

# A Hand Up

## JACKSON PARK MINISTRIES HELPS FAMILIES THROUGH ACCOUNTABILITY

TEXT BY RICK HOUSTON PHOTOGRAPHY BY GERIN CHOINIERE



It all started with a determined deacon and a recent college graduate who had a vision.

Jackson Park Baptist Church was “dying” and was for sale. Only 25 or so members remained in 1985, and the plan of the church’s part time pastor was to take the proceeds from the sale and relocate the church to a better location.

Enter Bill Reid, who became a member and deacon chairman, and a recent college graduate, Kelvin Smith, who wanted to do community ministry. Reid was instrumental in getting the church off the market and convincing the members to make Smith both the church pastor and community minister. Reid’s philosophy was that the church needed the community, and the community needed the church. Thus, Jackson Park Ministries (JPM) was born.

Smith, with the assistance of Reid and his wife Naomi, and Dale Shields and his wife Kris, began ministering to the children of Jackson Park, along with volunteers and financial support from several local churches. From this small beginning, JPM has evolved into a very large ministry serving thousands

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord,*

*“Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, Plans to give you hope and a future.”*

Jeremiah 29:11

of clients each year.

The ministry’s 11 acre campus will eventually include 39 transitional housing units for families that are part of Jackson Park’s stabilization and strengthening program.

In 1996 the ministry acquired the first sixteen apartments adjacent to its property to remodel and house families with children while they undergo a “Tough Love” program designed to help them become good parents, good employees, and wise stewards of their finances. Emphasis is also given toward strengthening their spiritual lives.

According to Reid, one of Jackson Park’s first buildings was the worst crack house in Charlotte when it was purchased. While gutting the place, needles and cockroaches were swept out with the rest of the trash.

“The ministry just sort of evolved into a very large multifaceted ministry,” says Reid, who serves as

chairman of the board and executive director for Jackson Park Ministries. “We have food, clothing, furniture, rent assistance, utilities assistance, children’s programs, tutoring, computer lab, a big Thanksgiving ministry, a big Christmas ministry, eight to ten weeks of all-day Bible camp in the summer, and a unique transitional housing ministry.”

Listening to Reid recite this list of things that are taking place at Jackson Park, it’s easy to get the impression that the ministry is just getting started. Those looking for a free ride, however, are out of luck. The ministry’s website ([jacksonpark.org](http://jacksonpark.org)) says that it seeks to help people “by giving them a hand up and not a hand out.”

“The transitional housing ministry is a real tough love program,” says Bob Lamoureux, pastor and operations director at Jackson Park. “We’re not talking about a hand out by any means. When you step through the doors here at this ministry, we mean

*"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,*

*I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me."*

Matthew 25: 35-36

business. We're going to speak the truth into your life, regardless."

Here's how Jackson Park's transitional housing program works:

While staying in one of the operation's quadrangles, parents are required to attend marriage, finance and parenting classes. There are curfews, no-notice drug tests and apartment inspections. Each family's income is turned in to Jackson Park counselors, and in turn, the ministry provides a volunteer financial manager who manages and accounts for the money. A savings account is established and a budget is worked out. The ministry cuts a weekly check to cover only those expenses that are absolutely necessary. After completion of a 12 week financial training course, participants begin managing their own finances.

"I had a lady tell me last week it's like a jail," Lamoureux says with a smile. "I said, 'No, it's not. It's good, Christian living. Take care of this home that God has provided for you.' We're just telling them, 'Hey, when you use this laundry room, which is free to you, empty the trash can. Empty the lint thing. Just be responsible.'"

When participants in the program either graduate or leave, they receive 100 percent of the money from their account. Approximately 50-60 percent of those who take part eventually graduate. Typically, the program takes 12 to 15 months to complete.

Jackson Park has two live-in counselors who help oversee the program.

"We ask for a heart and willingness to change," Lamoureux says. "That's what we ask, if they can come here and be willing to put everything aside. We've got to change their playmates and their play pen, get them out of the drug world, the alcohol world. Whatever their dysfunction is, we've got to get them out and in one of our apartments." Transitional housing residents are free to leave at any time.

