



# DIALOG

## Youthful Offenders Program a true second chance

### THE NINE YOUNG MEN HAD MANY THINGS IN COMMON.

They all hailed from the same county. They all had come to the Diakon Wilderness Center 30 days before this day. And they all had come to the center because they faced felony charges.

They also had all just experienced something more difficult than they had imagined 30 days before. Based on their own words, they had had a month of blood, sweat and tears.

And they were all immensely grateful for that experience.

A month before this day, this day of celebration and graduation, they had arrived at the Diakon Wilderness Center near Boiling Springs, Pennsylvania, uncertain what their next 30 days would bring.

They were certain, however, that those 30 days constituted a critical second chance. One they certainly didn't want to waste.

The Bucks County court had referred the nine young men to the Diakon center to take part in the Youthful Offenders Program, a wilderness-based challenge for young adults 18 through 25.

The program serves pre-trial, first-time, non-violent felony offenders who have been assessed as potentially able to benefit from a second chance and thus avoid the burden of a felony charge on their record.

Following program completion, they return home to face their charges. But, based on program participation, success and learnings, those charges may be reduced or even dropped altogether.

That's a life-changing opportunity, noted one of the young men. "Facing a felony is itself a very scary thing. It's something that will weigh on you the rest of your life. Having that on your record can, in fact, ruin your life and chances for a lot of things. The opportunity to be absolved of it is an amazing one," he said.

That second chance comes with responsibility, something they may not have appreciated or even been accorded in the past.

"The first time I was leader-of-the-day," said one participant, "I gave orders to set up camp and for others to do certain tasks," a role that initially made him very uncomfortable. By the end of the day, however, he discovered he had natural leadership abilities and had become more comfortable guiding others, a responsibility he had never experienced.

The second chance also often brings new views of oneself—and an appreciation for how others view you.

"Hiking on the Blue Ridge Parkway gave me a sense of accomplishment and a feeling of strength I never knew I had," says another young man, "not

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The nine young men graduating from the Youthful Offenders Program pose for a group photograph with instructors Marvin Butts, fourth from left in green shirt, and Kevin Jones, sixth from left in rear, and Anthony Brau, program director and instructor, fourth from right.

# Our Mission

In response to God's love in Jesus Christ, Diakon will demonstrate God's command to love the neighbor through acts of service.

Diakon: Many Hands, guided by One Heart, transforming the lives of children, families and older adults. With programs ranging from adoption, foster care and at-risk youth services to counseling and comprehensive senior living services, Diakon annually helps thousands of people of all faiths through compassionate service, gracious hospitality and charitable care.

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Mark T. Pile

## The President's **DIALOG**

### Enjoying and learning from my annual 'opinion baths'

**PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN** deeply enjoyed what he called his "public-opinion baths."

These were times he set aside to meet with members of the public. In characterizing these sessions, he is reported to have said, "... no hours of my day are better employed than those which thus bring me again within the direct contact and atmosphere of our whole people."

That same need—to learn what colleagues feel about the initiatives and issues of the day for our organization, to know their questions and concerns, to share a vision of our future together—propels me to embark at least annually on formalized visits with each of our child, family and community programs and our senior living communities.

In these meetings, we jointly discuss immediate goals, ponder questions and review our overall vision for Diakon. But perhaps the most-important part of these gatherings is for me to hear what excites—and concerns—my dedicated staff colleagues, those who daily serve the people who come to us in need.

In a way, these are my public-opinion baths.

I am nearing completion of my end-of-2016 visits and want to share with you some of the key points we discussed:

