Alvis is Reflecting and Celebrating 50 Years of Service in 2017

As Alvis celebrates a half-century of service to the community this year, I am incredibly proud to lead the organization in its anniversary year. Today’s Alvis is a vibrant, efficient, effective organization that achieves results.

When the agency opened Central Ohio’s first halfway house in 1967, it was not an era of vision and mission statements. But from the beginning, our founders modeled the statements we “officially” adopted in recent years:

**OUR VISION:** That communities believe each person’s potential is more important than their past.

**OUR MISSION:** To innovate and deliver evidence-based human service programs that empower those we serve to build successful and productive lives.

Growth and innovation have always defined Alvis, both in programs launched and individuals served. Originally, the agency only served men who were returning to the community after spending time in the Ohio Penitentiary. Over time, the agency’s focus has expanded to include programs for individuals with developmental disabilities, women and families.

From a single house – a 15-bed facility that served fewer than 60 men its first year – to more than 40 locations in Ohio that provide direct services to more than 7,000 people a year and impact thousands more, Alvis is an extraordinary success story. In fact, over the last 50 years, tens of thousands of men, women, young adults and children in Ohio have received direct services from the organization.

Milestones like this truly are cause for reflection. So many people, institutions, corporations and nonprofit agencies have been part of the Alvis journey since 1967! We will remember and thank these participants all year in our anniversary celebrations. And we invite the Central Ohio community to join us at: Special Edition celebrating 50 years of 180 degree impact.
Members of the Alvis Leadership Team are (from left), front row: Gerard Lowe, Managing Director, Programs; Phil Nunes, COO; Joe Geary, CFO; Lois Hochstetler, Managing Director, Clinical Services. Middle Row: Denise M. Robinson, President & CEO; Heidi Riggs, CAO; Arlene Reitter, Managing Director, Development & Communications. Back row: Sandra Allen, Managing Director, DD Division; Shanda McJunkins, Controller; Dr. Randy Shively, Director of Research & Clinical Development; Dianne Jenkins, Managing Director, Programs; Ramona Swayne, Managing Director, Social Enterprises.

Unlikely Team Shared Passion that Founded Alvis House

The agency’s pioneers had nothing in common except good intentions, little organization and even less funding. Together, they introduced Columbus to the concept of a halfway house that would help people to be more successful in returning to the community.

In the mid-1960s, two very different personalities – a young, idealistic Episcopal priest and a founding partner in a local law firm – were spending time with inmates at the Ohio Penitentiary. The Rev. David Dunning of Trinity Episcopal Church conducted Bible study classes. Attorney Irwin Barkan was a discussion leader for a “Great Books” course.

Both became passionate about helping the men they met, particularly as they were paroled and transitioning back into the community. As they looked for solutions, they were joined by Edwin Hammock, founder of a court reporting business, and John Holden, who worked in housing rehabilitation for the City of Columbus. Together, they discussed what it would take to start a corrections halfway house.

They were able to find a house, at 971 Bryden Road, that was in pretty good shape and was for sale for just $10,000, but lack of funding looked like it was going to stop their progress. Fortunately, one of the original board members was Don Chapman, President of Gates McDonald, and he was able to access the company’s revolving fund that provided loans to support civic causes.

$100,000 Matching Gift in 2017 Will Further Alvis’ Impact

Honoring Alvis’ 50th anniversary, an anonymous donor will match all new and increased gifts made in 2017, up to $100,000. It’s an incredibly generous gift that will dramatically enhance the 180 degree impact that ALL of our donors and supporters have on the lives of the clients, families and communities we serve.

- The Evening of Light gala fundraiser for our Family and Children’s Program on April 28;
- The Grand Opening Celebration for the Community Treatment Center on Livingston Avenue in Columbus on May 10;
- The Family Reunion picnic for past and present clients, as well as their families, on September 9; and
- The 180 Degree Impact Luncheon on October 11, where we will recognize key individuals and organizations who have been turning lives around for 50 years.

In this year of celebrating our past, the Alvis team – the Board of Trustees, countless volunteers and more than 550 staff members – also know there is much to look forward to as we eagerly anticipate a bright future for the programs and people we serve.
Barkan, Hammock and Holden were among the earliest Alvis House board members and remained active board members for many years. All were later named “Life Members” of the Alvis House Board of Trustees. Dunning moved out of Columbus shortly after the agency was founded. He later left the priesthood and became an organizational psychologist in Seattle, Washington.

