

## Shelter mainstay a beacon for the Chapel Hill community

By Lucy Bryan, The Herald-Sun

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CHAPEL HILL -- For the past 19 years, something's been making the Inter-Faith Council Community House a little more like home for the homeless of Chapel Hill. It's not the clean beds or the warm meals -- it's a man named Raney Norwood.

Norwood's friends and coworkers say that he knows how to listen, knows how to love and knows how to provide discipline for those who need it.

Norwood -- who was born in Durham -- and his wife Delaine have raised their children Edward and Rykeal locally. The family attends St. Joseph's Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in Carrboro.

Nearly two decades ago, Norwood saw an ad in the newspaper saying that the IFC needed someone to run the homeless shelter three nights a week. He took the job, expecting to stay no longer than six months.

"I found myself there five or six nights a week, just wanting to hang out with the guys," Norwood said. "It was just like a family, sitting around and watching that big, black and white TV."

Norwood said that it's the people who have kept him at the shelter. Some of the guests were friends that he had grown up with. Others were families.

"A lot of the people take on the concept that homeless people are people with criminal backgrounds," Norwood said. "The thing I've found out is that they're people with bad luck, people who couldn't pay the light bill, just ordinary people."

Norwood said he spends a lot of time talking to guests, and often has the chance to give them input on their lives.

"The best is when you see [guests] really make it -- go out and buy a buy a home and a car and have a family," Norwood said. "Then they come back and share their stories."

Norwood said that he saw something special in one shelter guest and confronted him about his drinking problem.

"I got on him so hard that he went out and got a lawnmower -- it only had three wheels on it," Norwood said. "Now, he's got one of the biggest landscaping companies in Durham."

Sherri Murrell, a Chapel Hill lawyer, said she met Norwood in 1987, when she began volunteering at the homeless shelter as a UNC undergraduate.

"I was intimidated by him first night I worked with him," Murrell said. "He was big and quiet, and I wasn't sure if he liked me ... but by the end of the night we were fast friends."

Murrell said all of the shelter guests trusted and respected Norwood because he would listen to them but would not tolerate bad behavior. She said that he never brushed anyone off, and that she'd find him talking to guests in the middle of the night.

"He's never, never worked like 'This is my job and it's time for me to leave,'" Murrell said. "In the morning, if breakfast volunteers didn't show up, he'd stay."

Chris Moran, executive director of IFC, said Norwood is committed to helping people.

During the day, Norwood repairs homes and restores and refinishes antiques. He also hangs out with what he calls "the kids on the block" -- teenagers who have dropped out of school.

Norwood said he helps some find employment and encourages others to go back to school.

"A lot has to do with the lack of love, homes, churches, neighborhoods," Norwood said. "They're reaching out for love."

For his contribution, Norwood won the 1997 Martin Luther King Jr. Citizenship Award.

"When you are in a bind and you need somebody to help you out, Raney comes through," Murrell said. "It's that way all over town. Everybody knows him and everybody loves him."

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