- We jointly acknowledged—and maybe commiserated over a little—the sea change occurring within health care. While it can be difficult at times to know exactly where the health-care market is headed, there is no question we need to be able to care for patients with higher levels of acuity, who will stay with us shorter lengths of time and who may need continuing assistance to transition to home, without experiencing re-hospitalization.
- At the same time, our senior living communities face the continual need to expand and enhance the amenities provided in independent living (as well as in other levels of care) so that the communities remain market-leaders.
- Diakon staff members are acutely aware of the continuing challenges of recruiting and retaining dedicated, committed and engaged employees in very tight health-care and social services labor markets. To that end, a number of them have helped by taking advantage of employee-referral initiatives, particularly focused on nursing staff. Dedicated staff members throughout the Diakon organizations are, after all, our most-important and -valued asset.
- Related to these challenges, staff members throughout Diakon support transition to performance-based wage structures.
- The staff also supports our "stay interview" process, annual interviews focused not on performance reviews but on how employees and supervisors can work together to make each staff colleague's work experience the best it can be. Our goal in 2016 is for 100% of our staff members to have participated in an annual stay interview.
- The mid-2014 "split" of Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries (which operates our senior living communities) to create the sister organization of Diakon Child, Family & Community Ministries—or DCFCM—has, overall, been successful. There is no question DCFCM staff members have experienced significant changes as they focus on building sustainable ministries that can grow but also compete efficiently in the marketplace. But these efforts, which include a leading-edge focus on qualitative and quantitative outcome measures as well as productivity standards, continue to craft a successful organization, both programmatically and financially.
- All Diakon staff colleagues understand the need for Diakon to grow. We have experienced excellent internal growth through an emphasis on census in our senior living communities as well as capital improvements and specific steps to expand, such as is occurring with the construction of new homes at Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania.

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# Grateful for family, adoptive parents are inspired to donate

**BOB SIMONS OFFERS A SIMPLE RESPONSE** to the question of why he and his wife, Peggy, have become long-time donors to Diakon Adoption & Foster Care.

“Gratitude,” he says. “Diakon is responsible for our having a family we very much wanted.”

The couple, of Honesdale, Pennsylvania, were both teaching in the Honesdale School District—high school English for Bob and second grade for Peggy—when they began to look into adoption. Their journey started in 1980 with another agency that ultimately did not work out. They weren’t discouraged, however, because the experience helped them to gain an understanding of the challenges adoption can present.

Next they connected with Diakon and, soon after completing the initial home study, found themselves preparing to adopt a newborn through Diakon Pregnancy Services.

Their daughter, Flo, spent her first three months in foster care and came home with the Simonses in November of 1982. Although they were looking forward to the day a child joined them and had taken part in adoption training, the actual day brought lots of jitters and uncertainty, Bob notes today.

“I remember the call came to the school,” he says. “It was a little sudden. After we picked up Flo, we stopped in Easton to see my parents. They had a crib set up. We didn’t even have that done yet! My cousin, who did a lot of babysitting, showed me how to change diapers. A neighbor showed Peggy how to do the bath. All our friends and co-workers were very supportive.”

As a baby, Flo was diagnosed with a vision problem. Like all parents facing a challenge, Bob and Peggy worked through it. Flo had surgery at age 3 and wore an eye patch until she was 8, correcting the problem, Peggy says.

## The family grows

When Flo was 2, the family welcomed a baby boy into their home. Ben arrived at 5-and-a-half months from South Korea. International adoptions often are complex, requiring multiple agencies and governmental regulations. Ben’s adoption involved the predecessor to today’s Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, Catholic Social Services, Eastern Child Welfare, Inc. (now Eastern Social Welfare Society, Inc.) and the Korean government.

Kathy Roach, now executive director of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, was the case worker for Bob and Peggy.

“Kathy approached us and we said yes,” Peggy explains. “She helped us with the naturalization process and all the inevitable paperwork. We arranged for an adult escort to bring him to the U.S. Finally, in mid-August of 1984, we met Ben at JFK Airport in New York. I remember he was wearing a Mickey Mouse t-shirt.”

Growing up in a rural area, Flo and Ben had lives that “were pretty normal,” they and their parents say.



*The Simonses’ son, Ben, born and adopted in 1984, with his wife, Ellen, and their two children, Jenna and Colin.*

Flo exhibited musical abilities, learning to play the piano and trombone, and loved musical theatre camp. Ben was a talented athlete, playing for the school basketball team and running cross country and track. Bob and Peggy presented opportunities for both children to connect with their birth families and, in Ben’s case, cultural heritage.

