

The Herrington Recovery

Alumni Association Newsletter



From the Desk of our President

Hello Alumni, Friends, and Supporters,

I hope you are all doing well and enjoying the Fall season. I was a resident at Herrington in the Fall of 2006, so I always find myself reflecting on my journey at this time of year. I am so grateful for Herrington and the

ability to be part of this life-changing community.

A big part of our HMAA and recovery community came together on Saturday, Nov 9th for our 2nd annual Fall Ball. This was a wonderful event to promote community, connection, and having a blast in recovery. A little over 200 people gathered at the Oconomowoc Community Center for an evening of food, music, and fellowship. The event started with a terrific BBQ dinner provided by local restaurant Smoke on the Water. It filled my heart as I looked around the crowded room packed with alumni, current HRC residents, sober living residents, and other recovering individuals and loved ones. We were joined by some very special guests including Cindy Meyer, CEO of Rogers Behavioral Health and Brian Kay, Chief Strategy Officer of Rogers Behavioral Health. They both offered insights into Rogers' past achievements and the organization's future direction. We were also joined by the Mayor of Oconomowoc, Bob Magnus, who shared some thoughts on the positive relationship between Rogers and the city. Then we moved to the main event featuring foot-stomping country music by our very own Billy O'Dwyer and his band Chasin' Mason. Everyone had a great time, and I was already being asked how we will top the Fall Ball next year. (I don't know the answer just yet, but will certainly try!)

As always, an event of this magnitude requires a ton of planning, coordination, and hard work. I want to express my sincere appreciation to all of you who helped with set-up, clean-up, ticket sales, preparation, promotion, etc. There are a few folks I'd like to call out specifically: Billy O'Dwyer and his band members volunteered their time, equipment, and musical genius to this event. Thank you so much, Billy, for making the evening truly unforgettable! My wife Debbie Elston and Brad's

wife Leah Ingram were once again the Fall Ball's MVPs – they wholeheartedly dedicated themselves to every aspect of the event—from the decorations and food service to the countless little details that came together to make the evening memorable. Their support of our HMAA events is awe-inspiring. And finally, I'd like to give a huge shout out to Brad Ingram. Brad spearheaded the Fall Ball 2024 committee and was the driving force behind this year's event. His tireless effort and unwavering dedication were instrumental in bringing the Fall Ball to life, and he consistently exemplifies outstanding service to others. Finally, THANK YOU to those who came to the event; our community is what makes these occasions so meaningful.

The HMAA is also gearing up for our next big event: the 37th Annual HMAA Winter Retreat. The retreat will be held January 3-5, 2025, at the Redemptorist Retreat Center in Oconomowoc. Jim Dropik does an outstanding job organizing and facilitating this unique event. There is a Winter Retreat flyer with additional details included within this newsletter. I hope you'll consider attending this wonderful time of reflection, fellowship, and rejuvenation.

I would love to hear from you on what else our board can be doing to serve you. I always welcome your feedback and ideas so please feel free to reach out to me using my contact information below. I look forward to staying connected with all of you and promoting the blessings of recovery.

Scott Elston
262-442-0837 | cscottelston@gmail.com



Now you can use your smartphone to donate to the HMAA using Pay Pal. Just use your smartphone to scan this QR code.



Herrington McBride

Sponsored

37th Annual Winter Retreat

January 3rd - 5th, 2025



Friday Registration 3:00 - 6:00 pm until Sunday Afternoon 12:30pm

(Attendees must be recovering from their Addictions)

Redemptorist Retreat Center

1800 Timber Trail Lane - Oconomowoc, Wisconsin

All Registration Forms must be Sent by Friday, December 13th, 2024

“ GOD! I NEED A FAVOR ”

Keynote Speaker: Michelle S.

