

# NORTHWEST PILOT PROJECT

BETTER TIMES NEWSLETTER



Summer 2003

## The Taft is Saved!

On June 12, 2003, a community meeting was held with residents and staff of the Taft to announce the building will stay open, and that people will not have to move. This announcement marked the end of seven months of worry and uncertainty for the residents of the Taft. Since November 7, 2002, the long-term tenants of the Taft have had to live with anxiety, and the very real possibility that they would be displaced from a place they have called home for decades.

On November 7, 2002, Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare announced they would be closing the Residential Care Facility at the Taft on April 30, 2003. Cascadia's decision to close the Taft was based on inadequate reimbursement rates from government funders, and decreasing funding for mental health services. While NWPP organized a community advocacy effort to save the Taft, it was many long months before it became certain we would be successful.

Jack Twiss moved into the Taft in April 1991. In the spring of 1991, Northwest Pilot Project staff found Jack living in deplorable conditions in sub-standard housing. He was at risk of becoming homeless. Living at the Taft has improved the quality of his life, and provided critical health care for Jack. When asked how he felt when he heard the news about the Taft remaining open, Jack told us: "I was relieved. NWPP helped me move here, and I knew they would help me find another place, but I didn't want to move. It's hard to think about moving after twelve years. This is my home. I have friends here, and it's so convenient to everything I need."

*(continued on page 4)*



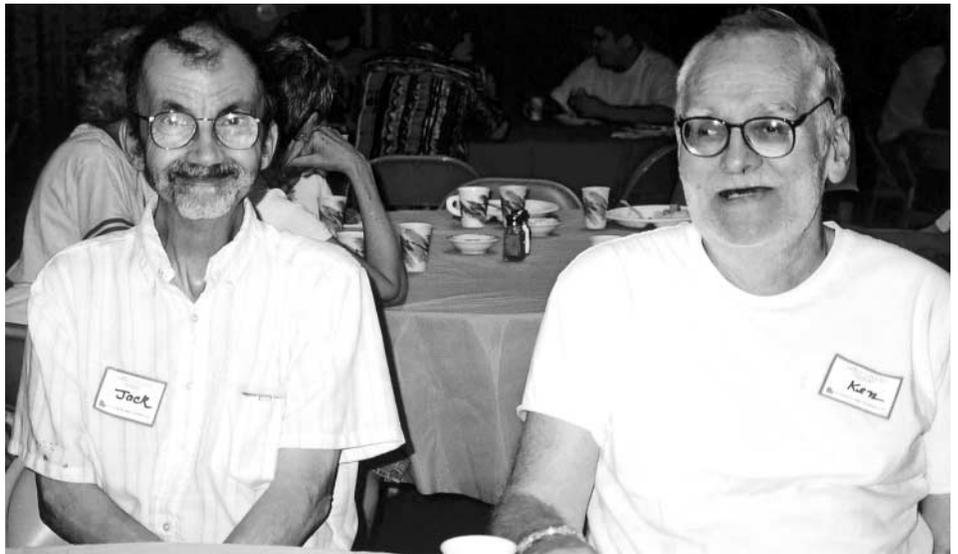
*Jack Twiss*

# The Taft is Saved

*(continued from page 1)*

Every July St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Southwest Portland holds a summer picnic for NWPP clients. Jack Twiss and other long-time residents of the Taft were at the picnic on July 29, 2003. As they told us how good they feel about being able to stay at the Taft, Jack was quick to remind us that some of the residents were not as fortunate. "People got so worried and upset, they felt they had to move. One man who had lived in the building for twenty years, and another for twelve years – both moved away, and it hasn't been good for them. We're happy about what's happening, but we don't want to forget about them."

**Concepts in Community Living** (CCL) is the new operator of the Taft, they officially took over on July 1, 2003. Those of us who worked on the advocacy effort to save the Taft were thrilled that CCL was willing to step in and take this on. A for-profit company, they manage and operate fifteen residential care and assisted living facilities in Oregon and Washington, including the MacDonald Residence at 605 N.W. Couch. They are highly regarded by state employees who license residential care and assisted living facilities. When we first talked to Michael DeShane, CEO of Concepts in Community Living, about the Taft he told us: "We take on a project like this, not because we expect to make a lot of money, or because it will be easy. We take it on because it's part of our mission."