“We had a prayer ritual at night, where they would ask God to bless everyone they knew and we would have them add ‘my first mommy and daddy’ to the list,” Peggy says. “We encouraged them to connect with their pasts, as long as it was something they wanted to do.”

## Family ties

Flo was curious about her birth mother. Around the age of 10, she began to write her letters and eventually met her. They maintained a relationship for a while, through Flo’s high school and college years.

“I always knew I was adopted and I’m glad that I knew, that it was never a secret,” Flo says. “I’m glad I met my birth mother, too. But after a time, I ended it. That was best.”

Flo’s musical talents led her to a career as a piano teacher and accompanist. She believes some of her talent comes from family members. Her grandfather had trumpet-playing chops and performed in local swing bands. Her dad sings and learned to play trumpet from his father, and her mom played the piano. Perhaps she will pass along her love of music. She and her girlfriend,

Dana, hope to have a family one day.

“We want children,” she says. “I have always wanted to adopt, so that’s something that may happen in the future.”

Ben did not care to meet his birth parents and had little interest in his Korean heritage. When he was young, the family visited a Korean church and learned to cook Korean dishes from a local Korean family. Ben learned a few Korean words. Bob and Peggy prepared a traditional Korean 1st birthday celebration for Ben, with the costume, cake and gifts that the tradition calls for.

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*The Simonses’ daughter, Flo, left, born and adopted in 1982, with partner, Dana.*

# Buffalo Valley expands independent living

**FOUR OF THE FIRST NEW RESIDENTS**, in an expansion of independent living homes at Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village, turned over ground recently to mark the symbolic start of construction.

Accompanied by Mary Usher and Joanne Frantz, co-chairs of the resident welcoming committee, and the Rev. Fred Bigelow and Ray Confer, president and vice-president of Buffalo Valley's resident council, Janet Temple, Marlin Gatty, the Rev. Don Haulman and Zelda Stewart—the four new residents—broke ground for the project.

Six homes will be built in the expansion's first phase, with a tentative completion date of March 2017. The next group of seven homes will follow that, dependent on sales. The new homes will add to the numerous independent living homes already part of the Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, senior living community.

Two styles of homes will be built, says Gretchen Nash, manager of marketing and sales for the village. The new 1,469-square-foot Manchester features a master bedroom suite with walk-in closet, a second full-sized bedroom, two full baths with walk-in showers and an open living area/kitchen with island. In addition, the home includes a one-car garage.

"We also are building more of our most-popular model, the Windsor, which includes two bedrooms, two full baths and an eat-in kitchen," she adds. The Windsor includes 1,365 square feet of living space, plus a one-car garage.

Both home styles include furnished appliances, a patio or optional sunroom, 24-hour call systems and priority access to care within the village's personal care and rehab/nursing care centers.



*Taking part in the Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village groundbreaking are, left to right, Joanne Frantz and Mary Usher, the village's resident welcoming committee; Marlin Gatty, Janet Temple, Zelda Stewart and the Rev. Don Haulman, the first four signed residents of the new independent living homes; and the Rev. Fred Bigelow and Ray Confer, resident council leaders.*

"We have spent the last several years working on renovations and similar efforts at our nine senior living communities in Pennsylvania and Maryland," noted Scott Habecker, Diakon's chief financial and chief operating officer, during the ceremony, "so it is gratifying to begin a project that represents expansion of our services."

The project site was blessed by the Rev. Barbara J. Collins, bishop of the Upper Susquehanna Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

## Frey Village opens short-term rehabilitation unit

### **FREY VILLAGE RECENTLY OPENED**

a rehabilitation therapy wing to serve short-term rehab patients.

The \$2.8 million expansion and renovation to a wing of the Middletown, Pennsylvania, village's nursing and rehabilitation center included construction of a rehab-therapy gym and physician suite as well as renovation of guest rooms in the short-term rehabilitation section.

The design of the new unit takes advantage of natural lighting to enhance the rehabilitation environment.

"The goal of the design is to help patients enjoy a more comfortable and effective rehabilitation experience," says Deanna Ziemba, senior vice president for Diakon Senior Living Services. The construction work, she notes, also included renovation of the nursing care center's dining room.



