

The Freedom Flyer

NFF's Monthly Newsletter ~ The Anniversary Issue

April 2015

A Decade with Chris Brennan The Mind Behind the Monday Night Meeting



Chris B. in action.

On Monday nights the doors of First Presbyterian Church are opened to NFF. People filter into the average-sized church cafeteria. Some are in pairs, conversing. Some walk in alone and scan for friends. Some look around, seeming lost. A man sits at the front of the room, legs dangling over the edge of the stage, coffee in hand, the words Newfound Freedom running across his sweatshirt. He is taking in the crowd, waving to familiar faces. There is a buzz in the air already; an intense energy pulsing throughout the room. Someone raises their voice up over the noise and welcomes the group. Everyone finds a seat and another Chris Brennan meeting begins.

(Continued page 3)

The Birth of Newfound Freedom As NFF Turns 12, Scott F. Tells How it All Began



Scott Fleming Discusses Future Plans for NFF.

Twelve years ago the doors of 712 Old Orchard opened to welcome twelve guys. These were the beginning stages of what would become a full-grown recovery community. Today Newfound Freedom consists of fourteen houses, a strong alumni association, international membership, and a staff of dedicated professionals. Though it has branched out to include numerous properties, people, meetings, and events, it all started with one tiny seed, planted in the mind of a young Scott Fleming.

Scott got sober in 2002 and began to reestablish himself. He started

working full time, opened a bank account to save his money, and opened the big book to begin his transformation. With eight months of sobriety, deep in the process of working the steps, Scott had a profound experience.

"It changed my life. And I knew it," Scott said. "There was this overwhelming desire to give it away that came with this experience. I wanted to get this message out and let people know, this really does work."

Around that time, Scott met a young man, Jason, who was new to
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Stay up to date with meetings, announcements and special events.

recovery. Jason needed a job, so Scott hired him to help deliver furniture. Jason didn't drive, and Scott planned to pick Jason up for work on his first day.

"He lived in a recovery house," Scott said. "I didn't know what recovery houses were. [When I got to his house] he wasn't up. So I had to go in the house and find him. I walked in the room and it had about ten bunk beds. I was waking up the wrong people, and eventually all the noise woke him up."

This experience left a bad taste in Scott's mouth. He was unimpressed with the conditions in which his friend lived, and after hanging out there a few times, realized what was missing.

"What I experienced was: no talk of recovery; no feeling of hope in the house," Scott said. "The owner was never around. Jason never even met him. He just wrote the checks to him. The house was falling apart."

Over the next few *months*, Scott helped Jason move into several different recovery houses, each less impressive than the one before.

"It got worse and worse. So the thought came to me, 'You can do this better'." Scott's idea of better meant many things. It was about the aesthetics, yes, but it was also about the energy, the program, the structure, and the message. The wheels kept turning.

"You can do it where the owner's involved," Scott's thought continued. "Where he leads by example, he's in recovery himself, he's taking guys to meetings and big book studies, conventions. The houses are nice with positive things on the wall." Scott saw this as an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of those suffering from the disease he knew all too well. He also wanted to give other alcoholics hope through

sharing his own story.

"I wanted to get the message out as much as I could. [A recovery house] seemed like a good avenue for doing that." It was with this conviction and his nest egg that Scott began looking at properties. A few months later, he was faced with a difficult decision.

"I had the opportunity to buy a house," Scott said, "but it was going to take my entire life savings to do so. I sat in my car and meditated on it. I decided to make the call and accept the offer."

In April of 2003 Scott opened the doors to the very first Newfound Freedom property- 712 Old Orchard. The residents discovered the house through word of mouth, and stayed because it was run effectively.

"That first house was about getting a sponsor, getting a home group, getting into the steps, right away. They had to," Scott said. "It was a basic structure, but holding them accountable was different. That wasn't around here before. And they had to be in recovery and they had to do work in their recovery while they were here." And this method paid off.

"It was amazing to see people come in, get excited about the big book, go to meetings, recover, stay sober. To see that we made a difference; that something magical was happening," Scott said. "Some of those guys are still sober today."

Later in 2003, Scott met another man who would become a big part of the NFF puzzle.

"Bill M. had been in recovery houses all over the country, so he really knew," Scott said. "He brought more structure to the table, more experience. He also knew how to market and he grew the business from one house to six houses within two years." Over the next decade, the list continued to grow to what was at one time 17 houses.

