Diefenderfer (retired Carpenter Technology executive). The award will recognize both Roedel and Diefenderfer for their

commitment, dedicated support, and passion for the Berks County non-profit community, as employees at Carpenter Technology and since their retirement. In addition, the award recognizes the legacy of Carpenter Technology's continued commitment to Berks County of giving back to the community.

(EDI's "Making a Difference" Community Service Award was established in 2008 to honor individuals and/or companies that "make a difference" in the community, and make Berks County a better place in which to live and work. For more information, contact Sam Albert, Development Director, at 610-898-7909 or salbert@ediinc.org.)

Editor's Corner

“Sober and Crazy” is often how many in 12 Step recovery programs describe themselves. As I researched the history of Easy Does It, Inc.; interviewed people who were there when it all started; and started to write, trying to capture the essence of the struggles and triumphs throughout the process; “Sober and Crazy” was the slogan that kept running through my mind.

Don't get me wrong - I mean that in the most loving and respectful way. From all that I've read about Bill Wilson, one of the co-founders of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), I'm pretty sure he was close to crazy, even when he was sober for years. But the beauty of Bill Wilson truly was in some of his "craziness": his grandiose ideas; his desire to be somebody; his incessant need to be better, bigger, and brighter than anyone else. These character traits moved him to act on his dreams, follow the path that others feared, and reach out for help out of sheer desperation not to drink - which led him to his friendship with Bob Smith, the other co-founder of AA, who many believed was sent by a Higher Power to keep Bill "right-sized." It was through the community of those two that AA was born, and still lives and thrives today. And it was through a similar type of community that EDI was born, grew, stumbled, grew some more, and continues to thrive today.

I am consistently awed by the power of community within these 12 Step programs. The 12 Traditions, which were first introduced in the AA Grapevine in 1946, have helped all 12 Step Programs to maintain a peaceful and group-minded existence, unlike many other organizations which must have a single person who is in charge - such as a president or chief executive officer. Members of 12 Step groups are encouraged to share their ideas, give service to the group, and attend business meetings and sessions. New ideas are embraced and tried, sometimes to great success, other times as failures from which the group learns and grows. And, most importantly, differences of opinion may not always be liked, but they are accepted.

The beginning of EDI was blessed by people who were living the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions in their own lives. Along the way, the journey has not always been smooth, feelings have been hurt, and friendships have been tried. Some of the old-timers involved with the establishment of EDI are remembered as being too grandiose, and maybe even a little crazy. But it was that grandiosity and craziness, like that which Bill Wilson showered upon the birth of AA that gave EDI the energy to fuel up, start down the runway, and take off into the fabulous organization it is today.

While EDI is not - and has never been - affiliated with one specific 12 Step group, it has always been the idea, the work, and the vision of individuals from many different 12 Step groups. These individuals have taken what they have learned in their own personal 12 Step work and applied it to their service to this fine institution that offers a road to recovery and clean and sober fun to so many. From one who has benefited greatly from walking through the doors of EDI, I thank everyone who so selflessly and tirelessly has worked to build, strengthen and maintain EDI over these last 20 years. I can't even begin to imagine the adventures in store for EDI and the recovering community over the next 20 years!

Jessica L. Morris

(If you have feedback, ideas, or comments about Stepping Stones, please send an email to the editor at jessicamorris@comcast.net.)

Easy Does It, Inc. Celebrates a Milestone and Thanks Volunteers

On Saturday, November 14th, EDI friends, residents, and staff joined together to celebrate its 20th Anniversary and to honor valuable and loyal volunteers. Over the last 20 years, volunteers have helped in every way to further the mission of EDI - from helping to plan and host events at EDI's facilities - to staffing EDI's annual Soberstock event - to picking up trash at the Reading Fair to serve the community - EDI volunteers always come through!

At the 20th Anniversary Celebration and 4th Annual Volunteer Appreciation and Comedy Night, the EDI family enjoyed a fabulous meal prepared by Chef Bobby and were entertained by world renowned hypnotist and comedian, Tim Triplett. The event was enjoyed by all, and served to honor everyone who has helped to create and build EDI into what it is today.

THANK YOU!



Place to Call Home (continued)

and halfway houses, as well as a community center for those in recovery who wanted to have fun without drinking or drugging. He also realized that programming and housing would cost money, so he began to research how to apply for federal, state and county grants. Eckstrom carried EDI's message by visiting the organizations where applications for grants were accepted in Washington, D.C., Harrisburg, and Pittsburgh, just to name a few.

As he trudged through the red tape and frustrations that are often associated with such applications, many in the program told Eckstrom he was crazy - that this thing would never succeed. None of that mattered to him. Eckstrom devoted every day - all day - to accomplishing his goal of establishing EDI as the organization that welcomed all people in recovery, no matter how rich or poor.