Barkan, Hammock, Holden and Dunning all went on to enjoy long lives and accomplished careers, but they never forgot the organization they founded and followed its success through the years. Each man’s obituary proudly noted the founding of Alvis House as a major accomplishment in their lives.

Photographed in 1992 at Alvis House's 25th Anniversary Celebration were founders (clockwise from top left) Irwin Barkan, Dr. David Dunning, Edwin Hammock and John Holden.

Who was Ralph Alvis?

Although Ralph W. Alvis may not be well-known today, when founders of the new “Franklin County Halfway House, Inc.” were looking to name the agency, he was the ideal namesake. A highly-respected community leader, Alvis was Warden of the Ohio Penitentiary from 1948 to 1959.

Alvis didn’t look or act the part of a traditional warden. Just 43 years old when he arrived in Columbus for the job, “Big Red” was a former college and professional football and baseball player. Alvis, his wife, Charlotte, and two young daughters lived in an apartment over the entrance to the Penitentiary.

Early in his tenure at the Ohio Penitentiary, Alvis was asked about his approach to his work with inmates. He knew hundreds of them by first name. “Each man has a problem,” he said. “He’s an individual and he should be treated as such if we’re ever to rehabilitate him and make him useful to society. That’s our one aim here. The better we do it, the better we’re doing our job.”

The Ohio Penitentiary had a reputation for operating smoothly. Most people attributed that to Alvis’ leadership and commitment to rehabilitation. Alvis and his staff were credited with advancements such as the abolition of lock-step marching, extension of privileges in visiting and writing, extended educational, recreational and religious programs, establishment of social and psychological services, establishment of a vocational training program and training programs for employees. Alvis left his post as warden in 1959 because ultimately, he could not reconcile his position with his opposition to capital punishment.

Ralph W. Alvis died of cancer on August 5, 1967 – the same month the founders of Franklin County Halfway House, Inc. purchased the first facility. As they sought a name to honor the spirit of reform in the corrections profession, the answer was simple: Alvis House.
Irwin Barkan was the founding partner of a Columbus law firm. He led a “Great Books” program for prisoners at the Ohio Penitentiary, which is where he met Dunning. Barkan also became interested in helping men to transition successfully back to the community.

David Dunning, Alvis House co-founder, was a newly-graduated seminarian at Trinity Church in downtown Columbus and assigned to serve as Episcopal chaplain at the Ohio Penitentiary. There, he developed a passion for helping people who were returning to the community from prison.

Decade One – 1967 to 1976
The Dream Becomes Reality

- The first facility, located at 971 Bryden Road, is purchased. – 1967
- Maurice (Maury) Breslin, an experienced halfway house manager from Wilmington, Delaware, is hired to be the executive director. – 1967
- In its first year providing services, the 15-bed facility assists approximately 60 men paroled from the Ohio Penitentiary. – 1968
- Alvis House becomes a United Way agency. – 1970
- Milton McAngus, Assistant Deputy Director for the Ohio Youth Commission, is hired to be the second executive director. – 1975

Decade Two – 1977 to 1986
Struggle, Survival and Resurgence

- Employment assessment and job placement services begin. – 1977
- Severe reductions in government funding for halfway houses force the closure of several programs and reduction in staff. – 1981

“Starting Alvis House in the ’60s wasn’t so much timing – I don’t think there’s ever a good time. I think it was the people involved. The founders had a commitment to the community. There was just a core group – a diverse group, some heavy-weight people – that made it work.”

Geno Natalucci-Persichetti, Former Assistant Executive Director of Alvis House

“Columbus had a community action program… and I worked with the leadership to get them to recognize Alvis House and give us monies. I was stonewalled and decided to use some pressure tactics. I lined up 15 elderly women at Trinity Church and had them call the headquarters, in almost a nonstop fashion, to ask why they didn’t fund Alvis House.” The Director relented and gave us funding.

David Dunning

“[Mayor Sensenbrenner]… wrote a poem to read at our opening kickoff. It talked about facing the world after the prison gates opened and you didn’t have a thing in your pocket, you didn’t have this, you didn’t have that, you didn’t even have a place to stay.”

