



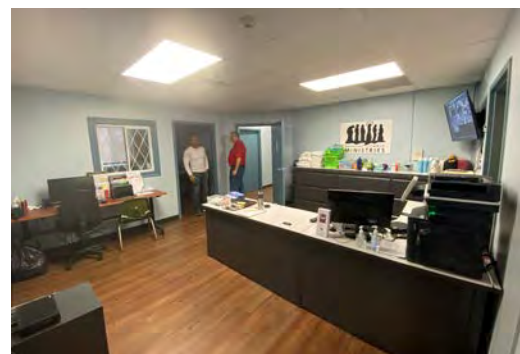
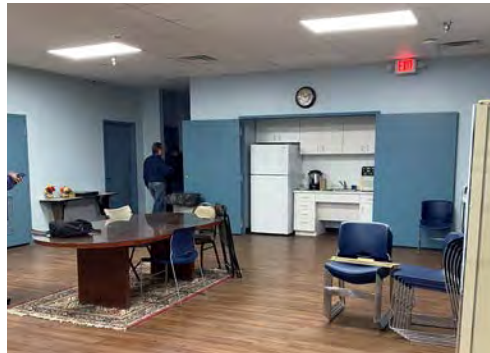
An Affiliate of Goodwill of Southwestern Pennsylvania

Northside Common Ministries  
1601 Brighton Road  
Pittsburgh, PA 15212  
www.ncmin.org

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### A new place to call home...



In June 2022, Northside Common Ministries completed an 18-month renovation project. Check out these photos of our new space!

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1982-2022: 40 years of providing for the needs of our brothers and sisters who are hungry and homeless

# Northside Common Ministries News

September 2022

## A message from the Director

“Each one, teach one!” That is a statement my grandfather would share, among many others. My life of service started when other people reached out to help me – a poor kid from the streets of L.A. – grow beyond the environment in which I was born. The Late Great Jay, former director of Northside Common Ministries (NCM), was one of many mentors who helped me on my personal path to becoming a servant to my community. Jay was a true community leader. We should all hope to be as selfless as Jay, and he will be missed dearly. I have big shoes to fill.

My name is Michael Moore I am the new director of NCM. I can only hope to bring half of what Jay brought to this place. I have been working at NCM for almost 12 years, learning as much as I could by working under Jay. My primary goal as director is to bring more awareness to the many people we serve who are homeless or low income. It can be easy to overlook people and their situations if they do not directly affect us, but what we don’t understand is that every action by every person is like a ripple in a pond that is bound to touch one another in some way. Scientists believe that each birth is a miracle; let us use the miracle of our existence to be a blessing to someone less fortunate.

I’m a leader who believes in transparency, so let me share a bit more about myself so you can see where my heart of service comes from. I was not the most fortunate child; I grew up in harsh conditions in South Central L.A., during the late 80s and early 90s. Waking up every morning surrounded by gang violence and a culture of emotional and mental pain inspired my drive to become someone who could make a difference and help heal the pain of others. Living and feeling the effects of this type of lifestyle inspired me to study psychology. I earned an Associates of Art in Psychology at Community College of Allegheny County, and then went on to earn my Bachelor of Science in Behavioral Science at Duquesne University.

Before my children came into my life, I was a broken young man with a lot of pain and emotional damage largely due to the physical and emotional abuse suffered as a child while staying in foster care from the ages of 6 to 8. My father died when I was two years old, and my mother was using drugs, so I bounced around a lot. Despite the darkness I have suffered, all I can truly remember is light. I have made my share of mistakes, but the birth of my first child brought that light into full view. To show my children a better future, I realized I had to first make a better future for myself and be the same light they have brought into my life. In the process, I also realized I could use my light to help lead others out of dark places as well. My hope for my new role at NCM and as a part of the community is to use the testimony of my life to inspire others.



