

The History of
THE COASTAL BEND ALCOHOL AND DRUG
REHABILITATION CENTER, INC
“CHARLIE’S PLACE”

Foreword

The history of Charlie’s Place was compiled from a variety of documents found in Bob Beck’s office after his death. These consisted of letters, newspaper clippings, minutes from meetings, and recorded interviews with Bob Beck. The documents covered the period from 1965 to 1993. The author of this history is the wife of Bob Beck and her memories of those early days are included. Additional material will be added from interviews with other persons who remember the events of those years. The documents can be found in a separate notebook at the Founders’ Club under the title Supporting Documents for The History of The Coastal Bend Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation Center, Inc. “Charlie’s Place.”

The narrative will show how the 12 Steps of the AA Program motivated, guided and energized the participants. A quote from an untitled, undated, and unsigned paper is offered as an introduction to this story. “We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol- that our lives had become unmanageable. This is the first of twelve steps taken by alcoholics with a desire to recover from the dreaded disease. This step was necessary for the conception of the Coastal Bend Halfway House for Alcoholics” (Supporting Documents, 34. Especially significant was the 12th Step which says that the recovering alcoholic must carry the message to other alcoholics. These two precepts and a third, “In order to keep it, you must give it away”, shaped the efforts of a few recovering alcoholics.

Introduction

Charlie came out on the front porch of the white two story house on Third Street. He stood on the top step and looked up and down the street. “Surely, Bob will be here soon,” he thought. He knew that Bob got off work at the refinery at 3:00 p.m.; it would take awhile to get into town and go to the grocery store. It was 5:00 now and he should be here any minute. Charlie wanted to get supper started because the men were hungry. Hank had been by with some fish he caught this morning, but there wasn’t much else to cook for supper until Bob got here.

As Charlie waited for Bob he thought about how grateful he was to have a roof over his head, food to eat, and other alcoholics to talk to. Of course, there were times when they got rather quarrelsome, but Charlie just told them to settle down or leave. Nobody wanted to leave. Charlie thought about what it had been like before he came to Third Street. It was only four months ago that he

arrived here from Houston. He had just gotten out of the Veteran's Hospital and had no place to go. It was April, 1967 when he arrived and he had been sober ever since. He lived in this house with seven or eight other men (the number varied).

Bob and his friends (other recovering alcoholics) had rented this house when their first venture to help sick, homeless, and suffering alcoholics proved too successful-the number of clients outgrew the resources very quickly. In other ways the first venture seemed to have failed miserably because of many financial problems. The idea had been to form a key club called the "24-Hour Club" where members could take newly recovering alcoholics who had no place to go. A monthly fee paid by members supported the club. The trouble was that many of the supporters dropped out or lost interest. It was wildly successful because it helped the men who started it stay sober and some of the ones they tried to help were able to stay sober also. It had been so successful that it had become necessary to move to a larger place about a year ago. Unfortunately, they still couldn't pay the rent and buy food.

It was no longer a key club and it had a new name; everybody referred to it as the "Halfway House." About the same time Charlie arrived, concerned citizens were made aware of what was being accomplished and the financial problems. They began donating some money; but it was still a "hand-to-mouth" operation. The main difference was that it was no longer totally supported by AA members. Several churches had taken over some of the responsibility for raising money.

Charlie had been in and out of hospitals and jails and he was glad to finally find a place he could call home. He had only been here a month when he was made House Manager (whoever had the most sobriety was put in charge). He enjoyed cooking for the others (when there was something to cook) and they seemed to accept him as the boss. He really felt comfortable living here and doing what he was doing. Some of the guys were pretty sick when they came and a few managed to stay sober and get a job. Others went back to the bottle as soon as they quit vomiting. Seeing that helped Charlie to remember what it had been like when he was drinking. He didn't want that anymore. He wanted to be like George, Hank, Dick and Bob and the others. They seemed happy and free now that they weren't drinking.

About that time Bob drove up in his old, rusty car. Charlie went out to the curb to help him with the groceries. There weren't many bags but it looked like enough for a day or two. Bob asked, "What's going on, Charlie?" (He always asked that as a way of greeting). Charlie replied, "Glad to see the groceries. A priest from the Valley showed up last night about 10:00 pm with a real sick guy. We've been giving him orange juice with sugar and he seems a little better this morning. I hope you brought more orange juice and coffee? We are about out." Bob answered, "It's here. Also some beans and potatoes." Then he added, "Mrs. Tarlton called again today to remind me that the rent was due." Charlie replied, "Uh-oh". But Bob said, "Don't worry, we'll figure something out." And those devoted to Charlie's Place have been "figuring it out" ever since.

BEGINNING YEARS: 1965-1970

On February 23, 1962, Bob Beck went to an AA meeting at the 18th Street Clubhouse with his friend, Dick Murray. Whatever he heard there prompted him to go back each day for months. As a result, he was able to stay sober for the last 46 years of his life. AA stresses that in order to stay sober; a person must keep in contact with other alcoholics through meetings and helping those who are still drinking. Bob and his friends Dick Murray and George Bachert spent hours after the meetings talking to the newcomers. They listened to their problems and told their own stories of uncontrolled drinking and loss of family and jobs. This is the way AA has worked for many years: one drunk talking to another.

Many of the newcomers had no place to go when the 18th Street Club closed at 10:00 pm. They were homeless, hungry, sick and out of work. In order to “carry the message” and “give it away”, the recovering alcoholics would take these newcomers out for coffee and a meal. Sometimes they would take them to their own homes for the night. Eventually, though, they had to leave them someplace like a street corner. One of the many men they tried to help was Charlie Acklen. He came into the club in 1962 or early 1963. Dick let him live in his apartment for a year once. Charlie stayed sober for varying periods of time but eventually he would start drinking again.