Cost is \$270.00 which includes all meals & 2 night's lodging. Married Couple \$440.00

Scholarships are available through "The Brian Kenevan Scholarship Fund" for those who require financial assistance to attend the retreat. Those requesting scholarships are asked to contribute what they can honestly afford. We set our rate to just cover costs. Please contact Jim Dropik for all scholarship requests which are confidential.

Please Note: Anyone arriving under the influence of any mood-altering substance will be asked to leave immediately and no refund will be given. Refunds will be made only up to two weeks prior to the retreat, as we have to pre-pay at the retreat center.

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venmo

or

MAKE CHECK PAYABLE
TO: HMAA

Send directly to:
Jim Dropik
S70 W15884 Princeton Ct
Muskego, WI 53150

REGISTRATION FORM DUE WITH PAYMENT BY FRIDAY, DEC. 13, 2024

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: () _____ Email: _____

Need a 1st floor room? Yes _____

Roommate? Yes _____ Roommate's Name: _____

Willing to share a room? Yes _____ No _____

Registration Fee: \$270.00 Married Couple \$440.00

Donation to Brian Kenevan Scholarship Fund : _____

*Donations will help those needing scholarships

Total Amount of Check \$ _____



My Story

Hello, I'm Ray, and I'm an alcoholic. On August 28, 2024, I celebrated 38 years of sobriety. I faithfully attend AA meetings at the Ladish Center and fellowship with residents and alumni of the Herrington Recovery Center.

I was exposed to alcohol at a very young age—around 5 or 6—and I clearly remember my family drinking various types of alcohol at gatherings. It was a common

part of our social life, and there always seemed to be an air of fun and celebration around it. Eventually, I was given the chance to take small sips. Although the taste wasn't great, I found the warm sensation it created inside intriguing. It was a feeling that surfaced every time I drank, like a comforting yet subtle trap, drawing me into something I had no idea where it would take me.

As I grew, alcohol became something I viewed as a symbol of maturity. My friends and I wanted to seem older than we were, so we drank to feel 'grown-up.' This led us to find ways to obtain alcohol even when we were neither old enough nor wealthy enough to purchase it. Trouble was lurking on the horizon. When I reached adulthood, I found myself integrating alcohol into nearly all my activities, without realizing how I was prioritizing it over everything else. Drinking and smoking were things 'grown-ups do,' and now that I was an adult, I felt like I had earned the right. I started to adopt a self-important attitude, even carrying my own flask to prove how 'cool' I was. Now, I had the freedom to get drunk anywhere I wanted!

I drank in the Air Force, I drank after I got married, and I drank at my job—and it all felt acceptable at the time. I never missed work, but I skipped family events like holidays and birthdays. My drinking eventually caused tension with my first wife, and my sons lost respect for me as well. I always showed up to work and kept up with the bills, but in hindsight, I realize I was using those things as excuses to justify my drinking.

Eventually, my job required additional responsibility, I was turning 40 years old, and my wife was exasperated and said she thought I was an alcoholic. Our relationship was breaking down, yet I denied my condition and provided an ultimatum: I would get tested and if the doctors didn't find me addicted, I would no longer listen to her concerns. My plan was to avoid drinking for a few days so the test would be negative. However, instead of testing my blood, I was given a 12-question questionnaire which indicated that I was an alcoholic. I felt trapped and yet knew I needed to make a change. I had applied for a more demanding job role and realized I wouldn't excel if I was constantly hungover. I also understood that if I didn't change my ways, I was only shortening my life. As a result, I spent the next 30 days in outpatient treatment at Elmbrook Hospital. I worked from 7 am to 3 pm and attended treatment from 4 pm to 10 pm. During those 30 days, I made a promise to myself to stick with the program. When I graduated, I was encouraged to find a sponsor and find Alcoholics Anonymous meetings to attend.

My relationship with my wife was still on a downhill slope and we

eventually separated. I spent time at my parents' house and had to find an AA meeting nearby. I looked in the Where and When directory and found a night meeting at a local church. When I arrived at the church, a clergyman answered the door and informed me the meeting was no longer there. This was ultimately a test for me; I could find a bar or bottle store, or I could go home and make a new plan. I chose to make a new plan. I found a different meeting.