*Jack Twiss and Ken Hulburt at St. Luke's picnic on July 29, 2003*

One of the first things CCL did was to hire Karen Shenefelt to be the Director of the Taft. Karen had previously run the program at the Taft from 1991 to November 2002, and has an intimate knowledge of the residents and the staff. Karen has worked in the mental health field for almost twenty years: four years at Dammasch State Hospital, and a combined fifteen years at Mental Health Services West, Unity, and Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare. Karen has been deeply committed to the Taft for years, and understands its importance to our community. "There are people living at the Taft who I have known in the system for as long as I've worked in mental health – who have been successful at the Taft and nowhere else."

Michael De Shane told us: "We are honored to have the opportunity to keep such a critical Portland resource functioning. Without the Taft, many frail and disabled Portland residents would be without a home or essential services." And

Michael told us about the improvements they are planning. CCL will be remodeling the first floor of the Taft, completely redoing the common areas, and purchasing new furniture. "We will be bringing more light into the community space, and improve lighting in the upper hallways." They also plan to have an onsite maintenance person.

Other plans for the Taft include accepting more medically needy individuals. As Karen told us: "We can keep people who have significant physical problems longer, and we won't have to send them to nursing homes like we did in the past. We will be able to hire more staff, and provide increased personal care."

It's wonderful to watch these improvements, and know how much they will benefit the residents. We're proud of our community's efforts to keep the Taft open, and look forward to a celebration later this fall to thank all those who have made it possible.

## Too important to lose

### *Saving Taft Hotel protects very fragile residents and averts a community emergency*

Count the checkmarks that add to the burdens of longtime residents at the 80-unit Taft Hotel, a residential care facility in Portland:

- ✓ They're poor.
- ✓ They're old.
- ✓ They're alone.
- ✓ Most have primary disabilities and require assistance and monitoring of their food and medicines.
- ✓ Serious mental illness is a secondary complication for many.

What more can go wrong?

- ✓ A notice tells them that their home will close July 30.

This is a population that isn't skilled at making other arrangements. Many have been evicted from every other facility they've lived in; other care centers aren't eager to accept them.

Dozens would be homeless — on the streets, victimized, cycling through hospitals, jails and public shelters. Instead of each being maintained in a dignified community at the Taft for \$1,600-\$1,800 a month, many would end up in nursing homes at more than \$100 a day or hospitals and mental-health facilities at several times that.

Remarkably, an alliance of city and state departments, private nonprofits and a business agreed that the numerous personal crises would add up to a public emergency and a reduction of community livability. The Taft, they concluded, is too important to lose.

The result: a rescue mission that is almost assured (once the Legislature and governor agree on a budget) of saving the Taft. This rescue also sets the pattern for multi-agency cooperation when future emergencies arise.

This story has no villains. It features a large cast of heroes and heroines:

- ◆ The Northwest Pilot Project, a relentless advocate for the disadvantaged in the city's downtown core.

- ◆ The REACH community development corporation owners, who were resolute in wanting to keep the building providing affordable housing for people with few other options.

- ◆ State personnel, who shifted many responsibilities from Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities to Seniors and People with Disabilities, opening the likelihood that reimbursement rates would rise.

- ◆ Portland's Bureau of Housing and Community Development and Commissioner Erik Sten, whose leap of faith made the deal possible, by trading heavily restricted federal grants with the Park Bureau for use of less restrictive federal funds to pay a portion of the operating deficit until reimbursement upgrades could be achieved.

- ◆ Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare, which extended its operation of the Taft despite losses (\$379,000 anticipated for 2003) until another provider was found.

- ◆ Concepts in Community Living, the for-profit operator of 15 residential care and assisted-living facilities in Oregon and Washington, which didn't seek the job but agreed to take on the risk of restoring the Taft to operational stability.

The cost to the public of homelessness and other social plagues will always be higher than the cost of preventing them. But, as in this stellar effort at the Taft Hotel, success usually requires people to reach beyond their traditional domains. Well done, everybody.