"The doors are always open for them to leave," Lamoureux continues. "We never hold anybody. If they want to leave, as soon as they leave the apartment and they hand in their keys, we give them all their money. We're here to work with them, but the tough love part is speaking the truth into their lives, saying, 'Wait a minute . . . you're going down the wrong road.'"

"Some have alcohol and drug addictions. All of them have financial problems. We're trying to create



a plan for them to eliminate their debt, start a nice savings account, and learn how to manage their spiritual and family lives."

Many success stories have come out of Jackson Park Ministries. One family—consisting of a husband, wife and four children—had arrived there in a car with no air conditioning. All of their belongings were in the trunk.

They had already sought help at several other area churches, to no avail. Jackson Park put them in a motel for a week, then brought them into the transitional housing program. Ten months later, they graduated, debt free.

"This year, they built a brand spanking new, beautiful home," Lamoureux says. "Their debt's still good. They still have income coming in like they were taught. Those are the things that we look for, change in every one of these families' lives. That is the cornerstone of this ministry."

Another graduate, a former drug addict, went to school and received a degree in Christian counseling. Today, she works at Jackson Park as a part-time counselor. In the end, Jackson Park Ministries is giving those who take part in its programs something they more than likely have never had before: Hope.

"We really want to make a difference in the city of Charlotte with families," Lamoureux concludes. "We want to see these families change. It's just exciting to see families who are absolutely hurting having a

place to go and having hope. We're not ones who want to get a pat on the back. We want to see the Lord receive all the glory for everything that's done here. It's all about Him." \*

## HELPING HANDS

Jackson Park Ministries operates on a shoestring budget because of the generous giving of compassionate people. Over one third of the staff are full time volunteers. Charlotte-area churches and organizations, along with hundreds of individuals, help Jackson Park Ministries. Here are just a few: Calvary Church, Central Church of God, Church at Charlotte, Sardis Presbyterian, Paw Creek Presbyterian, Christ Covenant, St. John's Episcopal, Sharon Baptist, Carmel Baptist, Providence Baptist, Good Shepherd United Methodist, Carmel Presbyterian, First Baptist Huntersville, Forest Pointe Church Belmont, Steele Creek Church of Charlotte, Life Pointe Church, Mulberry Baptist, First Baptist Charlotte, Joe Gibbs Racing, Queen City Optimist Club, and Smith Turf and Irrigation.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

You can help by becoming a volunteer or a monthly financial partner.

The *Jackson Park Cookbook* is a great collection of over 180 recipes compiled by the families and staff of JPM. Buy one for yourself and all of your friends at only \$10.00 each. Proceeds will be used to support children's and youth ministries.

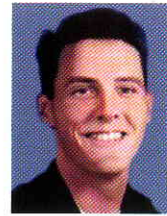
You may purchase a memorial paver to help with the restoration of the Nobles-Burnette Memorial Children's Park. Pavers start at \$50 and are tax deductible. Also, join in the fun at the November 5th Jackson Park Benefit Golf Tournament.

Visit the ministry at [www.jacksonpark.org](http://www.jacksonpark.org) or call 704.392.4981 for more information on these and other opportunities to lend a hand.

**LEFT** Jackson Park Ministries staff members (left to right) Melonie Nothnagle, Lynn Craig, Gail Tomlinson, Board Chairman/Executive Director Bill Reid, Tracy Davis, Donna Lamoureux, Jim Emery, Pastor/Operations Director Bob Lamoureux, Jean Telfort and Wade McHargue

**ABOVE** Delenthia McDaniels Brannum is a participant in the Jackson Park Ministries Transitional Housing Program. Delenthia is in the process of turning her life around and operates her own painting business. She gives God thanks for directing her to Jackson Park. Delenthia is pictured on the job.

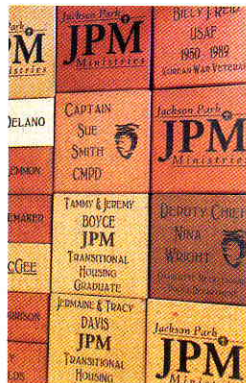
# Nobles-Burnette Children's Memorial Playground and Park



COURTESY OF ODELL

As you enter the small lobby of Jackson Park Ministries (JPM), you'll see a glass case full of trophies. Two familiar photographs are prominently displayed front and center, pictures of Charlotte police officers Andy Nobles and John Burnette, who were slain in the line of duty in October 1993.

