



The Gateway

Summer 2021



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The E. Raymond Alexander Jr. Memorial Golf Tournament Turns 20!

By Ogi Overman

Typically, the rooms of recovery are just that —rooms. Meetings are generally held in rooms of churches, civic clubs, homes, and lately, even via Zoom. But, as Dr. Bob is alleged to have said, “All it takes for a meeting is a couple of drunks and a coffee pot.”

And sometimes even the coffee pot is optional.

For E. Raymond Alexander, Jr., the setting for a meeting was often a golf course. Whether it was a foursome, several foursomes, or, in special cases, just him and another drunk trying to stay sober, golf was a vehicle for fellowship, reaching out to those still struggling, and spreading the message.

Ray began organizing a Saturday morning round for a dozen or so of his fellow sober drunks, followed by a meal at the club or a nearby restaurant. Handicap was never an issue, but one Gateway Summer 2021



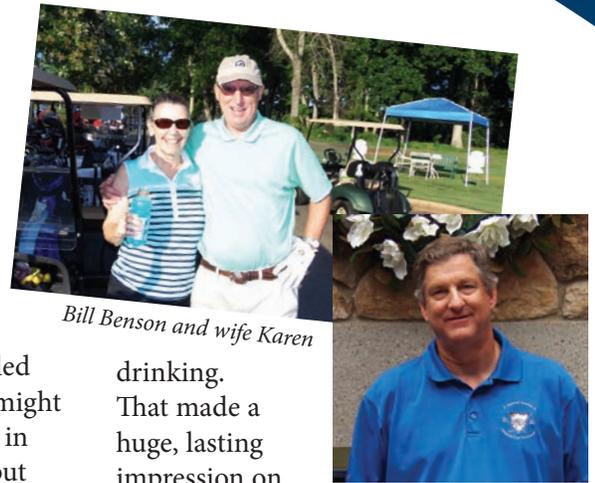
E. Raymond Alexander, Jr.

of the regulars at Ray’s outings happened to be a scratch golfer named Bill Benson.

“We would get together most Saturday mornings,” recalled Benson, “There might be 12 to 16 of us in the core group, but everyone was welcome.

It was just a fun way to be with your AA buddies and get in a good round among friends.”

Ray’s style was more subtle than sledgehammer. Boyd Watkins, who became one of the Saturday regulars, recalled a pre-sobriety round in which Ray singled him out to drive his cart. “Raymond said, ‘Boyd’s going to go with me; I’m gonna 12 step him.’ I figured, being a lawyer at the time, he was going to lay down the law to me, but he never did. We laughed the whole round. But what he was doing was showing me how much fun you could have without



Bill Benson and wife Karen

Boyd Watkins

drinking. That made a huge, lasting impression on me. I got sober a few months later, and I dare say that I would not have made it without the influence of Raymond Alexander.”

By the turn of the century, the affable attorney’s influence had spread throughout the region. But then the unspeakable happened. On New Year’s Eve, 2000, Ray, by then a sitting district court judge and former district attorney, had a massive heart attack and died suddenly at the relatively young age of 62. To say that it was a blow to the local AA and NA community would be an understatement.

“We were all devastated,” lamented

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Benson, “and I don’t mean just the golfers or even the recovery community, but everyone. It was so sudden and shocking that I actually felt kind of cheated because I didn’t get to say good-bye to him.”

But rather than sit around bemoaning the loss of his beloved comrade, Benson hatched an idea to wish him farewell in the most fitting way possible — with a golf tournament.

“It was just meant as a memorial to Raymond,” said Benson. “It was, and is, a way to keep his name and legacy alive. We kept the entry fee low, and planned to donate the money to Fellowship Hall, since he loved that place so much. After expenses we had around \$300, but then one of our friends (who prefers to remain anonymous) kicked in \$2100, so we gave them \$2400.”

That got the attention of then-Development Director Rick Redmon, who took the idea to then-Hall President Rodney Battles to affiliate with the tournament and make it an annual event. Two years later, in 2003, it was held in conjunction with the annual conference, played on the Friday morning before the weekend-long conference began that evening. By 2006 it had become formalized as the E. Raymond Alexander, Jr. Memorial Golf Tournament, with proceeds going to establish a scholarship in Ray’s name to guests whose insurance ran out before they could complete treatment. Over the years, the earmarks have expanded to benefit the family program and other areas where funds were needed.