Ultimately, my wife informed me she wanted a divorce; despite this I felt a sense of relief and we proceeded. My sons were still unhappy with me and my behavior and were reluctant to spend time with me. I was on my own. We sold the home we built together, I found an apartment close to my job, and I found meetings near me. The loss of my family, my home, and a lot of other material things was another test, but I didn't give up. I had a good sponsor, found good meetings, and took things one day at a time.

Previously, when I looked back at my history, it was shameful. Every day since, things have gotten better and better. I found a new love, we bought a new home, the material comforts came as needed, and my sons saw I was doing well and began to interact with me positively. I started attending church every Sunday and became an usher. My connection with God grew and continues getting stronger. Despite ongoing life hurdles including illness, loss of parents, loss of great pets, and tragically the loss of one son due to cancer, I have maintained my sobriety.

~ Ray E.

No Longer Digging



My struggle with an alcohol use disorder/addiction has been years in the making, however the last five or six years it had taken over my life. I no longer knew myself anymore. I had been to detox on a couple occasions and gone through several in and outpatient classes, speaking with counselors and therapists, but residential was something I wouldn't consider. I thought, 'Not me, no way, I'm not like THOSE people.' These were things my ego would tell me, and I believed it because I didn't know

another way and wouldn't look at things differently. Change is never easy for anyone. However, when you're in your mid-forties, with a lifetime of experiences, beliefs, and assumptions, only to have everything come crashing down, turned upside down, and inside out — and to realize it's your own doing — it's truly heartbreaking. Thoughts like, 'No one owes you anything,' and 'If you want it, you're the only one who can make it happen,' are tough but essential truths we all must face. The saying, 'If nothing changes, nothing changes' finally started to hit home.

I returned to another IOP session at Silver Lake one morning and explained to my nurse that I relapsed the night before. My blood pressure readings were high, and I was feeling very sick. The nurse voiced in sadness, 'Jake, how much longer can you keep doing this to yourself? You know you don't have to hit rock bottom; rock bottom is wherever you choose to stop digging.' That conversation and long talks with friends and family gave me the strength to admit I was ready to accept help. I entered

the Herrington McBride Residential Treatment Center on the Rogers campus in Oconomowoc on February 23, 2024. This is where my 'change' began over the next month. I began to learn about the 'Three-legged stool of addiction' and how it had consumed my life.

#1 The Physical Aspect. For years I tried every option imaginable to find relief from the self-inflicted symptoms of physical addiction: sweats, shaking, dry heaving, withdrawals, etc. You name it, I tried it: diet fads, cleanses, hypnosis, etc. If someone told me they had an answer to make me feel normal, I was willing to try it. The problem is, they never worked, or at least not for long. I had no rendering of what 'normal' was anymore. My only way to stop the physical withdrawals was to drink to prevent them and then rinse and repeat. That cycle is what's referred to as an allergic reaction. My body simply doesn't tolerate alcohol. Yet, whenever I consume it, I convince myself otherwise, which brings me to the second aspect.

#2 The Mental Aspect. Last September, I went to detox a second time and then participated in outpatient treatment for a few weeks. The outpatient classes covered mental health and the concept of 'dual diagnosis,' which refers to the common occurrence of both addiction and an underlying mental health disorder. In other words, along with physical addiction, many individuals also struggle with mental health challenges or poor coping skills, leading them to engage in behaviors where excess becomes harmful. Things like excessive shopping, spending, prescription or over the counter drugs, eating, smart phones, video games, binge watching TV, or even exercise. Anything that tells your brain, 'Hey that feels good, do it again.' However, when done in excess, the brain undergoes changes, becoming reliant on constant stimulation and a steady flow of dopamine. When not fulfilled, symptoms of depression and anxiety result, including anger, irritability, discomfort, and misery. Years of drinking changed the chemistry in my brain to expect and want something that is not physically sustainable. The key to managing it is recognizing the urge and then choosing healthy behaviors to ride it out until it passes. At times, this can feel overwhelming and unbearable, even for just a few minutes. But I've learned that the temporary relief of feeling better in the moment doesn't compare to the long-term consequences of giving in. How I act, what I do to myself, and how I treat others when I drink and the pain and misery that comes with it isn't worth it. It never was. I was just too blind to see it and even when I finally learned to stop, I still needed to learn how to let go.