Maury Breslin
Alvis House’s First Executive Director

“In Employment Services, my job was to develop training programs and convince employers to hire our clients. In 1983, the John Galbreath Company hired us for building maintenance at 30 East Broad – that opened a lot of doors for us. It was the start of getting Alvis House clients into better-paying jobs.”

Al Young
Retired long-time employee of Alvis House
“I remember one fellow, who had been in for drug offenses. He was a bright, intelligent person. [I saw him] several years later… leading a group of people. He said, ‘Because of you, I got my Master’s Degree in counseling at OSU and now work at North Central Mental Health Center. I have you to thank!’”

John McCormick
Retired long-time employee of Alvis House

• A 15-bed intermediate care facility opens for men with developmental disabilities and significant behavioral challenges, adding a second, significant line of service for Alvis House. – 1981

• The employment services unit expands with the help of a landscape and litter abatement program and funding from the Private Industry Council, through the Job Training Partnership Act. – 1983

Decade Three – 1987 to 1996
Building the Business Side of Alvis House

• Robert Gloeckner is promoted from assistant executive director to become Alvis House’s third executive director. – 1987

• Professional alcohol and drug counseling services are made available to all residents. – 1989

• Alvis House begins its first residential program for female clients. – 1990

• Alvis House expands its efforts beyond Central Ohio with the acquisition of COPE Center (Comprehensive Offender Program Effort) in Dayton. – 1991

• Program Services Center, with expanded facilities for cognitive behavioral treatment services, substance abuse education/counseling and staff training, opens at 700 Bryden Rd. - 1996

“When I was a new board member, Hunt Carlile (then board chair) said, ‘There is no one else standing in the shoes of Alvis House … We are their only chance. Our job is to give people a chance.’”

Denny Newman,
Attorney, Former Board President of Alvis House and a Life Member of the Board

“No one should be discarded because they have a disability. These are people who can’t speak for themselves – they need a voice.”

Denise M. Robinson
Decade Four – 1997 to 2006

**Alvis House is Recognized as a Community Corrections Model**

- Alvis House opens groundbreaking residential program at the VA Medical Center in Chillicothe to provide treatment for former offenders who are military veterans. – 1997

- Board of Trustees approves Alvis House’s membership in OhioLink Corrections & Treatment, Inc., an organization whose membership consists of the three largest non-profit community corrections agencies in Ohio: Alvis House, Oriana House of Akron and Talbert House of Cincinnati. – 1998

- Alvis House builds the Alum Creek Residential Treatment Center, which is the first newly constructed halfway house in Central Ohio: – 2000

- With the accreditation of the Alum Creek and Toledo programs by the American Correctional Association, Alvis House completes a six-year goal of accrediting all the agency’s residential programs. – 2001

- Alvis House receives multiple awards for its excellent work from the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. – 2001, 2002, 2003

- Alvis House begins providing supported living programs, which extends the range of services for individuals with developmental disabilities. – 2003

- Upon the retirement of Bob Gloeckner, Executive Vice President Denise M. Robinson is named President and CEO of Alvis, Inc. – 2005
Decade Five – 2007 to 2016

Alvis House Expands to Address Increasing Needs

• As some agencies discontinue providing reentry services, Alvis House is asked to expand and take on those clients to ensure continuity of services. – 2007, 2008

• Alvis House receives a Crystal Eagle Award from the American Correctional Association, the association’s highest honor recognizing a commitment to excellence in corrections. – 2012

• The CHAT program (Changing Habits, Attitudes and Thoughts) is launched to serve women who are survivors of human trafficking. – 2013

• Supported living and behavioral support services for individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities expand into Montgomery County. - 2014

• A Family and Children’s Program for mothers in Alvis House’s residential programs and their minor children is created. – 2014

• Recovery Choices, a new outpatient substance abuse treatment program, opens in Columbus. – 2015

• The agency rebrands, drops the "House" and is now known as Alvis. - 2015

“It’s one thing to do the work, but you’ve got to have a passion for the mission and the people you serve. If we ever forget why we’re here, we will have a problem. If we help our clients, it will change them, change their families and change our community for the better.”

Denise M. Robinson
Evening of Light

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Friday, April 28, 2017

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