



# *Life in* RECOVERY *Can Be* SPARKLING

Gene Aiken of Bella Grove is happy to share the details of what she calls her “Big Life Bonus.” Her marriage to Johnny Aiken in 2017 didn’t just create a new couple, but a blended family of 27. Her shimmery fairy hair has become her trademark. She has a huge sweet tooth, and she enjoys hosting small dinner parties. She celebrated her granddaughter’s high

school graduation by skydiving! She has also been in recovery from alcoholism for 30 years.

If it shocks you that she shares this, that’s the reason she shares this. According to statistics, over 40,000 individuals in Greenville County have a diagnosable substance use disorder, but fewer than ten percent receive any

type of help at a given time. One of the greatest obstacles to recovery is the shame and stigma surrounding the disease, which is why, in 2004, Gene, her friend Jane Pressly, and a small group of community advocates founded Faces and Voices of Recovery (FAVOR) Greenville, an organization dedicated to providing intervention and support services to those seeking recovery.

“

This is just one program that is significantly changing lives and the stigma around this disease. When a person or a family engages with FAVOR, we, and our programs, are there for them for as long as they need or want, free of charge.

”

“I have a genetic disposition for substance use disorder from both my maternal and fraternal lineage. Of their three children, two of us are in long-term recovery,” Gene says. “Alcohol was my drug of choice. I was desperate for a solution, and I found sobriety and recovery in a traditional 12-step program. I also found relief and hope, so, rather than stay silent and anonymous, I chose to share my recovery.”

Sharing is the bedrock of FAVOR, whose mission is to ensure that individuals suffering from addiction receive the same respectful, nondiscriminatory care afforded to those with other health conditions. When people like Gene – people who could be neighbors, family members, or friends – share their stories, the public perception of addiction shifts, and proof is offered that long-term recovery is possible. Those in recovery go on to serve as group leaders or individ-

ual coaches at FAVOR’s Greenville Center on Woodruff Road.

“As a Community Volunteer Leader, I have worked with various committees, participated in Hope and Healing Hours, and served on the Board of Directors, chairing twice,” Gene says. “Frankly, I try to do just about anything I’m asked to do. This month, I’ll be taking the 35-hour Recovery Coach training and hope to obtain that certification.”

FAVOR’s calendar shows its dedication to meeting the needs of those suffering from addiction. At FAVOR’s Greenville Center, there are meetings seven days a week, scheduled throughout the day. In addition to groups like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, there are meetings for the families and the significant others of those dealing with addiction. *Life Inside the Park’s* Merritt Rechichar recently visited the FAVOR Center to learn more about the work they do.

“At the Hope and Healing Hour, I was able to hear several stories of families dealing with drug abuse and recovery. The FAVOR Center is a busy place, and the staff and the volunteers are committed and professional,” Merritt says. “I was particularly struck by the faces of those being served. They looked like everybody, really.”

In addition to services provided at the FAVOR Center, there are 25 outreach meetings per month held at partner agencies around Greenville County. Adventures in Recovery events help participants learn to have fun in sobriety. And through a project called FORCE – FAVOR Overdose Recovery Coaching Evaluation – help begins before an overdose survivor even

leaves the hospital. “Once a patient is stabilized, a recovery coach is contacted and meets the survivor at his or her bedside,” Gene explains. “Recovery coaches are on standby 24/7. This is just one program that is significantly changing lives and the stigma around this disease. When a person or a family engages with FAVOR, we, and our programs, are there for them for as long as they need or want, free of charge.”

*Free* is not cheap. Even with its dedicated volunteer staff, it costs more than \$1 million annually to fund the programs offered by FAVOR. These funds come from the generosity of donors, so if you have any questions about whether real recovery is possible, just ask Gene Aiken.

If you can catch her. She stays pretty busy traveling, dancing, and creating Christmas ornaments for her grandchildren. You’ll recognize her by her sparkle, though, as she works to make sure that others have a chance to experience the same joy in recovery through FAVOR.

*If you or someone you know is in need of help with a substance use disorder, or if you’d like to make a donation, visit [favorgreenville.org](http://favorgreenville.org). You can also find FAVOR on Facebook and Twitter. And to reach Operation Rescue, FAVOR’s 24-hour hotline, dial 864-430-1802.*



**Do you have a favorite cause or are you involved with a business that is changing lives?** Please email [merritt.rechichar@n2pub.com](mailto:merritt.rechichar@n2pub.com) to share your story!