# 'Rebirth' of Old Main as 'permanency center' begins

## **NEARLY 120 YEARS AFTER THE FIRST SUPERINTENDENT**

of the Topton Orphans Home began construction of the home's iconic Old Main building by digging out "in the shape of a cross ... several wheelbarrowsful of ground," participants in a groundbreaking for a major renovation project of the building honored those beginnings by overturning soil dug in the shape of a cross.

Several hundred people including area residents, home alumni, Diakon staff, board members, adoptive and foster parents, residents of The Lutheran Home at Topton senior living community and local political officials participated in a September celebratory event to launch the \$8.2 million renovation and refurbishment project.

In addition to the groundbreaking, the event featured the naming of the adoption- and foster care-focused facilities to be established in the building as the Helen N. Palmer Center for Permanency. A significant bequest from Mrs. Palmer of Wyomissing, Pennsylvania, who passed away in 2012, provided seed money for the project.

Project construction is set to begin in late fall of 2016, with a tentative completion date of the end of 2017. In addition to exterior and mechanical systems work, the project will turn the currently unused second floor of the 32,000-square-foot building into the Diakon Adoption & Foster Care permanency center as well as create space for Diakon Ministry Support offices currently located in the Medical Arts Building on the Luther Crest campus in Allentown, Pennsylvania.



Three presidents, current and retired, took part in the Old Main groundbreaking program. From left are the Rev. Dr. Paul Buehrle, retired president of The Lutheran Home at Topton; the Rev. Daun E. McKee, Ph.D., retired president of The Lutheran Home at Topton, Lutheran Services Northeast and Diakon; and Mark T. Pile, MSHA, MSW, current president/CEO of Diakon.

"Having the groundbreaking in the shape of a cross was not only a fitting way to honor our history and the Rev. Uriah P. Heilman, who undertook that first groundbreaking so long ago, but also to reflect our faith-based mission to serve our neighbors," says Mark T. Pile, Diakon president/CEO.

The center for permanency related to Diakon Adoption & Foster Care will include space for training of adoption and foster care staff and support

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Groundbreaking participants for the Old Main project on The Lutheran Home at Topton campus formed the shape of a cross in honor of the building's history. That history tells of how the first superintendent of the Topton Orphans Home began work on the foundation of the building by digging out "several wheelbarrowsful of dirt" to form a cross. Participants were, left to right, MaryEllen Dickey, senior vice president, Diakon Office of Advancement; Cayden Roth, served by Diakon Adoption & Foster Care; the Rev. Dr. Paul Buehrle, former president of The Lutheran Home at Topton; William Rohrbach of Boyertown, who lived at the home from 1936 to 1950; the Rev. Dr. Daun McKee, former president/CEO of The Lutheran Home at Topton and Diakon; Kenneth Mertz, Diakon board member, adoptive parent and chair of the adoption program's advisory council; Scott Habecker, Diakon's chief financial and operating officer; Kathy Roach, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care executive director; Mark T. Pile, Diakon president/CEO; Shari VanderGast, senior vice president, Diakon Child, Family & Community Ministries; Emried D. Cole, Jr., board chair, Diakon Child, Family & Community Ministries; Mia Manley, served by Diakon Adoption & Foster Care; and Laurie Manley, adoptive parent.

# Dining with Diakon raises more than \$140,000 for adoption, foster care

**DINING WITH DIAKON**, held in early October at SteelStacks–Musikfest Café, raised more than \$141,000 to support services offered by Diakon Adoption & Foster Care. More than 350 people attended this year’s Tastes of Italy-themed event, which included wine pairings and live music performed by Steve Brosky and Jimmy Meyer. Ken Mertz of Lancaster County, an adoptive parent, chair of the Diakon Adoption & Foster Care Advisory Council and a Diakon board member, won this year’s chef challenge by raising \$22,465. The event also exceeded figures for 2015 in terms of attendance and funds raised for services that bring permanency to the lives of children and youths.