“I still have the

letter that Rick and (then-Marketing Director) Mike Whaley wrote me,” disclosed Ray’s widow Carol, “outlining the three goals for the tournament: to establish a golf committee to oversee the event, to provide funds for scholarships, and to kick off the conference with a great round of golf for the participants.”



Gordon Rayle awarded 2020 Spirit of Ray



Tournament kicks off at the Cardinal in 2019

The first, informal tournament was held at the Old Home Place, near Wallburg. The following year it moved to the Meadowlands, and two years later to Crooked Tree. After a nice run there it made a big step up to Bryan Park, one of the area’s elite courses, where it remained until 2018, when it moved to the Cardinal for two years (including the pandemic year, when the shotgun start and post-round meal were eliminated). And this year it will move back to Bryan Park, where both the Players and Champions courses will be utilized for the first time.

“I think we had around 26 players that first year,” noted Benson, “and it grew to 67 the second year. Then the third year it rained torrentially all around us but we stayed dry.”

Smiled Watkins, “We

all were saying that that was Raymond moving the clouds around so we could get the round in.”

In 2012, the Hall Board of Directors and tournament committee established the Spirit of Ray Award, to recognize an individual who embodies Ray’s spirit of reaching

out to others and going above and beyond the call of duty to improve the lives of alcoholics and addicts. Deservedly so, the first award was given to Bill Benson and the second to Boyd Watkins. It is presented at the Friday-evening session of the annual conference, this year to be held August 6-8 at the Downtown Greensboro Marriott.

The tourney has grown steadily over the years, attracting sponsors from both individual and corporate benefactors. It averages raising around \$55,000 a year and has raised almost a million dollars in its two-decade span. Likewise, all the player slots are filled every year. This year the tournament moves back to Bryan Park to celebrate its 20th anniversary where a field of 200 linksters will take over both the Players and Champions courses. First-, second- and third-place prizes will be awarded for each course.

“It was always my hope that this could become an annual event,” mused Benson, “and it’s gratifying the way it has flourished and grown. It’s great that it has raised all that money for Fellowship Hall, but its main focus is still to remember Raymond. I said when he died that we are his legacy, and it’s important that we keep his name alive.”

Added Watkins, “Twenty years after his death, he’s still saving people’s lives, just like he did when he was alive.”



Carol Alexander at the first tournament

AUGUST 6, 2021 | BRYAN PARK

2001 2021



20th Anniversary

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Message from Mike

Greetings from the front office!

Here we are at the beginning of a new summer! Conference is just a few weeks away and we are so thrilled that we will be live and in-person this year! You may recall

that last year we had a virtual conference due to COVID. It was an enthusiastic gathering, and I was grateful to attend, but nothing can replace the energy of being together. The Fellowship Hall Council has been working hard to put together a memorable program and there is a palpable joy in witnessing this effort. I hope you are planning to join us at the Downtown Greensboro Marriott for an awesome recovery weekend.

The Ray Alexander Golf Tournament that kicks off conference is celebrating its 20th year and we will return to Bryan Park to remember Ray by using both courses with a record 200 golfers! What an awesome turnout that will be thanks to our many sponsors and loyal golfers. We are thrilled that proceeds from this year's tournament will support the Partner Scholarship Fund. I am looking forward to a round of golf and then attending the opening of conference. It is a return to what feels normal, and I am grateful!

COVID fatigue is a real thing. I must commend the wonderful staff here at Fellowship Hall as they have continued to show up every day to serve our mission. I could not be prouder of our efforts. We have hit a few speed

bumps along the way, but never once have we strayed from remembering why we do what we do each day. I also want to recognize the daily efforts of our volunteers. Speakers, 5th steppers, drivers, contacts -- all of you are critical to our work and I want to say thank you on behalf of the staff and Board of Directors.

In addition to our daily programs, we have many new projects in the works. We are in the middle of building out and implementing a new electronic health record. Our Continuing Care program is making a consistent effort to monitor our guests' progress after they leave our treatment program, gathering information to help us further our mission. We are hoping to do some major work on our parking lots and driveways this summer. We are also anticipating a return to a fuller census as COVID continues to wane. We hope people can get back to taking care of themselves, not only here but across the country.

We have tried to roll with the punches over the last 16 months. We have learned a lot about ourselves and our ability to meet new challenges. We have done this by keeping our focus on why we are here and that has served us well. Keeping our doors open has been a motivator and I think we are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. We have a lot to be grateful for. I have a lot to be grateful for, and from what I have been told, a grateful addict/alcoholic is a clean and sober addict/alcoholic!