#3 The Spiritual Aspect. Among the Twelve Steps of AA, only one step, the First Step, talks about alcohol. In that step we admit that we no longer have any control over what alcohol does to us and accept that it has wreaked havoc in our lives. While that step can be difficult for some to accept, it was not for me. My drinking career proved that I do not have control over my addiction. I learned that I have a specific group of character defects that I must remain vigilant towards to avoid returning to my old ways. I refer to these defects as the AFTER: (A)nger, (F)eat, (T)rauma, (E)go, and (R)esentment. I ask my Higher Power God to help me daily with the AFTER so I can be a better man tomorrow than I am today. When I'm not doing this, my judgment becomes cloudy, I get too logical or overly emotional, and I become narrow-minded and selfish. This creates a mental tailspin, prompting me to seek other things or substances to make me feel better which can cause a relapse. Two tools that I use to avoid this is to remain connected with other like-minded alcoholics within the AA program and continually engage in acts of service, giving back to the program and people that have given me so much. The program has provided me with an opportunity to meet some truly wonderful and giving people that I am proud to call my friends. Attending meetings, helping at events, and having a sense of purpose is profoundly

impactful. While isolation is an ingrained trait, getting out of myself and engaging is important for my recovery. Therefore, I ask God daily to help me be of service to others.

A couple weeks after discharging from Herrington in March 2024, I was sitting with both of my teenage daughters who have witnessed first-hand the impact of my addiction. My youngest asked me, 'Dad, can you promise us that you will never drink again?' A couple of years ago, I likely would have promised that I'd never drink again, but that would have been a lie, even though my intention was never to hurt them again. I told her, 'Honey, all I can promise you is that I will not drink today.' I don't think she understood at first, but once I explained my response in more detail, I think she understood. I can only control what's in front of me, right here, right now and God will handle the rest. If nothing else, I hope my daughters have learned from my experience how crucial it is to seek help when you need it.

I could tell you many great things that have happened since I started my recovery journey almost 9 months ago. I will close with this: While not every day in recovery is easy, I can confidently say that my worst day in recovery is still far better than the best day I ever had while using. Thank you to all the staff at Rogers who have helped in my recovery, and to all the friends I have made during this journey. God's peace be with you and remember, you are enough.

~Jake B.



A Journey of Recovery: Accepting Addiction and Finding Sobriety

On January 20, 2024, I never could have imagined I'd end up where I am today: happy, healthy, and alive. How did I go from 'there' to 'here?' I grew up in an upper-middle-class family in a nice neighborhood with many great memories playing with neighbor kids, going on family vacations, and playing competitive soccer. My dad had been to alcohol treatment when I was six years old, but I never really understood what that meant. In general, alcohol was not around much while I was growing up.

Moving to a new city right before 8th grade was a big shift. The kids there seemed to be ahead of me, moving at a much faster pace. This became especially apparent when I started high school and heard about parties involving drinking and drugs. Being someone who always followed the rules, I steered clear of experimenting with substances, mainly out of fear of getting into trouble. However, that changed as high school went on.

One of my first memories of drinking was when my friend and I stole alcohol from her parents' liquor cabinet and went to an underage dance club, where I went by the code name 'Vanessa.' I don't remember anything other than my Dad having to pick me up. It's quite scary, having complete blackouts at 16 or 17 years old, especially knowing that many more would follow. My friend group changed a few times, but I was generally well-liked and had acclimated perfectly in my junior year. I went from somewhat awkward to being on senior prom court. When I headed off to college, I might have appeared confident, but inside, I was anything but. I struggled with liking myself, not knowing my identity and wanting to fit

in with every single person I met.