*Dining with Diakon chefs, left to right, front row, Parker Kline and Lucas Flickinger; second row, Jamie Kratz, Andrea Brady, Kassie Hilgert and Mindy Beck; third row, Kathy Craine and Cindy Bonney; and fourth row, Paul Buehrle, John Mraz and Ken Mertz.*

## ‘Opinion baths’ *Continued from Page 2*

Core DCFM programs also have grown, both geographically and in scope of service. In addition, we gained successful family-reunification and -preservation programs (as a result of a colleague agency’s exit from those types of services) in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. These two services can be replicated in other regions and we welcome similar opportunities for this type of growth.

Like our 16th president, I cherish these times specifically dedicated to meeting with as many of my staff colleagues as possible. They are among the most-positive experiences I have, even when discussing challenging topics.

It is heartening to see firsthand the dedication and commitment of Diakon staff members—and to hear of their thoughts, dreams and goals for us.

I look forward to next year’s round of “baths.”

Mark T. Pile, MSHA, MSW  
President/CEO

## Grateful for family *Continued from Page 3*

“From the time I was a kid, I knew I was Ben and that’s all I knew and I was okay with that,” Ben says. “I really appreciate that my parents encouraged us to explore our adoption and left it open to us to decide. It showed that that they cared about our personal feelings.”

Ben was affected by the events of September 11, 2001, Bob and Peggy say, and they believe that influenced his decision to join the National Guard after two years in college. He was sent to New Orleans to help during the Katrina disaster and then was deployed to Iraq for a year. Ben calls that experience one of the most important of his life.

“I learned a lot of different values, including respect for family, and that gave me a new appreciation for my parents,” he says. “My dad and I didn’t always see eye-to-eye when I was a teenager, but now I consider him one of my best friends.”

Ben and his wife, Ellen, whom he met in college, just celebrated their 10th anniversary. They are parents of 5-year-old Jenna and 4-year-old Colin. Ben works for a large grocery store chain, overseeing security and technology. Life is busy, he says, and it’s a life he loves.

“My adoptive parents are my parents. When they decided to adopt, they became my birth parents,” Ben says. “I have the life I have because of them. They provided everything for me, gave me the structure, and I am very grateful for that.”

## Staying connected to Diakon

Bob and Peggy Simons created their family in a unique way. Looking back, they express a sentiment that many parents share. “We have a good family,” they say.

When you adopt, you’re aware that you are changing a child’s life, Peggy says, adding that that child changes your life.

Since the adoptions that changed their lives in the early 1980s, Bob and Peggy have donated regularly to Diakon Adoption & Foster Care. Their donations help to pay for many things, according to Alex Dapkewicz, a donor relations officer.

“The donations support everything from emergency supply packages for children who are picked up in crisis to training for families to a fund for children who are aging out of foster care,” he explains. “The Simonses have been donating for quite a while, so they have helped many children.”

Kathy Roach remembers the adoption and the family well, in part because they continue to be connected through their financial support. But she especially recalls the generosity they showed by opening their home to two children in need.

“The whole adoption process, the complicated international adoption, their daughter wanting to seek out her birth mother—they embraced it all,” she says. “We can’t thank them enough.”

# Inspired by GOTR participant, Diakon exec gains support for fund

## INSPIRED BY HIS PARTICIPATION IN THE 5K RUN/WALK

that concludes each session of Diakon-sponsored Girls on the Run – Lehigh Valley, Scott Habecker decided to set sights on his own run—one to raise funds for the Diakon Lutheran Fund.

And as Habecker, Diakon’s chief operating and chief financial officer, described the experience, “I did it! In the midst of the best weather one could ask for, I completed the 13.1-mile Hershey Half Marathon and did so in better time than I had hoped for, coming in at 1:53.”

He also came in with more than \$20,000 in gifts and pledges for the Diakon Lutheran Fund. The fund incorporates assets that provide support for Diakon services for children, families, adults of all ages and entire communities.

“With the help of a group of committed and generous donors, we together raised significant dollars for the fund,” Habecker says. Like other gifts that have been placed in the fund over the last near-150 years, the money raised will support Diakon services for children and families in need for years to come.