Bob would bring men to his home where they could drink coffee and talk all night. This was alright except that it was hard on his family, especially the six children. Sometimes the men were very sick. After a while a man’s stomach would no longer accept alcohol and he would vomit for hours. Or maybe a man had the shakes so bad he couldn’t even hold a coffee cup. Sober alcoholics had to devise their own treatments for symptoms like the “shakes” and DTs. One treatment was a large glass of orange juice with as much sugar as possible stirred into it. As soon as the guy stopped vomiting, they poured this down him. Then they gave him gallons of coffee. Drinking large quantities of coffee is still seen today at AA meetings. When the DTs or hallucinations seemed imminent, they gave him a small drink of alcohol.

In those early days in the ‘60s, there were no treatment facilities in the area for alcoholics and very few nationally. The men would wind up either in jail or on the psychiatric ward at Memorial Hospital. When a man was found passed out on the street or drunk and disorderly, he was taken to jail if he could be aroused and to the hospital if he could not. In the hospital he was put on the psychiatric ward and sobered up. If he had DT’s, he was kept a little longer and then sent back on the street. In jail he was kept varying lengths of time depending on his offense. The least time would be enough to get him sober and he was sent back to where he came from. Alcoholism was only recognized as a disease in 1957, and there were still stigma attached to it. Many thought it was simply a lack of will power.

Dick had experienced skid row, but neither George nor Bob had ever been homeless. They evidently felt empathy for those who were. They found that helping others made them feel alright with the world and kept them from drinking; just as Bill W. and Dr. Bob had discovered. Possibly this is what led them to the next step.

The impetus for the formation of another type of group seemed to come from the recognition that some new members who may still be drinking needed more than an extra hour with a member with some sobriety. The first record of an organized effort to provide 24-hour help for those still suffering alcoholics was documented in an incomplete set of minutes dated June 19, 1965 (Supporting Documents, 1 and 2). At this time a small group of 12 AAs met in an unnamed office on Staples Street. The Acting Chairman was **Rubye H.** Reference was made to a list of those present at the end of the minutes. However, the second page is missing. In addition to the chairman, two other names were cited-**Ab C. and Bob B.**

The topics discussed are quoted below:

- 1) responsibility to the sick alcoholic ,
- 2) responsibility to the new member of AA,
- 3) providing a place for the new member to “sit-it-out”,
- 4) availability by phone 24 hours a day,
- 5) having a club based on the principles of the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions
- 6) responsibility of “carrying the message”,
- 7) providing something for the alcoholic to do during the time there are no meetings,
- 8) providing activity within the club-the therapy of keeping busy
- 9) concern over “keeping the alcoholics in AA”
- 10) to reach and hold alcoholics from “all walks of life”
- 11) providing an atmosphere where all feel “a part of the club”
- 12) creating in By-laws that no person serving on a board could serve for a designated time again
- 13) set up some type of rotating system where a member would be eligible to serve on a board and automatically go into service-all to be permitted to serve in this manner (Supporting Documents, 1)

The group planned to meet again on June 23, 1965 at the All Saints Episcopal Church. Bob B. was asked to be Acting Chairman of the second meeting. There were no records of this second meeting; however, rumors of the intent to start another group must have created a firestorm among other AA members, especially those of the 18th Street Group. There is a copy of letter from the fledgling group that is 2 ½ pages long justifying their intentions and explaining their goals (Supporting Documents, 3). It is addressed to the Governing Board of The Alanos Group of AA on 18th Street and is signed by Bob Beck,

ad hoc Committee Chairman. The subject of the letter is stated as “The formation of an Alcoholics Anonymous 24-Hour Club.” Several copies of this letter are available, some incomplete. One is dated July 21, 1965, and seems to be a working copy.

The letter is an impassioned plea for understanding of the “real” intentions and plans of the new group. It addresses specific “rumors” and criticisms and is backed with numerous quotations from AA materials such as, the responsibility to other alcoholics as outlined in the 12 steps and 12 Traditions and “Why You Were Chosen for This Work” (Supporting Documents, 3). A point is brought out that representatives of the new group had attended meetings of all other AA Groups in the area and explained the project before any moves were made to implement it.

Many hard feelings must have ensued after the first planning meeting to have induced this level of defense. The author remembers the distress expressed by Bob Beck during this period. It had not occurred to any one of the group that there would be opposition to the idea of helping other alcoholics at times other than regular meetings. The main concern seemed to be that the Alanos Group would be broken up. Since there were so few groups in the Corpus Christi area at this time, the concern had merit.

How this impasse was resolved was not recorded in any of the surviving documents. There must have been a satisfactory solution because both the 24-Hour club and the 18th Street Group continued to survive and were mutually beneficial as the author remembers.

On November 30, 1965 the “Articles of Incorporation of Corpus Christi 24-Hour Alanos club, Inc” were signed by **Robert N. Beck, George E. Bachert, Jack H. Fielder, Richard L. Parker, Maynard T. Herbert, James D. Westley, and Henry M. Cherry**. The purpose for which it was organized was:” to acquire, maintain, and furnish a meeting place and /or club room for the Corpus Christi 24-hour Group of Alcoholics Anonymous, to promote educational programs dealing with the disease of alcoholism, and to aid and assist individuals suffering from the disease of alcoholism and their families.”(Supporting Document, 4) This new facility extends its scope beyond the traditional AA meeting in three ways: it offers 24-Hour access to help; it adds an educational element; and it shows direct concern for the families of alcoholics (Supporting Documents, 4). The seven men cited above probably did not analyze what they were trying to do or foresee where it would end. The three principals that guided them were born out of their need to help others through AA and were the foundation on which Charlie’s Place was born.