## A shelter... and more!

We want everyone to feel welcome at NCM and we hope to embrace the community with our work. We are excited to host a free GED program through Goodwill of Southwestern Pennsylvania. We also offer a Neighborhood Employment program in which we help people find their paths during their job search.

Do you need meeting or event space? We welcome the community to use our building to host meetings. We aim to be a community center that can promote fresh ideas to help others. Our space is available to rent for small celebrations, poetry readings or open mic events. All proceeds help the men who reside in our shelter.

Interested in volunteering? We are always in need of volunteers to help the many people we serve, and we are always open to any arts and music programs interested in providing therapeutic activities for the men in our shelter.

If you are interested in any of these opportunities, email [info@ncmin.org](mailto:info@ncmin.org) for more information.

## Meet a few of our NCM team members!



Edward Boehme is the assistant director of NCM. He's been in this position for six months and brings many years of experience from the field (including previous positions at NCM). He enjoys the environment at NCM and likes working with the shelter residents. In his spare time, Ed likes to garden.



Todd Hall volunteered at NCM for four years before becoming officially employed as a resident monitor. Todd hopes to make a positive difference in the lives of the men at the shelter and strongly believes in the good work that NCM is doing in the local community. When he's not at NCM, Todd likes to read, cook, shop at Goodwill and other thrift stores, and watch sports. An interesting fact about Todd is that he used to play football!



Joyce Mosely is an administrative assistant at NCM who first came to Goodwill from the Step program. Joyce likes everyone she works with at NCM, and her favorite thing about her job is that the team gets along so well. When she's not at NCM, Joyce enjoys playing games on her computer and phone, watching TV, listening to music, and crocheting. An interesting fact about Joyce is that she was a registered nurse for many years!



Warren Strickland has been a van driver at NCM for 12 years. He likes the flexibility that NCM offers. Warren is kind and caring and he likes that his work helps people in need of things like food, clothing, and furniture. In his free time, Warren enjoys golfing.

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**Did you know you can donate to NCM online?**

Visit [www.ncmin.org/donate](http://www.ncmin.org/donate) or scan the QR code with your cell phone.



## Northside Common Ministries makes major renovations

After 18 months of work through a pandemic and increased need for a welcoming place in the city for homeless men, Northside Common Ministries (NCM) completed renovations and rededicated its building in a ribbon-cutting ceremony in June.

In conjunction with its 40th anniversary, NCM continues its mission to build bridges that connect neighbors in need to an improved quality of life, while tearing down the walls that keep the hungry and homeless from achieving success.

At the newly renovated building, NCM operates the Pleasant Valley Emergency Shelter for men and male-identifying individuals aged 18 and older, the Northside Food Pantry, and a Permanent Housing program for those with disabilities at its building located at 1601 Brighton Rd. in Pittsburgh. The Goodwill-affiliated facility is supported by hundreds of volunteers, including members of more than 60 church congregations who provide evening meals for shelter residents throughout the year.

While the work over the past 40 years has been substantial, it became necessary to renovate and make the current 130-year-old building more sound to ensure the shelter and food bank would remain in place for many years to come. Renovations included upgrades to the interior of the building as well as exterior entry ramps, stairs and other ADA upgrades enabling the shelter to continue to house homeless residents in wheelchairs.

The upgrades to the building were made possible thanks to community partners who provided significant funding to make NCM's building renovations a reality. Major funders included Federal Community Project Funding, Allegheny County, City of Pittsburgh and The Hillman Foundation.



*Cutting the ribbon on the opening of the newly renovated Northside Common Ministries were, left to right, Mark Bibro, Northside Common Ministries Advisory Board Chair; Keith Wehner, Office of State Senator Wayne Fontana; Abigail Horn, Allegheny County Department of Human Services; Aaron Jones, Northside Common Ministries Staff Member; Paul D'Alessandro, Office of US Congressman Mike Doyle; Michael Moore, Director of Northside Common Ministries; and PA Representative Emily Kinkead.*

## Success story: Sanders

Sanders came to our shelter a few months ago after being incarcerated for several years. Upon his arrival, Sanders turned his life around and quickly became a top-level role model among our residents.