**Scott,
During a
Recent
Work-
shop,
Pondering
Plans for
the Future
of
Newfound
Freedom.**



Today there are 15 houses, men's and women's, recovery and sober. There is even an NFF shore house in Wildwood, NJ. But Newfound Freedom is more than just a list of properties.

"It's a community of people that connect with each other to help each other become better," Scott said. "I feel like we're a lighthouse in the recovery community."

If someone had told Scott this in 2002, would he have believed it?

"No," he said. "I saw one house, and that was it. I just wanted to make a difference." And what a difference he has made. Many people have been touched by NFF.

"We've been recognized by the Caron Foundation," Scott said. "There have been family members getting sober together here. Our alumni association is phenomenal."

As for the future, Scott has a lot of ideas. He is currently working on taking NFF to the next level.

"I'd like to focus on making what we have better in every way, both the houses themselves (remodeling them), and the experience," he said. "There are things we can add that aren't just more of the same. Bringing Sarah on board, for example."

There are many other visions Scott has for the future. No one knows exactly what the next twelve years have in store for NFF, but, as always, the possibilities are endless. ♦

For eleven years Chris has been running the Monday night step meeting for Newfound Freedom. Those who have been to one of his meetings know that it's far from a lecture and more than just sharing. It's a passionate discussion about the philosophies behind the 12 steps. Each week, Chris focuses in on one step. He gets excited, spouting his wisdom and thoughts, while inviting others to join the conversation by sharing their own ideas. Whether a fan of his method or a skeptic, one can't help but be swept up along with him in the journey through the big book. But why does Chris continue to make the journey to Levittown after so many years? And how did this whole thing start? To answer these questions, we must first go back to 2004.

Eleven years ago Chris was running something very similar to the NFF Monday night meeting down in Kensington. He was sponsoring several guys in the area, and had become a teacher and mentor to that recovery community. Realizing there was a need for more discussion and explanation of the steps, he started a big book study. Scott Fleming, always wanting to experience different meetings and speakers, made his way to Chris' meeting.

"One day this straggly looking guy with flip-flops showed up," Chris said. "And that was Scott. I was talking to him outside after the meeting. We talked for a while and he said that he had just opened [some recovery houses] up in Levittown, and would I come up and start a big book study up there."

Chris said yes, and the Monday night step meeting was born. At that point, NFF was still very young, with only three houses. The first few meetings were held at 82 Inkberry. There were about a dozen people attending in those early days, "a few from the house, and a few friends of friends," Chris explained. "And that's pretty much how the whole thing got started."

As NFF expanded, the meeting got bigger and it moved to the Blue Ridge house.

"We used to have it outside by the pool when it was nice out," Chris said. He remembers being on one side of the pool, by the diving board, as everyone else- a big group of people- sat on the other side of the pool. "There were probably a hundred people at that point already coming to it," he said.

"Eventually we went to Truman high school after it started to get really big. We [were there for] a number of years," he said. "And then we ended up in the church we're in now."

The church allows for a few long tables and several rows of chairs. Tropical decorations hang from the ceiling and palm trees cover the doors. Chris shares the stage with boxes of supplies and fake plants, but once Chris starts talking, it's hard to notice anything else. From the moment he begins, he is animated; excited. To Chris, it is important to have fun while speaking, and having fun should come naturally if one has had a spiritual transformation.

"With that comes an overwhelming desire to give it away. So it should come with passion," Chris said. "If I wasn't excited about it, I would really question what I'm doing. It's not designed to slow you down and wear you

out. It's designed to give you life."

Chris tries to inspire this passion in others by encouraging them to be actively involved in the meeting.

"Instead of them just listening to me, I throw out a topic or explain something, and then I encourage them to challenge it," he said. Chris creates an interactive experience, allowing people to expand on his points or to disagree altogether. Through this format, everyone learns and everyone grows, including Chris.

"I encourage people to question me not just to get them involved, but I do that because I want them to find something in what I'm saying that is inaccurate and I want them to get me to see it a different way. I think that's how I grow," he said. "If everybody disagreed with me and I just sat up there garbing out whatever, nobody would get anything out of it."

This method of running a meeting may seem unconventional to some. After all, he is loud, forceful, and he expects involvement. This can be intimidating for those who haven't experienced it and for those who are brand new to the program, and Chris is well aware of this.

"A lot of the guys, especially when they're new, are a little hesitant; a little scared of me," he said. And it's always been that way. "Whenever I get a compliment, it always sounds something like this: 'I couldn't stand you when I met you, and now I love ya.'" This has happened time and again, but Chris has accepted that it comes with the territory, and had been rewarded in the end with strong bonds.