A room was rented at 1809 Morgan Street. The initial registered agent was Robert N. Beck. Three beds that functioned as couches during the day and beds at night were donated or purchased. Someone found a coffee pot and a few small tables. The main room in this area was about 30’ by 30’ and there was a similar space on the second floor. An attached metal building was used as a meeting room. The facility functioned as a “key club”; that is, each member paid a monthly fee to keep it open and was given a key to the rooms. He could take another alcoholic there if the person was new to AA, make a pot of coffee, and spend some time talking about the AA program. If the man had no place to spend the night, the 24 Hour Club was available. The homeless were allowed to sleep there and food

was brought for them. Members of the originating group spent time after work with them teaching about the “Big Book” and the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions. The fee to be a member was \$25 a month. Originally the group consisted of the founders and a few others for a total of 25 members (Supporting Documents, 4 & 5).

The 24 Hour Club operated from November 30, 1965 to July 7, 1966 (a period of 7-8 months) at the Morgan street address. Evidently its existence became known and soon other AA Clubs began referring those who needed help, police brought them, doctors and churches referred them, and family brought them to Morgan Street. It appears that the need for a place like the 24 Hour Club had been amply demonstrated and the alcoholics kept coming of help. Some were able to stop drinking and others went “out” again.

In an interview with Bob Beck in 2004, he said many of the first 25 members who initially paid their dues dropped out but the alcoholics kept coming for help. A few of the original members persisted in their efforts to help another drunk. Bob said there were “sustainers” who could always be “tapped” for a few dollars when it was time to pay the \$135 a month rent. He said that during many of the lean times faith was all they had to go on. During the first year of operation of the 24 Hour Club, they had nothing but faith. In spite of the lack of adequate funding, the surviving group of “sustainers” looked for a larger place (Supporting Documents, 8). It appears that the need for a place like the 24 Hour Club had to be filled.

The effort must have been successful but the only evidence for this statement is found in a quote from the unsigned letter (Supporting Documents, 34). “It all started several years ago when a group of zealous alcoholics (with varying lengths of sobriety) started the 24 Hour club at 1609 Morgan Street. Alcoholic wanderlusts sought refuge from the cold and a cure for their illness and were given comfort and aid at the 24 Hour Club. As all good enterprises go, the 24 Hour Club expanded and it was decided to move; this was disastrous. However, move they did, on July 7, 1966 to 1106 Third Street. Here the rent was more than double, resident numbers were increased, but badly needed support diminished. We foundered. In desperation, the remaining few loyal, sober alcoholics sought the support of non-alcoholics of the community.” Rent for the Third Street house was \$250 a month.

In addition to the constant worry about adequate finances, the Third Street house was not exactly a quiet haven for recovery to take place. There was no specified plan for running the place. No one was in charge when the sober alcoholics were at their places of employment or their homes. It was a place for alcoholics to dry out but it didn’t offer a disciplined environment or a specific plan for recovery. Fights broke out, there was no one to cook or to make sure the place stayed clean and some of the men were very sick when they arrived. Bob and Hank Stence (a “sustainer” who stuck around for 39 years) spent much of their time there but they couldn’t be there 24 Hours a day. Both worked and had families at home and Bob had small children. Since his wife worked, he sometimes took some of them with him when he went to Third Street. His youngest son still remembers being there when one of the men got mad and tried to throw a chair through a window. It soon became apparent that medical consultation was needed for some residents and rules needed to be established to keep order. Someone had to be in charge on a 24 hour basis!

In April, 1967 Charlie came from Houston as a new resident. He was sick, had stitches in his head from a fight, and had no other place to go. Some of the problems of running this place were solved after Charlie got on his feet because he could cook. He was so happy to have a place to sleep and regular meals that he soon started getting the men to do things to make the place more livable. This was quite a relief to Bob and George and the other men. After a month, they made him the house manager (Supporting Document, 25). Helping other alcoholics gave Charlie the same incentive to stay sober that it had given Bill W., Dr. Bob, Dick, George, and Bob. Charlie never took another drink. It works!

By spring of 1967, just keeping a roof over the men's heads became a time-and money-consuming job. The four other recovering alcoholics they had recruited to help with their efforts joined Bob and George in getting an unsecured loan from a benevolent banker at one of the local banks (Supporting Document, 17 & 18). The loan was for less than \$775 but each of the six was supposed to pay a portion each month. The banker was tolerant and sympathetic but he still had to show that the loan was being paid off. He became a little insistent (Supporting Document, 20). The six men who remained active in the project were: Tex Johnson, Judge Phillip Schraub, Paul Moomaw, Bob Beck, Commander Hank Stence, and George Bachert (Supporting Documents, 17 & 18).

Finally George went to the minister at his church to appeal for financial help. On March 16, 1967, the Board of Directors of the Congregation of Churches met to discuss the problem. One of the ministers described recent activities of the 24-Hour Club and recommended that the Congregations of Churches contribute \$250-\$300 a month until a more stable structure could be developed (Supporting Documents, 11).

The structure formed was called the Coastal Bend Halfway Houses for Alcoholics, Inc. It became part of The Comprehensive Mental Health Plan for Corpus Christi which had recently been developed. Under this plan a Halfway House could be partially supported by national and state funds. By May, 1967 the new Board of Directors had been selected and officers were elected. All of the officers were ministers of the various churches. Among those also named to the Board were Hank Stence, Ben Cannon, Bob Beck, and George Backert. Ben Cannon was a member of one of the churches. Funds were to come from voluntary donations by churches, citizens, civic organizations, and businesses in local and surrounding communities (Supporting Documents, 11). These were the first contributions from persons outside AA and shifted part of the responsibility for the sick alcoholic to the community (Supporting Document ,22). These funds were to be supplemented by required but nominal payments for room and board by those clients who had recovered sufficiently to work (Supporting Document, 30).

For those involved in the project, the change of name from "24 Hour Club" to "Halfway House" came easily. However, the structure of the organization shifted as members of the Board who were non-AA members became involved in the management of the Halfway Houses. The driving force of the original project had been one alcoholic reaching out to another. The original group reached out to suffering alcoholics by providing food, shelter, and hope. By doing this they maintained their sobriety. Now different agencies brought their expertise to the meetings. Medical and psychiatric care was provided for those with serious illnesses and well as those in danger of DTs. Counseling was sought

through Mental Health Mental Retardation (MHMR). Vocational rehabilitation was included to help the men become work eligible. This shift in philosophy resulted in the loss of several long-term supporters.