I look forward to seeing you in August either at the golf course, the Marriott or both!

In loving service,
Mike Yow

MEET YOUR ALUMNI COORDINATOR *Introducing Aaron Bauer*



We're excited that Aaron has joined our staff as our new Alumni Coordinator, working to build our Alumni Programs across North Carolina in the Triangle, Charlotte Metro, Triad, and Wilmington regions.

Aaron operates our Continuing Care Program, getting to know our guests while in treatment then conducting check-ins over the next year after our newest alumni leave treatment. Our goal is to make sure our guests are doing well in their recovery, track their progress for the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of our programs, and find innovative ways to keep you (our alumni) - newcomer and oldtimer alike - engaged with us and building your support networks. It's all about sustaining long-term recovery as part of the Fellowship Hall family.

Aaron is a graduate of Appalachian State University and is a native of Greensboro. He's a strong recovery ally and looking forward to serving you!

Help us get the Alumni Program going! Complete our online survey and tell us what you'd like your Alumni Program to look like. Email Aaron to get the link at aaronb@fellowshiphall.com.

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Join us for a Recovery Weekend!

AUGUST 6-8, 2021 | LIVE & IN PERSON!!!
DOWNTOWN GREENSBORO MARRIOTT

FRIDAY, August 6

6pm.....Check-in & Registration Opens
7pm.....Meet & Greet in Hospitality Room
8pm.....Welcome to Conference, Spirit of Ray Award,
& NA Speaker Cynthia W, Raleigh NC

SATURDAY, August 7

8am..... Check-in & Registration
9am..... AA Guest Speaker Traci M, Canton GA
10:30am... Al-Anon Guest Speaker, Lori G, Oklahoma City, OK
Noon Picnic at Fellowship Hall
2pm..... Gratitude Meeting at Fellowship Hall
6pm..... Check-in & Registration
7:30pm.... Recovery Countdown & AA Guest Speaker Clif G,
Oklahoma City, OK
9:00pm.... Ice Cream Social

SUNDAY, August 8

9am..... Check-in & Registration
10am..... Guest AA Speaker Doug M, Canton GA



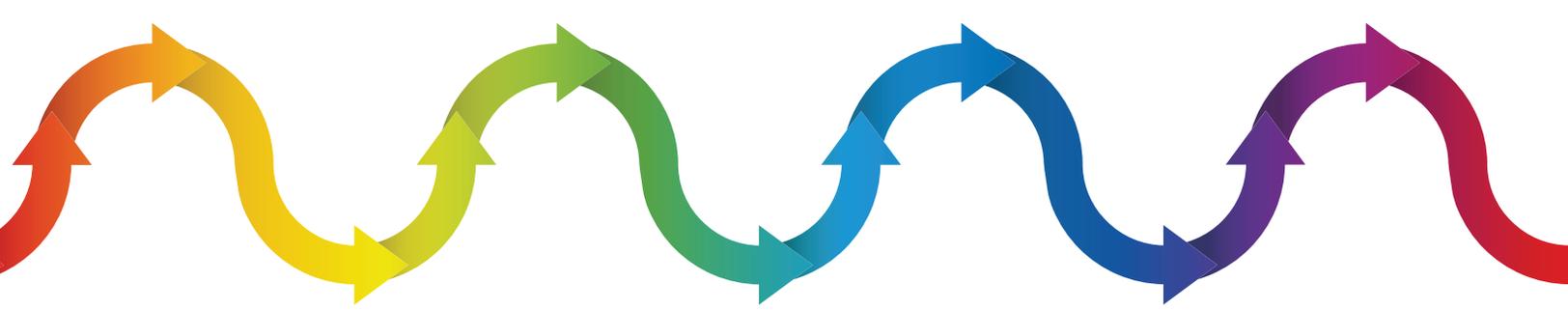
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The Learning Curve

ADAPTING TO CHANGE

To say it has been an interesting 16 months is an understatement.

Individuals, cities, and nations across the globe have been working to daily manage the ongoing challenges brought on by the COVID pandemic – and the situation at Fellowship Hall is no different.

From the very beginning of the crisis in March 2020, we began to find ways of adapting the delivery of our treatment programs to meet the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control, NC Department of Health & Human Services, and our local Guilford County Health Department – all while working hard to keep everyone healthy, maintaining our mission to deliver top quality treatment at an affordable cost, and save as many lives from addiction to alcohol/drugs as possible.

Though it has been a learning curve of a year plus, we are stronger for it! What have we learned?

We've learned that our volunteers are essential to the work that we do!