College in Iowa brought another wave of challenges. I quickly bonded with a group of girls on my floor, many of whom remain my best friends today. Greek life was important there, and I was eager to join my friends as Alpha Phis. However, my rejection due to not having a high GPA left me feeling socially isolated. It sounds foolish now, but back then, it felt like everything. I soon became known for my frequent drunken mishaps—always happy but often one drink too many. My lack of an ‘off switch’ became increasingly evident after I attended a fraternity party. Despite remembering exactly what I was wearing and who I left with, I found myself in the hospital requiring my stomach to be pumped with no memory of the incident. Instead of that serving as a wake-up call, my drinking intensified, in part due to shame and embarrassment. During my junior year I drove my friend and I home from a bar and made it two blocks before crashing into a tree, resulting in my first DUI. Although I tried to quit drinking and isolate myself, it didn’t last long, and I continued finding myself in dangerous situations on campus and while studying abroad in Spain. I experimented with various drugs as well, but alcohol was the one ‘friend’ that always gave me the courage and relief I needed.

After graduation, my routine of drinking on weekends became ingrained in my life. I got married in 2011 and welcomed my son in 2015, feeling healthy as I easily abstained from drinking and smoking while pregnant. It was so easy for me to stop cold turkey then, which meant I could totally control my use - right? The stress of balancing motherhood and a demanding job began to take its toll. I began drinking more at home instead of the occasional few drinks at dinner during date night. My husband’s work trips created resentments, and I felt pressure to maintain the facade that everything was fine. Any opportunity for a night out to socialize, I would overcompensate by drinking in excess. Comments about my drinking habits from multiple people only fueled my need to hide my alcohol use, leading to a downward spiral. Handling myself and my issues alone was just too hard, and asking for help was even harder. I had no other tools to deal with my unmanageable life. All I knew was alcohol which provided me the ‘cloud buzz’ so I didn’t have to deal with another stressful thought.

The onset of the COVID intensified my struggles. Working remotely, I found ways to sneak drinks during the afternoons, hiding mini bottles in my car. It became almost a game at one point. I always needed to ‘run an errand’ on lunch breaks to get out of the house, while in reality I was going to a store to stock my surplus. I experienced anxiety and memory loss, often waking up in a panic, not remembering the entire end of my workday or dinner. My boss and my husband expressed concern over my changes in behavior, but I continued to sweep the issues under the rug. My life became so unmanageable that there were times I had to pull over the car because I had to be sick. I even crashed my car into a McDonald’s pole with my son in the backseat because I could not stop my car quick enough to be sick. I totaled my car, yet I still didn’t get the wake-up call I needed. The talk of divorce came up, as my husband and I had been living separate lives for quite some time. Yet my drinking couldn’t have been that bad because no one urged me to get help - right?

In June 2022, I moved into my own place for the first time ever, feeling deeply depressed and anxious about what that meant for my son. The stigma of divorce weighed heavily on me, and I constantly feared judgment from others, as if I could somehow control the narrative. A week before I moved out, I received another DUI, this time caught by someone calling in my plates as they noticed my swerving. I was

arrested in front of my neighbors while my son was thankfully not at home. I was forced by my family to seek treatment, so naturally I chose the IOP program because it required the least time commitment. I stayed sober for six weeks as I didn’t want to fail a urinalysis, but the day I graduated I purchased alcohol.

Living alone and unable to reach out for help, my mental and physical health deteriorated. During the workday on July 5th, I was ordered to take a drug test or resign from my job due to my suspicious and non-coherent behavior. I refused the test, leading to my resignation after working there for 14 years. Drinking became an isolated routine. I concealed it by hiding bottles in crazy places and alternating locations where I disposed of empty bottles, ensuring I wasn’t seen at the same place regularly. I avoided purchasing alcohol at the same stores as I didn’t want people to judge me. I calculated the hours I needed to metabolize alcohol to successfully pass my ignition interlock device.