The AAs and other members of the Board were pleased with the concept of Halfway Houses (plural) because they intended to provide a place for women as soon as possible. The need for a place for female alcoholics and their children had been recognized early on. The means to provide this care had not been found yet.

Charlie quickly became involved with other house managers of Halfway Houses in the state. As the one in charge of the day-to-day management of the facility, he represented it at local and state meetings. Charlie attended conferences on alcoholism and halfway houses and was involved at the national level. His name became known in the agencies that were providing funds. He prepared the inevitable reports needed to show the agencies what was being done with the money. Also, word traveled across the county and state that there was a place in Corpus Christi where a drunk could go for help. Although the Board of Directors still referred to it as the "Halfway House", the clients began to call it "Charlie's Place". Soon, it was better known in the county and state as "Charlie's Place" than the "Halfway House" (Supporting Document, 22).

The Third Street house was overflowing. The Board of Directors began looking for a larger place. They discovered that the Henderson family who lived in the old Country Club area was willing to sell their large house. Through valiant efforts by Charlie and the Board, they were able to raise \$11,000 which was half the asking price. It was at this time that Charlie made his acquaintance with Mrs. H.E. Butt. Her family owned a large chain of grocery stores. She donated \$3,000 and was instrumental in getting friends to donate also. Charlie went to Mrs. Butt each time he needed something badly and she never let him down. Charlie and Ben Cannon, who was president of the Board went to close the deal. As they were leaving, Ben said to Charlie, "What have we done? We can't even raise \$250 a month for the rent. Where are we going to get another \$11,000?" And Charlie, with almost five years of sobriety said, "Don't worry. It will come". Charlie always had faith that what they were doing was blessed by a Higher Power.

The move to Country Club Place occurred in November, 1969 (Supporting Documents, 33-36). The house was large and would accommodate 16 residents. Also there were several small buildings that could be used for expansion. Many of Corpus Christi's leading citizens used to live in the neighborhood when the Country Club and golf course were located there. After they moved to another part of town, some of these old homes had been converted into apartment houses. Many small homes sprang up on the vacated golf course property. Oil refineries were beginning to use some the land for huge storage tanks. Before they moved into the Henderson House, members of the Board and some of the donors met with the other residents of the neighborhood to explain who they were and what they were trying to do. No objections or complaints were ever voiced.

Charlie continued to do all of the admissions of new residents, the direction of the recovery program, the physical and fiscal management of the facility, and most of the cooking. They had a collaborative agreement with Vocational Rehabilitation of MHMR and had become a United Fund

agency, thanks to Mrs. Butt. The minutes reflect the need for more beds, the ever present problem of paying the bills, and the need for a woman's facility

The Middle Years: 1970-1989

There are very few documents to provide substantial history of the middle years. The few that are available focus on the years from 1970 to 1975. The few minutes available show the continuing need for services of different kinds, the need for more beds, and of course, the need for more money. As the number of agencies involved grew so did the need for more record keeping and report writing. Additional staff had to be hired such as, a bookkeeper, a cook, and house managers.

Due to the dearth of evidence, it is not possible to describe the growth of Charlie's Place with the rich detail provided by the documents of the previous period. Also, the many supporters, staff and members of the Board cannot be named. The names of donors, foundations, and agencies are lost. The author remembers hearing about colorful personalities who were clients or Board members, stories of the desperate need for money to pay the bills, sad stories of deception and misuse of funds, and heart-warming stories of giving. It is possible only to list the accomplishments and problems as they are documented.

Charlie's Place grew in a topsy-turvy fashion as identified needs were met. There was no model to use for guidance. Charlie attended national and state conferences and brought back information to the Board. He also was the one to identify local needs. The Board tried to prioritize need and find new sources of funding. Charlie, himself, was the best fund raiser.

In August 1970, a powerful hurricane hit Corpus Christi. Charlie's Place suffered some damage but no one was hurt. Wind insurance provided some of the funds for repair, but Mrs. Butt rounded up a variety of craftsmen to donate their services to repair the old buildings (Supporting Documents, 45-49).

In 1971 the need for additional housing became acute as the number of residents rose to 20. Another house was added. This one was called a recovery house in the minutes. It is uncertain if this was a detox unit or a residential house. In 1972 counseling, medical, and psychiatric services were added. In 1973, Women's Residential Services were added to the campus. They were housed in an old two story brick home called the Ivy House because it had ivy growing up the walls. It could house 18 women and was located near the other buildings. 1974, a major supporter of Charlie's Place, Ira Phelps, resigned from the board. He had been an officer for many years. He indicated disappointment in this way, "the present policy is not in keeping with the original idea of helping the alcoholic get well through AA. I cannot condone so many other agencies controlling the Halfway House" (Supporting Documents, 57). Bob Beck was distressed at the loss of his friend, Ira.

By 1975, Charlie's Place had become a respected facility for the treatment of both men and women and boasted a success rate of 55%. The need for an After Care program was becoming evident. A few of the "graduates" studied to become counselors and worked at Charlie's Place for many years helping other alcoholics. More buildings were acquired as funds became available because there were

always sick alcoholics waiting to be admitted. In addition to the usual problems with raising funds, they had experienced robberies, hurricanes, embezzlement of funds, and rapidly deteriorating property.

The years from 1975 to 1993 are not well documented. They can be summarized by the following events:

1976- Charlie was elected to the Board of Directors of the Association of Halfway House Alcoholism Programs of North America. He later served as president of this organization for two terms.

1986- Minutes from meetings in 1986 indicate that the official name of Charlie's Place was Coastal Bend Alcoholic Rehabilitation Center, Inc. A kitchen and dining room/meeting room was added with a large covered porch. The Meadows Foundation was a major contributor (Supporting Documents, 65).