Fund subsidies annually support such programs as Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, Diakon Youth Services for at-risk youths and Diakon Family Life Services counseling.

Habecker’s mission began when he became a “running buddy” for a recent session of the Girls on the Run program. “I wanted to learn more about this program, which has a significant positive impact on hundreds of girls each year,” he says. A running buddy accompanies each young participant on the 5K run.

Inspired by the motivation and determination of Qiara, the girl he accompanied, Habecker soon decided to take part in the Hershey event with a goal of generating support for the Diakon fund.

“Through its subsidy, the fund has an immeasurable impact each year on the lives of children, youths and families who could not otherwise afford care



Scott Habecker

or be served,” he says. “Importantly, these funds, through generation of interest, will continue to support our child-and-family programs for decades to come.”

Both runs, he adds, “were memorable experiences for me, and I am proud of the outcome that we together achieved.”

## Outdoor challenge helps to fund youth services

### DIAKON YOUTH SERVICES,

which, provides a range of programs to aid at-risk youths from counties throughout much of central and eastern Pennsylvania, benefits from the Outdoor Adventure Challenge, a 5K run/walk event held each September at the Diakon Wilderness Center near Boiling Springs, Pennsylvania. The 2016 Outdoor Adventure Challenge had 297 participants and raised more than \$43,000 for Diakon Youth Services programs.



*Photo shows winners in all age groups in the 2016 Outdoor Adventure Challenge. Thank you for your support!*

## ‘Rebirth’ of Old Main *Continued from Page 5*

groups for parents as well as family-style areas helpful in the process of transitioning children and youths into foster and adoptive families.

“We are pleased to be able to recognize Helen Palmer by naming the center for her,” says Pile. “When we received her generous bequest, we placed part of it in the Diakon Lutheran Fund, where it will remain, along with other funds, to generate income in perpetuity to support our services for children, families and communities. That is a very fitting way to honor and remember Helen Palmer, whose concern for children is what led her to be a supporter of The Lutheran Home at Tipton.”

“This project is not just about bricks and mortar, but also about the rebirth of the purpose of this building—to serve ever-more children and youths in need. By repurposing Old Main, we uphold not only our historic mission, but also the wishes and interests of Helen Palmer,” Pile notes.

The first floor of Old Main—which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places—will continue to house the Brandywine Community Library, the historic Putz train layout and some Diakon staff offices. Plans include eventual development of a center to highlight the history of the Tipton and Tressler orphanages, the two homes for children in Diakon’s past.



*Participants of the Old Main groundbreaking event had the opportunity to tour the currently unused second and third floors of the building.*



*State officials joined Diakon staff in celebrating the groundbreaking for the Old Main project. From left to right are Scott Habecker, Diakon chief financial and chief operating officer; Mark Pile, Diakon president/CEO; state Sen. Judith L. Schwank (D-11); the Rev. Dr. Paul Buehrle, retired president of The Lutheran Home at Tipton; and state Rep. Ryan Mackenzie (R-134).*



# Diakon Adoption & Foster Care holds unique fashion show-matching event

## DIAKON ADOPTION

& Foster Care recently held its fifth annual fashion show-style “matching event,” bringing together older youths in need of permanent families and prospective adoptive and foster families.

One of several matching events held annually by the program—others take place in such venues as professional baseball stadiums during games—the one-of-a-kind fashion show is held at The Lutheran Home at Topton, where Diakon Adoption & Foster Care’s northeastern Pennsylvania office is located.

The event employs a fashion show atmosphere that makes the youths “stars” for the day, with each youth receiving from area vendors free makeup, hair and clothing consultation, as well as a new outfit to model. The event is designed so that youths and families have time for socialization following the fashion show.

This year, 17 youths and 16 prospective and current resource families participated.

“We were very pleased with the response. The families and young people had lots of time to interact and get to know one another following the show,” says Joyce Riche, director of the Diakon Adoption & Foster Care office at Topton.