I was mostly drinking on the nights when I didn’t have my son. MOSTLY, until January 20th. I woke up slightly hungover in preparation for my son to be dropped off. I had a few mini bottles left which I quickly swigged to avoid getting physically sick. I took my son to basketball practice and proceeded to the liquor store. I stored the bottles I purchased in my favorite hiding place - the spare tire area. When we arrived at baseball practice later in the afternoon, I knew I had those bottles and reasoned I should drink them to avoid being sick. I drank more than a few and was soon pulled to the side by the baseball director who voiced concern: ‘Christa... I do not think you are in a condition to drive, and I will not let you behind the wheel.’ My mother was called and thankfully my son got home safely. The baseball director was a godsend and my guardian angel that day.

What I finally realized is that I can’t keep doing this. I won’t do it anymore. I gave up trying to have all the answers, because clearly, I had none when it came to doing this alone. I wanted and needed help, and I couldn’t keep ignoring that. I called Rogers and entered Herrington Recovery Center on January 26th. Whatever needed to click, CLICKED for me during that baseball practice and gloriously it was MY decision. Without Rogers and the introduction to Alcoholics Anonymous, I know with absolute certainty that I would be in a much darker place than I am now—if I were here at all. I finally realized I am an alcoholic and had to turn over everything to God, who has always been my Savior. My relationship moving forward with Him was one of gratitude and appreciation, versus blame for the various negativities in my life. At my first AA meeting, I shared my story openly; a story for which I had carried my whole life. I acknowledged my addiction and surrendered my struggles to God. How refreshing to meet people from all walks of life, yet who truly understand what you are going through. The AA fellowship, my sponsors, my sober network, and my family and friends are who I must thank daily. I speak to at least 2-3 people from AA every single day, attend meetings, practice gratitude, pray, AND I applaud and love myself. I am the happiest and healthiest I have ever been, and I know it’s only going to get better. Each day I continue to wake up and choose not to drink. I remember what my sponsor said to me very early on: one hour at a time, sometimes one minute at a time, and certainly one day at a time.

~ Christa B.

We Are Stronger Together

"A new life of endless possibilities can be lived if we are willing to continue our awakening through the practice of [the] Twelve Steps." - Bill W.

ROGERS BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AA MEETINGS

Ladish Center - 34700 Valley Road, Oconomowoc, WI 53066

Monday - 7 pm, Wednesday - 7 pm, Thursday - 6 pm, Saturday - 7:04 am, Sunday - 8:30 am & 6:00 pm

Lincoln Center - 2424 South 102nd Street, West Allis, WI 53227, Thursday - 7 pm



To find local AA meetings download Meeting Guide app:

To find local NA meetings visit: <https://usa-na.org/find-na/>

To find local Al-Anon meetings visit: <https://al-anon.org/al-anon-meetings/find-an-al-anon-meeting/>

Visit the international **Online Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous (OIAA)** for virtual AA meetings at: <https://aa-intergroup.org/meetings/>

Alumni interested in participating in **RAP speaking** or **PIZZA nights** with current HRC residents please contact Kenny Blaine: kennyblaine0@gmail.com or 414-559-5529

For more information about the **Herrington McBride Alumni Association** visit: <https://rogersbh.org/hmaa>

Herrington McBride Board Members

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The Herrington Recovery is published by The Herrington McBride Association – a not-for-profit organization, with the generous help of Rogers Behavioral Health

Layout and Printing - Village Graphics Printing, Hartland, WI

Your story is valuable! Alumni interested in sharing your HRC recovery journey or loved ones of alumni interested in sharing their experience, please contact the Editor. Also, please send name, telephone, address, and email changes to:

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