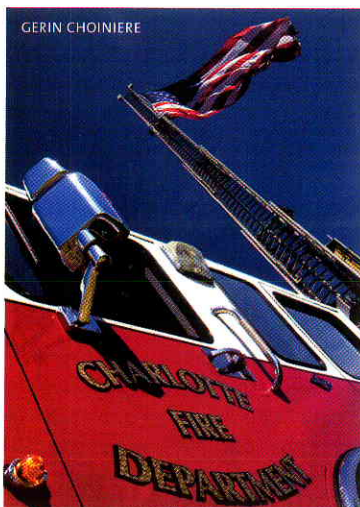
Andy Nobles and John Burnette not only served the community of Jackson Park, they loved the people. Two weeks before their tragic murders, Nobles and Burnette began plans for a neighborhood park, a



fun place and safe haven for the children. The project, on the grounds of JPM, never developed after they died.

JPM has revived plans to build the park as well as a soccer field for the children. The area under the shelter will be surfaced with pavers that can be purchased to honor or remember loved ones. JPM chairman Bill Reid bought four pavers, complete with paw prints, to remember his beloved pets.

To place a permanent marker in this beautiful park, call 704.392.4981 or visit [jacksonpark.org](http://jacksonpark.org).\*



GERIN CHOINIÈRE



On March 30, 2007, Charlotte police officers Sean Clark and Jeff Shelton were brutally murdered in the line of duty. The city grieved for our fallen heroes. A giant flag was raised on a firetruck outside Calvary Church, where the officers' funerals were held. People lined the streets as the funeral processions passed by to pay respect to the officers and their families. Sean Clark and Jeff Shelton will be remembered in the Nobles-Burnette Park.

## Hidden Treasures

Charlotte is full of surprises. When we decided to feature the city's west side in this issue of *Charlotte Place*, I wasn't sure there would be much to cover. After a little digging, we discovered hidden treasures all around. West Charlotte is exploding with color and possibilities.

Just west of Center City is Bank of America Stadium, home of the Carolina Panthers. A mile from the stadium is Wesley Heights, an old neighborhood being revitalized by people with energy and vision. (*West Side Story*, page 32.) The newly opened U.S. National Whitewater Center is a world class facility for Olympic training and family fun. (*Whitewater Fun Comes Rushing In*, page 102.)

As you head west out Wilkinson Boulevard, you'll see wide open spaces all around. The Ranch House Restaurant and Coyote Joe's inspire thoughts of the wild west as you head across the Catawba River to the quaint town of Belmont, with its renovated mill houses and luxury homes. The Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden presents a constant show of nature's colors. (*Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden*, page 50.)

On June 5th, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) opened the Billy Graham Library at its headquarters in southwest Charlotte. (*Billy Graham Comes Home*, page 40.) The Library offers an amazing

collection of fascinating memorabilia and Gospel messages. Some of my most precious memories include watching the Billy Graham Crusades on TV with my family when I was a little girl growing up in Charlotte. As I watched the dedication of the Library with people from all over the world, I felt that same sweet feeling once again. Charlotte is Billy Graham's hometown, and I, like so many others, am very glad he's come home.

The worldwide impact of BGEA is only part of the city's immeasurable outreach. Local citizens give their time and talent to help others, at home and around the world. (*Heart of Charlotte*, page 44.) Jackson Park Ministries is a shining example of people giving hope and "a hand up" to families with a heart to turn their lives around.

I believe you reap what you sow, which may explain our city's remarkable prosperity, for the outpouring of love from the hearts and hands of Charlotteans is sure to exceed the economic benefits. We dedicate this issue of *Charlotte Place* to the unseen, unsung heroes that make our city and the world a better place.

So go west, young man (and everyone else). Explore Charlotte's west side, help somebody in need, and you'll be surprised by the hidden treasures you will find.



*Kathy Buckley*

Kathy Buckley, Editor in Chief