1987-A detox program with 24-hour medical supervision was added. With this addition, the total bed capacity was 48 for men, 16 for women, and 12 for detox. The annual budget was \$239,000. Also in 1987 the Board of Directors recognized that there had been no provision for Charlie when he retired. It was decided to buy him an annuity. A long term contributor, Jim Whatley, presented the Board with a check for \$35,000 to buy an annuity for Charlie (Supporting Documents, 66,67,68).

THE LATEST YEARS: 1989-PRESENT

By 1989, Charlie's Place had another name change as it became a treatment center instead of a halfway house. Its new name: Coastal Bend Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation Center, Inc.(Supporting Document, 70). By this time, the name Charlie's Place was firmly imbedded in the minds of everyone and most people in the state and local community still called it "Charlie's Place". In 1993 a list outlining the growth of Charlie's Place says it was no longer a halfway house; it is now a treatment center.

In 1993 Charlie began to suffer serious health problems and retired. A succession of directors was hired; several proved to be inadequate for the job, questions of mismanagement surfaced, one director died, and others left for personal reasons. Larry Churn started as a tech in 1997, became a counselor, and in 2005 was hired as executive director. While helping Charlie's Place grow, Larry and a dedicated staff have guided the center through a series of crises and finally through the move to larger and better facilities.

In the late 1990s, the refineries in the area of Charlie's Place began to expand. The neighbors saw them as a threat to their health and safety. Meetings were held, public and environmental officials were consulted, and the refineries decided to move the residents to a healthier and safer place. It took several years but when it was over, all that remained along Highway 37 was a long stretch of vacant land and Charlie's Place. Tax records had been used to contact owners of the land. Charlie's Place wasn't on the tax records and had been skipped. Charlie's Place sat there alone and forlorn with almost 100 residents and 50 or more staff. Many of the twelve buildings had been built in the 1930s and 1940s. It

was becoming very expensive to keep them in adequate repair to meet the codes. In addition, the same safety and health hazards that had been of such great concern to Charlie's neighbors were still present. To find another place would be very costly.

In 1996, Charlie died after a long battle with diabetes and all the destruction it causes. The search for a new location for Charlie's Place continued as the deterioration of the old "Charlie's" grew more expensive to repair. In addition, the facilities were no longer large enough to accommodate all the clients who needed treatment.

In the summer of 2008, an official from Citgo Refinery approached the Executive Director and The Board of Directors with a plan the help establish a new home for Charlie's Place. After months of searching for a new place and negotiating with realtors, bankers, and lawyers, a motel was found that could be renovated to provide an ideal place for Charlie's Place to expand. Charlie's Place moved to the present address on McBride Lane in the fall of 2009 (Supporting Documents, 75,76,77).. Many believe that Charlie, Bob, Hank, and Ben and their Higher Power were involved in this miracle.

The Story of the Founders

Many people were involved in the founding and development of Charlie's Place. Those names that occur most frequently in the documents have been cited in the history above. There are many others who also contributed significantly and their names can be found in the Supporting Documents folder. Under the title "Founders" we would like to include the many AAs who contributed their time, talent, and treasure. Most of the names have been lost in time. As the unknown writer said, "It would be nice to name them here, but they know, we know, and God knows" (Supporting Documents, 28). There were donors, such as, Mrs. H.E. Butt and many more that came to the rescue when Charlie's Place floundered. Without their support Charlie's Place would have ceased to be on many occasions. They were sustainers who were invaluable. Although they cannot be considered "Founders", the many people who made up the staff at various times need to be recognized for their commitment and devotion. Under Charlie's leadership they demonstrated that love and caring can change lives.

The Board of Directors lost and added members from time to time. However, there are four men, who were persistent and devoted in their involvement from the very beginning of the Halfway House until they died. They have been recognized as the "Founders." These men are Charlie Acklen, Bob Beck, Hank Stence, and Ben Cannon. Dick moved away in the 1970s but he kept in touch with Bob throughout the years. George died in the early 1980s.

In the brief biographies of the four founders below, the story of Charlie and Bob will be related in more detail than the other two because more facts are known about them. Their stories will be told together since their lives were so intertwined.

Charlie Acklen and Bob Beck

The story of “Charlie’s Place” begins with the story of two men. One man, the most important player in this story, was Charlie. He was born in 1924 in Quitman, Mississippi. The other player was Bob, born in Cisco, Texas in 1926. These men didn’t meet for about 38-40 years after they were born, but their early lives are important to the story of how Charlie’s Place got started and why it has survived since 1965.

Each man came from a middle class family and each had an alcoholic father. Not much is known about Charlie’s early life. He had three brothers, a stepfather and a half-brother. He graduated from high school in 1943. His father was never able to achieve sobriety on a long-term basis and died at an early age from a blow to the head in a bar fight. Charlie didn’t have his first drink until he was 23 years old, about 1947. Charlie said he seemed to respond to alcohol differently than his friends even with his first drink. His first drink made him “come to life”. He thought he had discovered what life was all about. He said that alcohol took over his life and that he was a full-blown alcoholic within six months of taking his first drink. He felt that he was a “born alcoholic”. Although he served in the Army during World War II there is no record of drinking during this time.

Bob, on the other hand, started drinking earlier, probably in his early teens. His father was a geologist and made his living drilling oil wells. Corpus Christi was a big oil town during WW II and after traveling from one oil town to the other, the family settled here when Bob was just entering high school. Drinking was part of the social life of oil people so Bob got an early introduction. He became a discipline problem by his senior year in high school. Possibly this was associated with drinking. Whatever happened prompted his father to send him away to a military school in College Station for the discipline it offered. Bob recalled it as “a fun time” due to the creativeness with which he and his friends got around the rules. Although all of this occurred during World War II, he didn’t enter military service until 1947 at age 21. Due to bad eyesight, he was ineligible for the armed services, so he entered the Merchant Marine. He had some interesting stories to tell about his drinking during this period of his life. Evidently he saw the world through the bars he frequented when he was on shore leave.