Quickly, AA and NA meetings went virtual last year and the outside meetings we took guests to each weeknight were no longer an option. Thanks to technology and a strong volunteer network, we quickly adapted to bringing in volunteers (who were screened for COVID) to host meetings in our Men's and Women's programs on campus or going to virtual meetings when needed. The guests loved our

volunteer speakers and learned that virtual meetings were an option, too.

We've learned how to Zoom!

Prior to March 2020, we didn't know much about the realm of virtual meetings, webinars, tours, events, and all things Zoom. But we quickly learned and adapted to the changing environment.

By April of 2020, our leadership team and Board of Directors were holding their meetings virtually.

We took our Continuing Education programs online for both staff and outside attendees with monthly webinars to keep the education program going. Our four-day Family Therapy Program moved to the virtual realm as well, allowing family members to participate in the program without the need to leave their homes. And even our Intensive Outpatient and Outpatient programs moved to a virtual platform. The use of technology allowed us to keep a large portion of our programs operating strong.

We've learned to be flexible.

When you've been in operation for nearly 50 years, the flow of operations gets into a groove and operates smoothly. But when COVID caused a significant disruption in our flow,

it required us to rethink every step of treatment – from the moment someone calls to inquire about getting help to the process of discharge and aftercare. We learned to be flexible as the recommendations continued to be updated and change. We quickly implemented new cleaning procedures, COVID screening for staff and guests, and new seating arrangements in the dining hall – just to name a few changes

that we made. But at the heart of it, we learned we can adapt and that no matter what, we could remain focused on our mission of saving lives from addiction.



As we begin to return to what feels more like life before COVID, we will carry what we have learned forward and use the knowledge to continually improve our programs and services to meet our guests where they are and help them find the path to long-term recovery. We know that fewer folks sought help for addiction to alcohol or drugs in the last year. According to SAMSHA, only a small portion of people who said they needed help for addiction sought it out. We anticipate the number of individuals seeking help to grow in the coming months and we will use what we have learned to provide the best quality treatment to those who enter our doors.



HOW TO GROW YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK

“If it’s something weird and it don’t look good, who ya gonna call? ... Ghost Busters?!” Well...not exactly. Who are you going to call in moments of need throughout your recovery? Who will you call when things are going well? A strong support network is essential to successful long-term recovery. It is important to surround yourself with individuals that understand your situation and support your recovery.

At the beginning of your recovery, you might find that your approach to friendships and relationships has changed for you. You also probably had to leave some of the relationships from your days of active addiction behind you. This doesn’t mean that you’re destined to a life of less connection — no one recovers alone. Learning how to build your network takes time, but here are some helpful hints to get you started:

Actively Attend 12-Step Program Meetings

Many Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings are currently virtual, but that doesn’t mean you can’t still actively participate in the 12-Step Communities. So long as you have a desire to pursue sobriety, you are welcome in the rooms of AA and NA.

If you’re new to the sphere of 12-Step meetings, stay after and talk to some of the others in attendance, whether that’s in person or in the chat of the Zoom meeting. Those in recovery are almost always eager to help others, and remember—they were once new, just like you. Much like your recovery, sometimes the first step of reaching out when building connections is the hardest part, but it does get easier with practice!

Find a Sponsor

You must find someone with experience and empathy to

assist you as you work through the 12-Steps. A sponsor is someone that you feel comfortable being completely honest and open with. As another individual who has worked through the same disease as you, they should understand you and be close to you in your recovery in a way that few others could be.

This is the person who can encourage you when times are tough and guide you when you feel lost. Those moments *will* present themselves throughout your recovery journey, and it is important to seek the mentorship and connection of a sponsor in your fellowship. Continue with attending meetings and connect with as many individuals as possible. As you build relationships, you will know when you’ve found the person who is the right fit.

Reconnect and Rebuild Healthy Relationships

Finally, encourage your family and friends to educate themselves in regard to the disease of substance use disorder. If you are fortunate enough to have maintained a relationship with your loved ones after your time in active use, turn your attention toward improving those relationships through your program of recovery. If you are not in contact with loved ones due to mistakes made during active use, work with your sponsor and in your program on making amends to those individuals you might have wronged.

It may take some education, time, and consistency, but surrounding yourself with your loved ones who want the best for you in your recovery can be an incredibly valuable source of support in your network. Your loved ones can find resources to learn more about your recovery at <https://al-anon.org/> or <https://www.nar-anon.org/>.

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Henry David Thoreau