One of EDI's first board members, Willie Copeland, remembers Eckstrom's enthusiasm fondly: "He was full-steam ahead with ideas that went way beyond the traditional AA group. Yeah, some people were turned off by his personality and ideas, but Al was always all about why we should do it, not why we shouldn't." And it wasn't long before his hard work and perseverance were rewarded. EDI started to receive grants from HUD, HHS, the state's Community Revitalization Program, the county's Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency Grant and the Homeless Assistance Grant, and the Federal Home Loan Bank in Pittsburgh.

Having created a recovery facility unique to Berks County and the surrounding area, Eckstrom's vision started to grow. With the addition of Soberstock, EDI's annual sober music festival, and the Spring Fling, an event that invites Caron Foundation alumni to join with the Berks County recovery community for a sober dance and social event, Eckstrom and the EDI board of directors realized the great need that was being filled for all those recovering from addiction in the Berks County area. EDI was not just a place to go to be safe from drugs and alcohol, but also a dance and social hall, a home for those first residents, and a welcoming embrace for all members of 12-Step programs.

"To Al, this whole thing was about drunks helping drunks. There were a lot of egos in the room when we were hammering out the by-laws, but it always came back to how we could better help the drunk in need." Copeland shares, with passion, how much he benefited from working with Eckstrom: "His vision just kept growing and we started holding dances, our greatest revenue source at the time, and inviting other 12-Step groups to attend. He knew we needed to open the facility up to everyone in order to become self-supporting, and he knew he needed to ignore the nay-sayers and keep working toward his dream. I was always amazed by his determination."

By word of mouth and through Eckstrom's connections with the Caron Foundation and the Council on Chemical Abuse, EDI grew into a recovery model for which there seemed no boundaries, and yet there were. While the facility on Walnut Street was thriving,

there were rumors that drugs were being sold at dances, which scared away many in the recovery community. "Al didn't let this stop him. He talked to probation officers and counselors in the area and put a stop to those rumors immediately." Copeland smiles and shakes his head as he recalls Eckstrom's persistence: "He was a force to be reckoned with when it came to EDI's reputation."

Although the rumors eventually stopped, Eckstrom knew that certain AA members would never travel into the city for a sober event or meeting. He recognized the need to bring the same recovery model that had been created on Walnut Street to the suburbs of Reading. In the late 1990s, Eckstrom began discussions with local realtor, Bill Parks, and architects, Olsen DeTurck. He started to look for a piece of land that would accommodate a new building that could become a Recovery Community Center in an environment where every recovering addict felt safe.

The task was daunting, as there were not many townships in the area that wanted to approve of a drug and alcohol facility in their backyard. Eckstrom didn't let the rejections deter him. He continued to meet with township supervisors, and eventually went to Randy Pyle, a Berks County Commissioner. He told Pyle he had the money, but was having trouble acquiring the land. Pyle, along with another Commissioner, Glen Reber, arranged for five acres of land behind Berks Heim, at the cost of one dollar per year on a 50-year lease. Eckstrom paid the lease and construction began.

The final approval of the Leesport building



12/20 Club - Join today!

Please consider celebrating Easy Does It, Inc.'s 20th Anniversary by joining the 12/20 Club. It's simple. Your contribution of \$20 (or more) over the course of 12 months will allow EDI to continue to provide vital services to the recovery community and individuals in early sobriety.

You make it possible. EDI makes it happen. Together we can make a difference.

Members of EDI's 12/20 club receive the following benefits:

- ✧ Commemorative pin
- ✧ Recognition in an EDI event program
- ✧ 20% discount for all EDI events except award dinner
- ✧ 20% discount for hall rentals
- ✧ Inclusion in drawing for two tickets to EDI's award dinner

For more information - or if you would like to become a member of the 12/20 Club - contact Sam Albert, Development Director, at (610) 898-7909 or visit EDI's website at www.ediinc.org.

was granted at approximately 4 p.m. on December 31, 1999. The New Year's Alcathon (January 1, 2000) was the first official social event and meeting held at what is now known as the EDI Community Center on Hilltop Road. And the first resident at the Leesport facility was Richard Moore, an alcoholic who had been in and out of rehabs and AA for 12 years. Moore lived in York, Pa. at the time, but had heard about the new Community Center with transitional housing that was being built just outside of Reading. "I started calling Al and hounding him to let me live there. I couldn't even pay the rent for the first three months, but Al didn't care about that. All he cared about was helping me out."

During his first few weeks at EDI, Moore cleaned and swept floors, and helped to put beds together and organize rooms. And it wasn't long before he was joined by other recovering addicts. "We all had a job to do to help with upkeep of the facility and to help each other. It was an enormous dose of humility for me, since I came from a background where I didn't have to take care of any of that."

Today, Moore is sober for nine years and owns two houses, referred to as three-quarter houses, which serve as continued transitional housing for those leaving halfway houses and places like EDI: "When I first lived at EDI, Al told me to get off my ass and help somebody. I have never forgotten that and I never will. EDI was the first place that showed me how to live after I got sober. There is nothing more fulfilling in my life

today than being able to help others who need that extra assistance and longer-term housing to get back on their feet and learn to live responsibly."