During their thirties, Bob and Charlie continued to drink-Charlie constantly in trouble, and Bob getting bailed out of jail by his father. Charlie has said that he was in jail in San Antonio at least 80 times and many more in other towns such as Houston. These events were related to public intoxication, pan handling, and getting into fights. He also served a stint on the penal farms around Houston. He was in the VA hospital in Houston from time to time. Bob had one or two periods in jail but his lock-up time is not as colorful as Charlie’s.

Neither ever got a DWI, although both of them drove a car. Charlie probably didn’t drive as much as Bob did because he couldn’t afford a car and alcohol at the same time. He has said that at one time he lost control of his car and hit a telephone pole and a fire hydrant, and even though he broke his knee, he didn’t get a DWI. From the things he told friends, Charlie was drunk most of the time, and his

mother was sending him money for food and a place to sleep. Bob lost his first wife and family and had many wrecks because of his drinking. One time he suffered broken ribs in a wreck that totaled his car, but he escaped a DWI.

Bob always held a job, but couldn't get home with his paycheck. Charlie had no trouble getting jobs but had trouble keeping them. He always worked in nightclubs where it was difficult to stay away from alcohol. Later he worked in food service. He couldn't hold on to a job because as soon as he got his first pay check, he "blew" the money on alcohol and didn't show up for work until he was broke.

In 1962 Bob was about to lose his second wife because of his drinking. He rejected the idea that he was an alcoholic. He preferred to call himself a drunkard. He had friends in AA and he knew that if you were an alcoholic, AA was where you needed to be. He didn't want to stop drinking. He knew he drank too much and tried various ways to stop. For example, he would give up all alcohol during Lent each year. Another way he tried to cut down on his drinking was that he decided that beer (his drink of choice) was the problem and that if he drank Vodka, he wouldn't drink as much. He also tried not smoking because he said he needed a beer when he smoked. None of these devices kept him from drinking for long, however.

Charlie's drinking brought him to skid row where he begged for money to buy food and a place to sleep. When he was sober, he worked in eating places, but these jobs didn't last long (Supporting Document, 69). Bob never got this far down because he had a benevolent father and an enabling wife. He owned an insurance agency that failed because he spent the day drinking with clients in the belief that he was selling insurance. Then his father bought him a shrimp boat, but somehow the shrimp were not letting themselves get caught or the other shrimpers were crowding him out. If he did have a good catch, so did the other shrimpers and the price being paid for shrimp went down. If all went well, the market was good, the weather was good, and he had a good deckhand, the boat broke down and he couldn't go out. Those were the bad days. If he did make some money, he spent it at the Tanker Bar. Meanwhile, the electricity at home was being cut off, the landlord was demanding money, and the kids were hungry. In 1959, Bob got a job in maintenance at a refinery. His drinking got worse, but he managed to keep from getting fired.

Finally in 1962, although Bob was working at the refinery and making a good salary, he still couldn't get home with his paycheck. His wife was working to feed the family, but most of the children were small and needed day care which took a lot of her check. She took him into court to force him to contribute to the support of his children. At that time in Texas, a woman had to file for divorce to get child support. So he was faced with the loss of his family again.

Bob had a good friend, Dick M. Dick had been his deck hand and they were good drinking buddies as well. They met regularly at the Tanker Bar when Bob got off work and drank at the Tanker Bar until it was time to go to work again. Dick was still working on other shrimp boats sometimes and pan-handling. Sometimes Bob wouldn't go home for a week. His wife was less than happy about this. One time, she put most of his clothes in a suitcase and sent them by taxi to the Tanker Bar. They had only one car (a real "junk") and Bob needed the car to get to work. It was a good thing she didn't have

access to a car very often because she had a bad temper. One time she took the old, broken down panel truck they had bought and went to the Tanker Bar to get her husband to come home. When she got there and saw his car, she was so mad she rammed into it with the truck, backed up and hit it again, and repeated this until everybody came running out of the bar. Then she ran into the bar, grabbed a chair, and was headed for the juke box to wreck it when somebody stopped her. Even this didn't slow down Bob's drinking.

One day in February, 1962, Bob showed up at the Tanker Bar and Dick was not there. Bob stayed for several hours, drinking and waiting for Dick. Long after dark, he gave up and went home. The next day the same thing happened. This went on for six days as Bob either stayed and got drunk alone or gave up and went home. Finally on the sixth day Dick came in, had a coke, and announced that he had been going to AA. After a while, he talked Bob into going with him to the 18th Street Club for a cup of coffee. Bob was happy to see his friend so he went with him. Bob already knew a lot about AA and met people there who were friends of his or his father's.

After a few cups of coffee and lots of fellowship, Bob took Dick to his home. His wife was less than cordial and had a restraining order to keep him away. She knew he would talk her into dropping the divorce and letting him come back home. She had been going to Al-Anon for some time and had learned a little about her codependence. Seeing that he still wasn't welcome, he softened her up by telling her that he was going to AA now. She was delighted and immediately welcomed him back home. However, when Dick mentioned that they were going to an AA meeting that evening, Bob tried to get out of it by giving the excuse that he had to take one of his sons to a Cub Scout meeting. Dick got angry and told him he was an SOB for giving that excuse. He reminded Bob that he hadn't worried about Cub Scout meetings while he was drinking and now wasn't the time to start. Dick called Bob a few other choice names and off they went to the meeting. Bob went to the meeting and liked what he saw. He later told his son, Tim, "They told me all I had to do was not take a drink for one day. I replied that any idiot could do that". That was February 23, 1962. Neither of these men ever took another drink.