"That's kind of the role that I assumed when I started doing this," he said. "I'm the bearer of bad news. I'm up here to teach you the 12 steps. But I'm also up here telling you that you have no clue about the 12 steps. And that's not going to make me popular. But if you listen and [learn from it], it'll go from 'whatever' to a deep love."

This deep love is built on a foundation of mutual respect and understanding. Chris takes on the responsibility of ushering new guys into the world of the steps, and understands that they are in a very different place in their life than he is. At the same time, he said, he holds them accountable for educating themselves about the literature that he mentions that they don't yet know. For Chris, this meeting is all about continuing to grow, and each Monday is an opportunity to learn something new. The possibility of reaching one new person is Chris' favorite part of the Monday night meeting. This hope along with the promise of connection is what keeps him coming back.

"I still get excited about doing it, or I wouldn't do it. And I still have a passion for it," he said. "No matter what your mood or thoughts might be going into the meeting, when we open that book and start talking about it, the exact same thing always happens- same thing as eleven years ago, same thing will happen tonight, and that is the spirit takes over and that feeling and that camaraderie, all that comes right back."

Over the years this meeting has been moved, the crowd has changed, and NFF has grown exponentially, but the feeling is the same today as it was in 2004.

"Scott's always wanted me to do it. I've always wanted to do it. And here we are, eleven years later," he said. "Who knows? Maybe we'll do it forever." ♦

Spotlight on NFF: Throughout the Years

Scott decides he wants to open his own recovery house and make a difference.



712 Old Orchard is purchased. About a dozen guys move into this first house.



NFF opens its first female recovery house- 87 Appletree

NFF's 5th house was opened in order to offer the same high-quality support to women in recovery. This would eventually become one of two women's recovery houses for, and one of six total women's homes.

NFF opens first women's sober home- 272 Birch

2002

2003



2005

2007

2004

2008

Scott begins looking at properties

NFF opens first men's sober home- 147 Idlewild

NFF celebrates five years!

Chris B. starts running NFF AA step meeting on Monday nights.



This picnic was off the chain! Great weather and a great turn out made for an amazing five-year celebration. Alumni reunited and shared stories about how their lives had been changed. Everyone bonded over a beautiful slideshow of NFF pictures set to music.



For the ten-year picnic, NFF did it up right with live music, hot-off-the-grill food, a cigar tent, and a bouncy house. Residents, alumni, friends, and family gathered to celebrate, playing catch & volleyball, and listening to speakers share inspiring stories.



Today, NFF has blossomed into an amazing recovery community, consisting of 15 houses and an amazing alumni association. Weekly and monthly events provide lots of fun and constant reasons to celebrate. Annual events keeps residents and alumni connected to each other and the greater community.



NFF celebrates ten years!

NFF celebrates 12 years!

2013

2015



2012

NFF starts NA Monday night step meeting.

NFF goes international! Ville K. becomes first foreign resident.

2014

NFF shore house in Wildwood is purchased.

And beyond



Who knows what's in store for NFF? The possibilities are endless...

Ville met Scott at a meeting in Niche, France, where recovery homes do not exist. Ville was at a "jumping point," as he calls it, when he met Scott. Scott shared with Ville his own experience in recovery, as well as the philosophy behind NFF. One month later, Ville headed for America to become a part of Newfound Freedom.

"At first I was really scared but Scott, the NFF staff and the other residents took me extremely well and made me feel like part of the NFF family," said Ville. "And that's what it really has become for me, NFF is my home away from home." Today Ville is almost two years sober, and though far away, he is still a very strong branch on the NFF tree.

(Read more about Ville's story in a future edition.)

The Many Faces of Lee Bull

NFF's Unofficial Mascot Takes off the Mask and Speaks from the Heart



For the last 5 years Lee Bull has been the unofficial mascot of Newfoundland Freedom. Though he rarely shows his true face at NFF events, he is always the most recognizable. Whether he is sporting an extra beard, elastic buckles on his shoes, red hair spray, or a furry suit, Lee Bull always gives it one hundred and ten percent. Why does he do it time and again?

"I have fun," Lee said. "I think I'm good for doing these things." Lee also admitted he doesn't mind when the focus is on him. "I like attention all the time." His costumes have been a big hit over the years, adding a little extra excitement to the scene. Lee is happy to provide this service; to make people smile, laugh, and have a more interactive experience. Everyone wants to get a picture with Lee.