Beyond resulting in successful matches of waiting youths with adoptive families, the event has attracted international interest. Several years ago, a French documentary producer filmed the show. This year, a producer and a videographer from the Washington, D.C., bureau of the French television network TF1 attended the event and interviewed both youths and families for a nightly news broadcast in that country. A German television network remains interested in doing a Good Morning, America-style feature on the adoption effort.



*The youths who took part in this year’s fashion show-matching event pose for a group photograph.*



*A youth walks the red carpet during the fashion show-matching event.*



*Steve Harper, a videographer for the French television network TF1, interviews a prospective adoptive family at the fashion show-matching event.*

# Youthful Offenders Program *Continued from Page 1*

just physical, but also mental.” When he faced certain challenges, he added, a “little voice in my head would self-talk” him through the difficulties.

Moreover, added another, a growing sense of responsibility made him understand he was often “hard-headed” or acted in response to “a short fuse.” Now, however, he wanted to change—for his family and friends, but especially for himself and his future.

How the young men were viewed added to the motivation to change.

The Diakon Youth Services staff members who accompanied them on the 30-day wilderness challenge “were always here for [us]. They never looked at us as ‘bad people,’ but as young adults who had made mistakes but wanted to be successful in life.”

Each of the young men, in turn, told individual tales of success, transformation and insight gained, as well as the travails of the last 30 days.

Family members, girlfriends and Diakon staff members had gathered at the wilderness center to listen but especially to celebrate their graduation from the program and wish them well in the days ahead.

Taken collectively, their words painted a portrait of initial uncertainty, hard work, frighteningly long hikes, steep terrain and time spent alone in the woods for self-reflection.

And bugs. Heat. And more bugs.

But, as each progressed deeper into his stories, remarks shifted to challenges overcome, perspectives gained and self-reliance achieved—as well as realization of the importance of family, responsibility for actions and the values of self-respect and respect for others.

“It felt like a new beginning,” says one young man. “A restart. As I thought about my life, I didn’t always like what I saw. But I had a lot of time out there to think about me and how I could be better.”

Facing the challenges of the wilderness, including preparing food and camp, “made me appreciate my family,” said another.

A key phrase focused on brotherhood.

The group, said most, was initially one of strangers but one that also bonded quickly in the wilderness.

“We became a brotherhood of decades in two weeks,” said one in succinctly summarizing the group’s spirit.

Another recalled how a fellow student “was at least half the reason I was able to complete the program,” but added that each of the others “helped me at least once.” Telling of a hike that was particularly difficult for him, he said that when “my legs gave out from under me,” a fellow student took his pack and carried it along with his own.

“No matter what,” added another, “I always knew the rest of the guys had my back. After 10 days, we felt like we had been friends all our lives.”

“I never imagined the bond I would have with the others. And thank you,” one young man said to another, “for telling me that I was not as bad [at efforts] as I thought I was. That meant a lot.”

The changes the young men experienced on the challenge, says Anthony Brau, program director, are not unusual.

“They are placed in an unfamiliar environment and must face themselves and their personal adversities. As they work together to meet their basic physical and emotional needs, they also begin to find the strength to overcome the challenging situations we introduce and then to be responsible for themselves while building a community,” he says.

Staff—on this excursion Brau and colleagues Kevin Jones and Marvin Butts—use a phased educational approach to help the participants build that community, develop responsibility and learn to be accountable for their actions.

The program’s learning phase emphasizes accepting responsibility for self and others with instruction focusing on the basics of outdoor living and camping as well as “Leave-No-Trace” principles. The expedition phase puts into practice fundamental wilderness skills and pushes group members to form effective relationships. Reflection consists of a 72-hour solo experience that provides the young men with the opportunity to think about the choices that prompted their referral to the program—and how they will use what they have learned when they return to their home and community.

The short-term intervention program addresses a wide range of concerns, including social and school adversities, family dysfunction, accountability for probation violations and drug and alcohol issues, among others.

If the possibility of earning a clean record—or at least one with only a misdemeanor on it—is not sufficient motivation, the young men have their own skin in the game.

That’s because no county funds support the Youthful Offenders Program; rather, the youths pay a portion of the cost of the challenge, the remainder funded by anonymous donors who recognize the value of the program in turning young lives around while there is still time.