Bob died on his 46th AA birthday and Dick is still alive at this writing and still hasn't had a drink. Bob said that he didn't drink because he didn't want Dick to have more sobriety than he. He also didn't want to be seen as an idiot. Dick said he didn't take a drink because then Bob would have a longer period of sobriety. Length of sobriety is very significant to the alcoholic. In the early years, this six day difference was motivation for each of them not to drink.

Charlie's life did not go as well as Bob's. He continued to get drunk, to get in jail, to spend time in the hospital, and to be miserable. Eventually, he found himself sitting on a bar stool thinking what a mess he was. His mother was disgusted with him and had quit sending him money. He says, "She threw me out, a pink-faced baby of only 40 years, out cold into the world." His family knew little about him; he couldn't hold a job and had no place to sleep. He decided there must be a better way to live. He was sick and tired of being sick and tired.

At some point in 1962 or early 1963, a friend talked him into going to AA. He didn't "keep coming back" like the members told him and he was soon drinking again. But one day, he stumbled back

and was standing there with a paper sack in his hand. It contained all his possessions. Dick saw him and went over to talk to him. Charlie had no place to go. Dick bought him a meal and took him home. Dick told others that he pointed out the couch and told Charlie that it was his as long as he was sober. They lived together for a year until Dick decided to move to Houston. After Dick left, Charlie began drinking again. He was in and out of AA several times; sometimes he held down a job for awhile, but the old pattern of getting a job and drinking his way out of it, always returned. This experience probably contributed to his compassion for the alcoholic who is caught in the revolving door of alcoholism. Charlie frequently said, "You have to believe in them because nobody else does".

When Charlie was sober, he made rapid progress in whatever job he held. He would start at the lowest level and soon progress to a much better job. This would continue until he began drinking again. One time Bob took his wife for dinner in a four stool lunch room where Charlie was chief cook and bottle washer. That job didn't last long, though. Another time they went to a lovely, up-scale restaurant where Charlie was doing a great job as the "maitre d'". He had started as dishwasher, moved up to cook, and soon was maitre d'. He was a highly capable man; he just couldn't stay sober

Finally, in April of 1967, Charlie got into a fight in Houston and wound up in the VA Hospital again. When he was released, he called Dick and told him his troubles. He said "they" were after him for some hot checks. Dick and Bob had no extra money so Dick told him to float another check and grab a bus to Corpus Christi. He arrived in Corpus Christi a day or so later with stitches in his head, penniless, homeless, and hungry. Bob took him to the house on Third Street.

His natural management abilities developed as he worked with the other alcoholics on Third Street. He had shown this type of ability many times but his drinking caused him to have to start over again each time he got fired. Now that he was sober and learning about his disease, he became more confident and his gift of leadership grew. A relative peace reigned at the house

Charlie's natural attributes and life experiences prepared him for a job for which there was no precedent in the Coastal Bend. There were no local models and very few national models to follow. The model they were using was that of a halfway house. These houses were a recent approach in the treatment of alcoholism. AA had developed a proven program for recovery. But it became evident that some sick alcoholics could not benefit from the AA program until they became physically, mentally, and spiritually healthy enough. The halfway house was a place to help them prepare for living without alcohol. Under Charlie's leadership the 24 Hour Club became the Coastal Bend Halfway House for Alcoholics and then the Coastal Bend Alcohol and Drug Abuse Rehabilitation Center.

The financing of the Halfway House (as they called it then) was always and is to this day a serious problem. It seems that the need to expand is always greater than the funds available to run it. But somehow, the money becomes available at the last minute. Over the 46 years it had been in existence, Charlie and the Board of Directors have explored every available source of funding and have been able to tap into many. Charlie proved to be a very able manager. As his length of sobriety grew, he blossomed into the person his higher power had intended him to be.

Bob also grew through helping other alcoholics. He finished a college degree he had started at the beginning of World War II and received a BBA from Baylor University 30 years later with his wife and kidscheering. He retired in 1995 from a middle management position at the refinery where he had started as a maintenance man.

Charlie never married or had any children; Bob married twice and had eight children. Charlie died in 1996 and Bob asked that he be buried in the Beck Family plot at Seaside Cemetery. When Bob died in 2008, he was buried next to Charlie.

Several of Charlie's friends have provided interesting stories about Charlie that give a perspective on the kind of man he was. Some of the more insightful stories are included below.

He was also a compassionate man. Once he was "sleeping it off" on the couch at Bob's house when they got word that Bob's father-in-law had died suddenly. Bob's wife was distraught but Charlie took over the household without a word and cooked the meals, did the washing, and kept six kids under control. And all this with a hangover!

Probably because of his own experience, Charlie never gave up on a client. When they started drinking again, Charlie would seek them out. Ann tells the story about Charlie and Milton. Milton could not stay on the program. Charlie would miss him and find out where he was shacking up. He would go to him and say, "Are you ready to sober up?" If Milton said, "No", Charlie would go out and get him a bottle to prevent DTs and try again another day. After a while Milton would get sick enough and Charlie would take him back to the house. After a number of times, Milton finally stayed on the program and when he died he had 19 years of sobriety. Charlie believed that "you may give out on them, but never give up on them." He also taught that "you have to believe in them because nobody else does."

Charlie never turned anyone away. Somehow he always found a bed for each person who needed it. Dennis tells how he got discharged from prison and had no place to go. He had heard of Charlie's and found the number. When he called, Charlie told him that he had no beds. Dennis replied that he would come and wait. Charlie said he could sleep on the porch. But when Dennis go here, Charlie had found him a bed and Dennis stayed on as a house manager for several years. They became close friends and Dennis has some fond memories of Charlie. Once when Dennis was having trouble with a step, Charlie told him, "Well, you will either get it right or you will go out and get drunk." Charlie and Bob seemed to have the same approach to helping others. Neither gave advice. When asked, they would listen thoughtfully and say something like, "Just keep coming to meetings and working the steps."