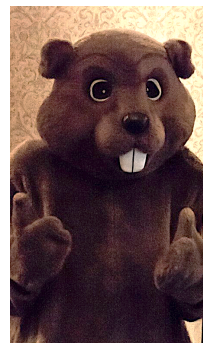
"They know what I'm about," he said. "I'm about helping people." And that's why he will continue bringing these characters to life.

Lee's first costume was **Santa Claus**. He has now been the face of the holiday party for five years. "They said I would fit," he said. Lee enjoys handing presents out to kids. He likes to make a difference by restoring the belief in Christmas magic. "A lot of little kids don't believe in Santa," he said. Lee is changing that one child at a time. And when the kids thank him with smiles and hugs? "It feels good in my heart," he said.



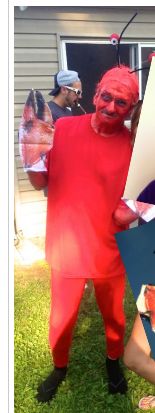
Since the creation of the Liberty Round Up, there was Lee Bull as **Ben Franklin**. Out of all of the costumes Lee adorns, Ben is his favorite. Why is this? First, it is the only costumes that he wears for three days a year. LBR is a weekend event, and Lee commits himself to the character Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Second, LBR has a huge turn out. "You meet a lot of people you don't know from different countries and states," he said. "When I started I didn't know that many, and now I'm on Facebook with some of them. I like doing it; making people happy." Lee takes his role very seriously, and understands how important it is. "It means something to them; to the roundup."

For the first, and as of now, only, NFF golf tournament, Lee suited up and became the fairway figurehead. Decked out in **gopher** brown, he made his way around the course, adding a little something extra to the scene. "It was just so funny," he said. "I was just walking around." This is the only costume of the four that NFF doesn't own; the only one Lee had to give back. "We rented that gopher outfit," he said. "It was a good outfit, too. It was the whole outfit. Boots and all." The tournament ended up getting rained out half way through, so Lee wasn't able to get full use out of this professional garb. Maybe next time.



Before taking on the role of the **crab**, Lee dabbled in the art of being a lobster. His previous experience as a shellfish gave him an advantage at NFF's 2013 crab fest. His completely homemade costume was thrown

together in a matter of hours. It consisted of red pants, a large red tee shirt, paper claws, foam eyeballs, red hair spray, and, of course, a lot of red face paint. "Took an hour and something [to get ready]," he said. "And it took, like, four hours to get cleaned up." But what happened in between was timeless. No one will forget the crab anytime soon.



If you ask Lee, he will tell you some of his thoughts on how to make things better: "Maybe have a Mrs. Claus. Maybe get a different Crab Costume. Maybe plan more."

As for what the future holds for Lee Bull and his talents, he ponders that himself: "I wonder if I could be something else. Another costume. What's out there?" No one knows for sure what face he'll wear next, but perhaps Uncle Sam will make an appearance this Memorial Day.



Get To Know the Newest Member of the NFF Team!

Sarah Espenshade Sheds Light on her Role as Clinical Director

This month, Newfound Freedom is expanding its staff and its services. Sarah McCabe Espenshade is coming on board as Clinical Director, and will be providing various counseling programs for residents. Sarah is excited to join the team, and will be working closely with Newfound Freedom's Executive Director and staff to ensure quality and consistency.

Sarah's relationship with NFF is not new. She has been referring patients to this recovery community for a few years, and has become familiar with the organization and its way of operating. Sarah has seen the benefits of the structure and programs put in place, and it's why she has chosen to add her expertise to the fold.

"I've been most impressed with the work that Scott and Newfound Freedom have been doing," Sarah said. "Everybody's very hands-on and involved. I like that Scott really has a presence in his houses. He and his staff are very good about really working with providers to create continuity and improve the outcomes and experience." She believes that providing this new resource will only add to the quality of life at Newfound Freedom. By having a counselor on staff, NFF will be able to better facilitate the transition to clean and sober living.

"My hope is that [these services will] increase the likelihood that people will maintain sobriety", Sarah said. The counseling will focus on creating a better foundation on which this can happen.

First, it will "give people an opportunity to address underlying issues that might contribute to the potential of relapse," Sarah said. She believes that "a relapse happens way before somebody picks up a drink or a drug." With Sarah checking in on a regular basis, she will be more likely to help those who might be on that path.