In addition to his three-quarter houses, Moore owns his own construction company and an apartment building in which he rents rooms to only those who are clean and sober. "My tenants at that apartment building are great. They always pay their rent on time and I never have any problems with them. There's something to be said for living a life built around the 12-Steps."

As Moore talks about his life today, Eckstrom's smile lights the room, "You can see that this has never been a one-way street for me," Eckstrom says. "I have been given so much by those who have walked through EDI's doors, and helped by so many others along the way." Proud as a peacock of Moore's sobriety and accomplishments, Eckstrom continues, "Money was never an object for me when I was talking to a struggling addict. All I wanted was to give them the opportunity to stay sober. Rich, here, is a great example of how it works."

Yet, Eckstrom isn't all happy about the way things have turned out. As Copeland mentioned earlier, large egos were often involved in the early days of EDI, and that never really changed. In 2004, when Eckstrom began talking of making EDI a franchise, the board of directors finally voted him down. Devastated and tired, Eckstrom parted ways with EDI and hasn't been to the facility in Leesport since then. "I wanted to take it up

a notch, to take the next step in growing EDI. They didn't agree. It was a hard pill to swallow, but it's how it is and that's that," he says.

While the board didn't agree with Eckstrom's franchise idea, they did agree with growing and changing the facility. In 2006, an expansion wing was added, which offered space for up to 50 residents (all men at the time). In 2008, a women's wing was created and now the facility offers transitional housing for 20 women and 30 men. Residents are given the opportunity to stay at EDI for anywhere from six months to two years. The short-term treatment that they have come from turns into a living and learning situation that offers long-term, sustained recovery. Their days are structured and they are personally responsible for their own sobriety and growth. It may not be the exact vision that Eckstrom hoped for, but EDI is changing the model of treatment from addiction with both the Walnut Street and Leesport facilities.

Today, as Eckstrom looks back over the 20 years since EDI was established, he is proud of all that the facilities have accomplished, but also humbled. Bothered by the attention he has received as EDI's founder, he asks that in telling this story, we are very clear about one thing - that this was never all about Al Eckstrom. This was, is, and will always be all about 'we.'

Meet Carrie Schwartz, Outreach Coordinator



Easy Does It, Inc. is proud to introduce Carrie Schwartz, outreach coordinator, who joined our team in August 2009. Responsible for managing public hall rentals, internal events, volunteer opportunities, and alumni relations, Carrie will work to expand EDI's list of volunteers and maintain strong ties with EDI alumni.

Prior to joining EDI's staff, Carrie spent three years working in the alumni department at Caron

Treatment Centers in Wernersville, Pa. There, Carrie gained significant experience in event planning, as she was responsible

for researching and contacting venues and entertainers, setting up events and processing ticket orders, and coordinating event volunteers. Carrie also spent a large amount of her time assisting in the production of promotional materials for events and coordinating mailings. She gained valuable experience in the stewarding of Caron's alumni and donors, and helped to maintain the department's internal and external communications.

Before starting her career in the field of recovery services, Carrie worked as a hairstylist and salon assistant in Berks County. She is a graduate of Empire Beauty School in Reading, Pa., and Conrad Weiser High School in Robeson, PA.

For more information on becoming a volunteer at EDI, call (610) 373-2463 or send an email to Carrie Schwartz at CSchwartz@ediinc.org. You make it possible. EDI makes it happen. Together, we can make a difference.



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Kudos...

- ✧ **To Dave Reyher**, EDI's Executive Director, who was awarded the Addiction Professional Award at the Caron Foundation's 13th Annual Berks County Community Service Awards Breakfast in June. The award is given to individuals who have excelled in their field of work to help those suffering from the disease of addiction. In addition, these individuals have made a difference in the areas of education, awareness and/or treatment. CONGRATULATIONS, Dave!
- ✧ **To Tim McGuirk**, a member of EDI's Board of Directors, who was honored on November 13th at the Association of Fund Raising Professionals (AFP) National Philanthropy Day as a Distinguished Honoree. Annually, volunteers who have made an impact on their organization are shown appreciation at this event, with this special recognition. Tim's enthusiasm and never tiring efforts are inspirational to other volunteers and EDI staff, as well as being integral to the fulfillment of EDI's Mission and Vision Statement. THANK YOU, Tim!

Easy Does It Recognized

On October 14th, Dave Reyher, Executive Director, was presented with two proclamations at EDI's annual VIP Breakfast. The first was a Certificate of Recognition from the Berks County Commissioners honoring EDI's 20th Anniversary in Berks County. It was presented by Commissioner Christian Leinbach. The second was a proclamation from the Pennsylvania State Senate congratulating EDI on its 20th Anniversary in Berks County and recognizing the vital role that EDI plays in the Berks County community. It was presented by Senator Mike O'Pake.