Every morning and evening, Charlie came to sit on the porch with the clients and drink coffee. He talked to them and shared his joy of being sober and just sitting and drinking coffee. Dennis enjoyed these times and learned what it meant to "keep it simple." Bob joined him when his family responsibilities permitted. Bob was on the Board of Directors for 44 years and went to meetings at Charlie's Place at least once a week. They were great friends.

Some of the alcoholics were probationers from the courts. If a judge complained about the way Charlie did things (usually he wasn't tough enough) Charlie told him if he didn't approve, he could take

all of them back. Charlie went to any lengths to help clients. Dennis remembers one Christmas when funds were low and Charlie went begging for money to buy food for clients. He had the private number of one of the leading women in Corpus Christi and he could always get money from her if things got tough, which they usually were. He also worked with other agencies in the city, such as MHMR, Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Council of Alcoholism. During the 1980 and 1990, grants were written and state funds were obtained, but somehow there was always the need for more as treatments became more sophisticated and addictions became more prevalent and the census at Charlie's grew.

Charlie had simple rules for those who stayed at the place. You had to keep the premises clean and your things in order. You had to be quiet from 10:00 pm until 6:00 am and you had to get up by 7:00 am unless you were working a night or evening shift. You had to be on time for meals or you had to wait until the next meal. No food was left out for stragglers. You had to go to meetings and counseling sessions. The rule said, "If you do not need the meetings, move out! Your bed can be used by someone else!" Another rule directed the clients not to leave the premises without permission and to come back on time, "or your may return to find your bed occupied by someone else." Charlie was kind and compassionate, and he was always aware of the suffering alcoholic out there who had no place to go but he understood that discipline was important to recovery.

Bob's health history paralleled Charlie's. He developed diabetes in the 1970s, had two cardiac surgeries and had both legs amputated shortly before he died of cancer of the lung. He died in 2008 but continued to attend AA meetings and Board of Director meetings until one month before he died. He is buried beside Charlie at Seaside Cemetery.

These two drunks who had very little going for them in 1963, but through the miracle of AA, each managed to make a significant contribution to the Corpus Christi community. The mayor of Corpus Christi, Mary Rhodes, declared Charlie Acklen Day in Corpus Christi in 1992, and Bob was Director Emeritus of both the Coastal Bend Council of Alcohol and Drug Abuse and Charlie's Place.

BEN CANNON

Ben Cannon became involved with alcoholics in 1967 when his church was approached by a member of AA to provide financial support for the struggling 24 Hour Club. He was immediately plunged into the financial problems of Charlie's Place as a member of the Board of Directors. He served for over 28 years and was president three times. He was made Director Emeritus in 1995.

Ben was presented with a medallion denoting a long period of sobriety on his 95th birthday. He earned the honor because he had been sober for 95 years; although Ben was a founder of Charlie's Place, he never had a drink. The information offered below is mostly from his obituary.

Ben Winstead Cannon was born in Crockett, Texas on May 24, 1904. He had seven brothers and two sisters and was next to the youngest. When he was 11 years old, his parents bought a farm near Bishop. He went to school there until his sophomore year. At that time he moved to Del Rio for his last two years in high school. He later went to Lon Morris College and the University of Texas. He worked

his way through college as a counselor at the State School for the Deaf, at the “Pig Stand”, and by officiating at both basketball and football games.

Ben spent 33 Years as business manager for some of the larger Methodist churches in Texas, including Marvin Methodist Church in Galveston, Bay City Methodist and Moody Memorial Methodist in Galveston. When he retired at 80, he was administrative assistant at First United Methodist Corpus Christi. Retiring from his job did not mean retiring from his work at Charlie’s Place. He continued to serve until his health failed.

He was a 45+ year Legion of Honor Kiwanain with 26 years of perfect attendance; he served as secretary, treasurer, president, and Lt. Governor. He was a medallion recipient of the 1999 Jefferson Award for outstanding contributions for the betterment of the citizens of South Texas.

Ben died on November 5, 2003 at age 99. His portrait is in the lobby of the “new” Charlie’s Place where he will be remembered for his compassion for alcoholics and drug addicts and his dedication to the facility that provides hope for them.

Hank Stence

Hank became involved in the early years while Charlie’s Place was still the 24 Hour club. He had probably been a member of the group that took suffering alcoholics home and was one of the founding members of the 24 Hour Club. His name first appears in the records in 1967 where he was named in a letter praising his work in coordinating and implementing a program dealing with alcoholism at the Naval Air Station (Supporting Document, 13). His name appears many times in the documents from the Third Street facility and in 1972, Charlie wrote a glowing letter of gratitude for his leadership and support during the last few years. It is apparent from letters in 1969, that he was well known and highly regarded by the leadership of the Texas Commission on Alcoholism (Supporting Document, 32). He was an avid fisherman and brought the struggling Halfway House the fish he caught for many months. He served on the Board of Directors for 35 years and was president several times.

Commander Henry Stence (Hank) was born in 1920 in Tanglewood, Texas. He started college at Texas Tech but left in 1941 to join the Navy and served until the end of World War II. He met his wife, an Army Nurse, in England; she died in 1999. They had four children, one of whom died in infancy. When he returned to civilian life, he attended college again and earned a degree in Agricultural Education. During the Korean Conflict, he was recalled to the Navy where he remained until his retirement in 1969. He then worked at the Naval Air Station a Special Service Administrator until his retirement in 1986.

During his Naval career he earned the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with two gold stars, The American Campaign Medal, the European African Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, World War II Victory Medal, Navy Reserve Medal, American Defense Service Medal, National Defense Service Medal, and the Korean War Service Medal.

In addition to his work as a founder of Charlie's Place, he was an active member of the executive boards of the South Side Kiwanis Club, the South Shores Christian Church, the Retired Military Officers Association, and the Military Order of the World Wars.

Hank died in 2001 after long years of service to the Corpus Christi community and, through his work in bringing alcohol and drug abuse education to the service men at the Naval Air Station.