

The plight of the homeless

Remembering Chantell

The first line of Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans' mission statement refers to the dignity of each human person. Because of our Catholic belief that every life is precious and should be celebrated, our staff put forth special



effort to see that the death of 36 year-old Chantell Christopher, one of our homeless clients, was commemorated by those who knew and loved her.

Our St. John the Baptist Community Center staff is well acquainted with many of the homeless people who live beneath the overpass of the elevated Pontchartrain Expressway that slices through downtown New Orleans. The center runs a homeless employment program and provides a variety of services for those without permanent housing.

When the staff learned that a woman had been brutally beaten to death and her body stuffed into the crawl space of an exit ramp in the shadow of the community center, they feared the worst. In fact, the victim was Chantell, a kind soul well known to St. John's homeless outreach workers. Chantell was mentally ill and had been separated from her family since Hurricane Katrina.

Chantell's death was a shock to the tight-knit community of street people who knew her well and appreciated her kind and gentle nature. St. John's staff decided to organize a celebration of Chantell's life at the center. The April 28th memorial service included prayers, reflection and music, and was

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attended by those who knew her and many who did not. "This service was in honor of Chantell and also the mentally ill and the homeless," said Christi Langoni, a homeless employment specialist with Catholic Charities. "We have a good community here, and she needed to be honored." Chantell's April 9th murder is still unsolved. Police suspect robbery was the motive.

Sheldon's success

Sheldon lived on the streets for two years. While he had qualified for disability benefits from the Social Security Administration (SSA), he was deemed unable to manage his own benefits. Sheldon had no one to help him, so SSA suspended his payments.

During those two years, Sheldon lived with whomever would take him, but he often found himself homeless and in-and-out of jail for loitering.

An outreach worker from UNITY of Greater New Orleans found Sheldon during one of his many periods of living on the streets, without his medication or disability benefits. One of Catholic Charities' case managers, Brian, took on Sheldon's case, starting with signing up to manage Sheldon's benefits so he would no longer be homeless. Brian helped Sheldon with his benefits for two years: in this time, Sheldon was able to acquire affordable housing, furniture and had help with monthly budgeting.

After managing his monthly expenses with Brian's help for two years, Sheldon successfully petitioned SSA to receive his own check. He opened a bank account and has been paying his own rent and monthly bills for the past year.

A busy 40th anniversary year

Our ACCESS Pregnancy and Referral Centers have a lot to celebrate in their 40th anniversary year.

On June 5, our team hosted the very successful Jazz Brunch at City Park's Pavilion of the Two Sisters to support the program. Auxiliary Bishop Shelton Fabre celebrated mass for around 200 attendees. After mass, the party got started with brunch and an exciting silent auction, featuring art, hotel stays, restaurant gift certificates and more. All proceeds benefit the pro-life programs of Catholic Charities.

Last month, ACCESS expanded its service area. In

addition to operating centers in Metairie and on the West Bank, ACCESS has made pregnancy support services,



including pregnancy testing, ultrasound, case management, on-line Medicaid enrollment and educational classes to women facing unplanned pregnancies available in the city of New Orleans at two Daughters of Charity Health Centers.

"Catholic Charities and Daughters of Charity decided to collaborate more than a year ago in order to reach abortion-vulnerable women," Michelle Black, Executive Director of Pro-Life Services for Catholic Charities, said. "Women are underserved in New Orleans, where there are two abortion facilities and few pregnancy support resources. We felt called to change that."

ACCESS services are available in Bywater on Mondays and Thursdays and in Carrollton on Tuesdays. Services are available in Metairie and on the West Bank on weekdays.

NEW PROGRAM LOCATIONS!
ACCESS Pregnancy & Referral Centers are now operating in the Bywater & Carrollton areas of New Orleans. Call (504) 427-1278 for more information.

Café Hope's Favorite

NFL players all over the country are spending this spring doing something other than the usual spring workouts with their teammates. New England Patriots defensive lineman and West Bank native Marlon Favorite is making a big impact spending his time mentoring at-risk youth at Café Hope.

At 6' 1" and 317 lbs, Patriots defensive lineman Marlon Favorite flips what he calls "the crazy switch" on the football field. But at Café Hope, when he's counseling the kids or giving them a pep talk, he is the very definition of the term "gentle giant." Marlon relates to the kids as an NFL star, but also as a player who has seen his share of adversity and had the courage and work ethic to get through it.

Though a defensive stand-out at LSU and a member of the BCS championship team that defeated Ohio State in 2008, Favorite went undrafted after his graduation from LSU in 2009. The Gretna native has bounced around the NFL, signing and being released from the Panthers, Seahawks, Colts and others. Marlon was signed to the Saints practice squad in January of 2010 and remained with the team through the Super Bowl win, but was released soon after. His luck seemed to change when he was signed by the New England Patriots to their practice squad during the playoffs last season and was offered a contract for the 2011 season. Then came the collapse of the collective bargaining

agreement and the player lock-out this spring.

He's working out daily with other NFL players in the area and can't wait to get back to work with his teammates on the field. But until then, he spends a lot of time with the Café Hope students. At 24 years old, he's not much older than they are. He's able to relate to them. His message is one of hope, hard work and spirituality. He's a guy who says a quiet prayer before every meal and is quick to give God the glory for his achievements.

We, at CCANO, are huge football fans and can't wait to see the contract issues between the NFL owners and players resolved. But until then, we have to say, Marlon is one of our Favorites!



Marlon is part of the Café Hope Youth Services team, which also includes Chandler August, Morgan Caldwell and Stewart Young.