Sanders found a job working the line at a candy factory and in less than three weeks he was promoted to a management position. Sanders used his new position to hire four more residents from the shelter!

The compassion Sanders has for others inspires us all at NCM. Every time Sanders made a positive move in his personal life, he made sure to lift up someone else in need.

After working 12-hour shifts at the candy factory, Sanders returned to NCM and regularly helped load cars at the food pantry just to show his appreciation for having a place to sleep.

Sanders recently reconnected with family and found a new employment opportunity in Florida, where he is now living in his own apartment and still helping those around him. Even at his lowest point, Sanders was able to find his own light.

## Grateful for Jay Poliziani

There aren't enough words to convey Jay's tireless work ethic and genuine compassion for our North Side community. It was Jay's mission to treat each person with dignity and respect.

Please take a few moments to read the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette's* heart-warming story that was recently published as a news obituary.

### **Obituary: James 'Jay' Poliziani Jr. | Advocate for the homeless and hungry among many other causes - August 13, 1961 - July 2, 2022**

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*Janice Crompton: jcrompton@post-gazette.com  
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James "Jay" Poliziani's role model in life was Fred Rogers.

And, much like his hero, Mr. Poliziani lived a life of compassion, caring and nurturing for those who were most in need of it.

As the director of the Northside Common Ministries for many years, he was a champion for the homeless, the hungry — the voiceless among us.

"When I think of Jay, joy comes to mind. He really was like Mr. Rogers," said his longtime friend and colleague Sue Kerr. "He was about that same kindness and neighborliness. He even wore sweater vests at times."

Mr. Poliziani, of Greenfield, died July 2 after a brief battle with melanoma. He was 60.

In keeping with his selfless nature, Mr. Poliziani was extremely modest about his many accomplishments, such as the time he and another member of the local AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power — known colloquially as ACTUP — took it upon themselves to contact local funeral homes in the 1980s to ask whether they would work with AIDS patients or those who were HIV positive.

"They got the Yellow Pages and called every single funeral home in Western Pennsylvania so they could save the families the trouble of having to do it," said Ms. Kerr, a local LGBTQ activist, social worker, journalist and blogger. "Can you imagine how hard that must have been at that time and the trauma he had to absorb as a buffer for the families and the burden he must have carried?"

In the days since his death, Mr. Poliziani's husband and other friends and loved ones have learned that story and the many others that populated his incredible life.

"He was such an awesome person, and I wasn't even aware of all the things he did. His modesty prevented him from talking about it," said his husband, Chaofan "Fan" Zhang. "I only knew a small part of him — I wish I'd known more. I was blessed and proud to be a part of his life." The two met and fell in love in early 2019. They married a year later.

Mr. Poliziani grew up as the oldest of three children in Pittsburgh's West End, where he was always an adventurous soul.

After graduating in 1979 from Bishop Canevin High School in East Carnegie, Mr. Poliziani "grabbed a backpack and took a trip to Europe," said his brother, Jeff Poliziani of Jackson, Mich.

Mr. Poliziani went on to earn several college degrees, along with one from the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 2008.

As with the other parts of his life, Mr. Poliziani was a fantastic brother, Jeff Poliziani said.

"Jay and I, we were always close," he said. "I was able to spend time with him during the last week and learned more about what an amazing person he was. I've told him numerous times that he was my hero."

He worked as an elementary school teacher then moved on to Goodwill of Southwestern Pennsylvania, where Mr. Poliziani worked for many years in social services, including placement services and as director of admissions.

When he moved to the NCM, an affiliated unit within Goodwill, it was a natural progression, he said in an interview.