More donations, of course, are always needed for a program like this, says Jason Brode, assistant administrator for Diakon Youth Services. “The value of the program can be incalculable,” he says, “when you compare the costs of this service against those—not just in financial terms but also in terms of lives affected—if the young men commit further offenses that require additional interventions or even incarceration. It truly can be a life-saving service.”

The nine did not just finish the program, said one participant. “We excelled at it!” To which another concluded: “I won’t let any of you down.”



# Cumberland Crossings celebrates 25th anniversary

## STAFF MEMBERS OF CUMBERLAND

Crossings, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, celebrate the Diakon senior living community's 25th anniversary. The early-fall anniversary event featured remarks by residents and leadership plus a variety of entertainment including musical groups composed of Cumberland Crossings residents. The senior living community began as a model independent living home constructed at the former MJ Mall by a local health-care group. In 2003, Diakon purchased the senior living community—which now consists of numerous independent living homes, a personal care center and a skilled nursing and rehabilitation care center—from the Carlisle Area Health & Wellness Foundation.



# Horger, Kern accorded special board honor

**TWO LONG-TERM MEMBERS** of Diakon-related boards of directors have been appointed to a new and special board role—that of director emeritus.

Attorney Paul Horger of Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania, and Peter Kern, a retired hospital executive from Brodheadsville, Pennsylvania, were appointed directors emeritus by the Diakon Board of Directors because “of their extraordinary commitment to Diakon. The goal of this recognition is not only to honor their long-term service, but also to maintain Diakon’s relationship with them and to seek counsel from them as appropriate from time to time,” says Mark T. Pile, Diakon president/CEO.

The designation is a lifetime one and, as the board itself described in making the appointments, one “reserved as a special honor of the highest order for past directors. The honorary title expresses the board’s appreciation and gratitude for outstanding and dedicated service to the organization.”

Both men currently serve on the Diakon Lutheran Fund Board of Directors, with their terms concluding the end of 2016. However, both have served long-term on a variety of other Diakon-related boards.

Kern served as a board leader from Lutheran Services Northeast during the affiliation and merger process that created Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries in 2000; he was among the first board members of the newly created organization. He became involved in the organization in 1992 through board service with LWS of Northeastern Pennsylvania, one of the organizations that eventually became Lutheran Services Northeast. Having been a member of various Diakon-related boards continuously since then, he has held roles on executive committees and served as corporate secretary and chairman of the compensation committee.

“I valued the opportunity to serve in this way and I will continue to lend my support to the Diakon mission,” Kern says.

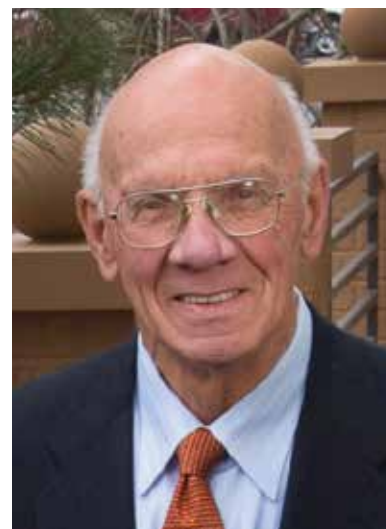
Horger began his association with the organization a few years earlier, in 1990, when he joined the board of LWS. He then served as a board member with Lutheran Services Northeast through the Diakon merger, joining the board of Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries two years after the 2000 merger. He has served as chair of both the Diakon Lutheran Fund and DSLM boards of directors as well as chair of the boards’ development committee. “Whatever my contribution to the various Diakon boards, I have received significantly more in return in working with the dedicated and talented staff leadership team and fellow board members in realizing the various missions of Diakon. I will always treasure my association with Diakon,” he says.

Both Horger and Kern are long-term members of the overall Diakon board.

“Both Peter and Paul have been exemplary leaders over the years in their service to the Diakon organizations and to the growing number of people served through our ministries. Their exceptional board service has reflected their deep commitment to our mission,” says Pile.



*Paul Horger, Esq.*



*Peter Kern*



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