Second, this service will "help maintain continued structure and guidance that is needed," Sarah said. "There's a need for the ongoing support, [after they get out of treatment]. You go from a super-structured, intense environment to [a much less structured one]. A lot of people fall through the cracks because they're not ready for that. They always think they are, but they're not." By adding counseling to the routine, NFF can more effectively maintain the structure needed for residents to succeed.

Sarah is not just looking at this from the point of view of someone in the medical field. She is able to see it through the eyes of someone in recovery, and this makes her all the more committed to her work. It's the reason she chose this career path.

"I love helping people. I am extremely passionate about helping people recover from the disease of addiction", Sarah said. "I have had amazing gifts and rewards as a result of my recovery, and I would like to be able to help other people have the same gifts and rewards. That's what drives me." ♦



Sarah McCabe Espenshade is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with over 7 years experience working with adolescents and adults in an acute inpatient and partial hospitalization setting. Sarah specializes in treating complex dually diagnosed individuals and utilizes a combination of cognitive behavioral therapy, solution-focused brief therapy, motivational interviewing, and the 12 steps to treat addiction.

Sarah holds a BA in history from the University of Pennsylvania and a Master of Social Work from Temple University with a clinical concentration and a health/mental health specialization. She also holds a Certificate in Drug and Alcohol Counseling from Villanova University and a Certificate in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy from Bryn Mawr School of Social Work.

Sarah will be providing the following services for NFF: group counseling, individual counseling, family counseling and education, clinical consultation, and intervention services.

For more info, email Sarah at: sarah@newfoundfreedom.com

Happy Spring, Everyone!

See You
Next Winter!



Brennan's Corner

*For those of us
given much,
much is expected.*

-Unknown original author

What's Going On?

April 2015						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
29	30 AA Step Mtg 7pm @ First Pres. NA Text Study 7pm @ St.Paul's	31 Men's Big Book Study 7:30pm @ 60 Jonquil	1 Garage Mtg (Men's Lit Study) 7:30pm @ Bowman	2 Recovery Rap Mtg 9:30am @ Blue Ridge	3	4 NFF Girls selling raffle tickets @ Harley Davidson
5	6 AA Step Mtg 7pm @ First Pres. NA Text Study 7pm @ St.Paul's	7 Men's Big Book Study 7:30pm @ 60 Jonquil	8 Garage Mtg (Men's Lit Study) 7:30pm @ Bowman	9 Recovery Rap Mtg 9:30am @ Blue Ridge	10 SEPIA Round Up Cape May, NJ	11 SEPIA Round Up Cape May, NJ NFF Girls selling raffle tickets @ Harley Davidson
12 SEPIA Round Up Cape May, NJ	13 AA Step Mtg 7pm @ First Pres. NA Text Study 7pm @ St.Paul's	14 Men's Big Book Study 7:30pm @ 60 Jonquil	15 Garage Mtg (Men's Lit Study) 7:30pm @ Bowman	16 Recovery Rap Mtg 9:30am @ Blue Ridge	17	18 NFF Girls selling raffle tickets @ Harley Davidson
19 NFF Men's Softball Team VS. L&O	20 AA Step Mtg 7pm @ First Pres. NA Text Study 7pm @ St.Paul's	21 Men's Big Book Study 7:30pm @ 60 Jonquil	22 Garage Mtg (Men's Lit Study) 7:30pm @ Bowman	23 Recovery Rap Mtg 9:30am @ Blue Ridge	24	25 NFF Girls selling raffle tickets @ Harley Davidson
26 NFF Men's Softball Team VS. Double Ds	27 NFF Celebration Mtg 7pm @ First Presbyterian	28 Men's Big Book Study 7:30pm @ 60 Jonquil	29 Garage Mtg (Men's Lit Study) 7:30pm @ Bowman	30 Recovery Rap Mtg 9:30am @ Blue Ridge	1	2

Come out and Support Livengrin's Ride for Recovery!

Every Saturday the NFF girls will be selling raffle tickets at Brian's Harley Davidson: 600 S Flowers Mill Rd, Langhorne, PA 19047.

Proceeds from the tickets go to help those without insurance receive the treatment they need.

Times vary. See NFF's Facebook page for details.

Upcoming Events!

- *NFF Men's Softball Season
- *NFF's Memorial Day Picnic- May 25
- *Livengrin's Ride for Recovery- May 31
- *AA 80th Anniversay- June 10
- *Founder's Day Celebration- June 12-14
- *4th annual Liberty Bell Roundup- August 21-23
<http://libertybellroundup.com>



NFF Celebration Meeting
Last Monday of Every



Contact Us:

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