"With my experience coordinating the shelter's meals and years of interactions with homeless individuals in the Downtown area, I knew that I could be an effective advocate and, more importantly, help them to be effective advocates for themselves," he said in an article for the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

As director of the NCM — which includes the Pleasant Valley Men's Shelter, one of the largest food pantries in the state and a

medical clinic, along with other services — the going wasn't always easy.

But, Mr. Poliziani was a tireless advocate for his clients.

In November 2019, he was among those who persuaded the Pittsburgh Regional Transit — then known as the Allegheny County Port Authority— to maintain its bus stop in front of the NCM shelter and food pantry on Brighton Road.

The stop was slated to close as part of a consolidation and cost-saving measure, but the authority decided against it after Mr. Poliziani circulated a Facebook post suggesting that authority officials should have a wheelchair race to the next closest stop, in front of the Pittsburgh Zone 1 police station, so they could see for themselves how difficult it would be.

"I'm not sure if that pushed them over the edge," Mr. Poliziani told a Post-Gazette reporter in a Nov. 17, 2019, story.

Now, Ms. Kerr hopes that she and others might be able to honor Mr. Poliziani's memory by naming the bus stop bench after him.

"He lived a good life — he lived a life of service," she said. "It's easy to put him on a pedestal, but he would knock the pedestal over and use it as a bench for four people."

Some of the stories were less hopeful, but Mr. Poliziani persevered.

Almost three years ago, the Rev. Sheldon "Sarge" Stoudemire, a Braddock preacher who worked the overnight shift for years at the men's shelter was fatally shot after refusing entry to someone who tried to get in after hours.

Just two months later, in September 2019, the shelter's longtime volunteer chef, Kelvin "Tracy" Organ, was found dead at a nearby homeless camp, where he often sat and talked with friends.

Those tragic incidents, plus no — or very low — wages made it even more difficult to find staff members to work overnight, so Mr. Poliziani himself often took those shifts, said Jana Thompson, coordinator of the food pantry.

"He was exhausted," she said. "He would start his week working the Sunday night shift. He wanted to take care of as many people as possible."

"I think I can sum up Jay in three words: He was gentle, thoughtful and dedicated. He earned all three of those," said Mark Fatla, former head of the Northside Leadership Conference.

"If you press me for a fourth, it would be effective. He really produced for the folks he was trying to serve."

From the bus stop to the tragic stories of many homeless, Mr. Poliziani found sympathy and a way forward for those most in need.

"He was, from my perspective, unflappable," said former Post-Gazette columnist Brian O'Neill. "He dealt with a lot of people who were facing heavyweight issues. He always seemed so calm, and he really cared about what they were going through."

Mr. Poliziani enlisted Mr. O'Neill's help with finding a job or resources for some of the people he encountered.

It was a fruitful — and symbiotic — relationship.

"He led me to some good stories because he cared about people who were in trouble," Mr. O'Neill said.

At NCM, Mr. Poliziani made a safe space for people of all religions, creeds and races.

And for the LGBT community, he found ways to make sure that everyone knew they would be welcomed, Ms. Kerr recalled.

"He put safe-space stickers and rainbow things on every surface he could think of to let people know it was LGBT-friendly, safe and supportive," she said. "It was a men's shelter, but he found a way to make sure trans people who needed shelter could get it."

The greatest way to honor Mr. Poliziani would be to carry on his crusade, family and friends said.

"I was not ready for my brother to leave because he touched so many lives and accomplished so much in his life," Jeff Poliziani said. "He touched a lot of hearts."

"Pittsburgh has experienced a tremendous loss that we probably won't fully realize for years," Ms. Kerr said.

Along with his husband and brother, Mr. Poliziani is survived by his son, John, of Greenfield, and his sister, Jenny Leskovansky, of Houtzdale, Clearfield County.

A memorial service will be held at 10 a.m. Saturday at East Liberty Presbyterian Church. Mourners are asked to wear casual happy clothing that will represent the joy that Mr. Poliziani had for life.

Donations in his name can be made to Northside Common Ministries or the American Melanoma Foundation.