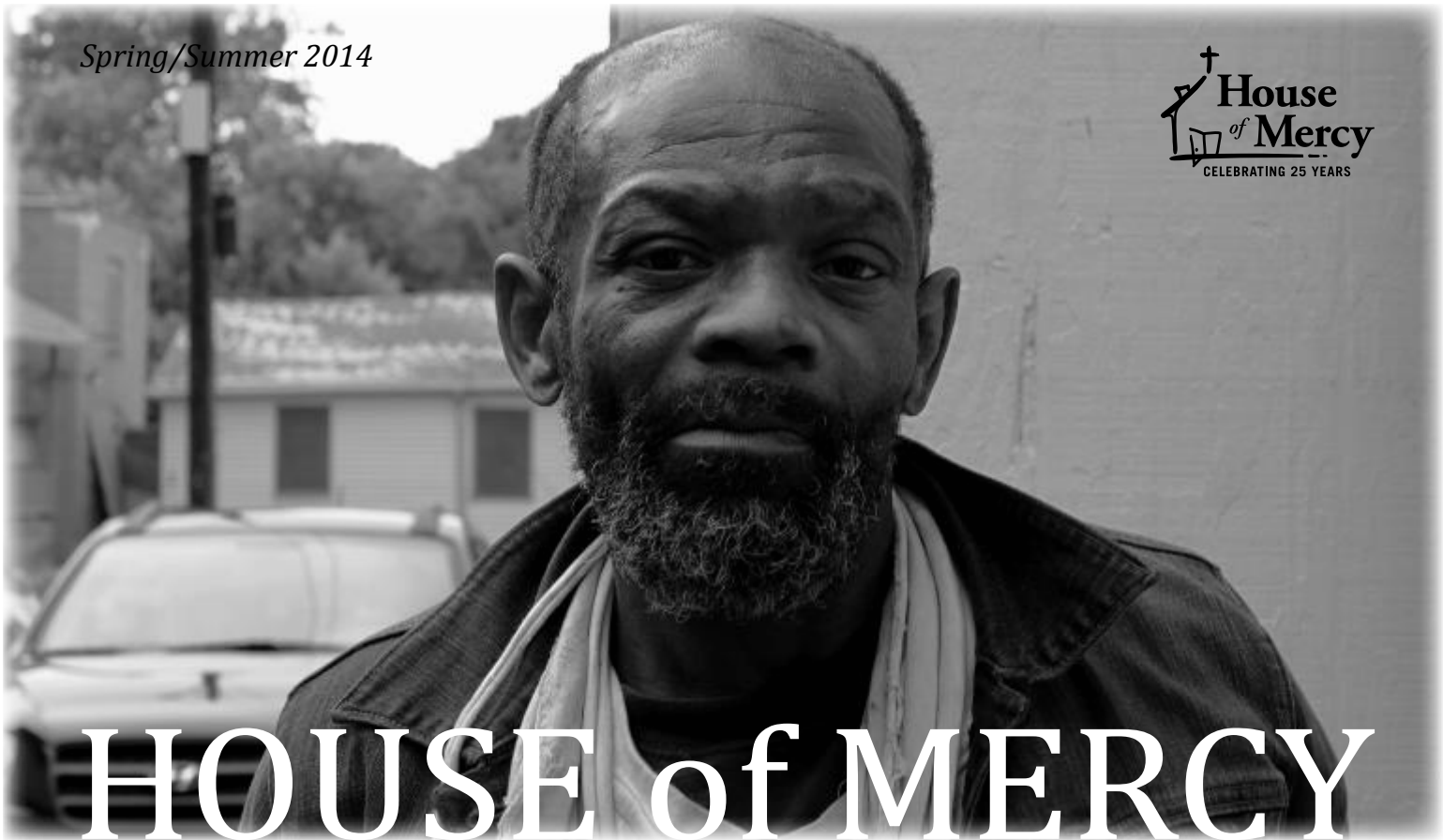


Spring/Summer 2014



# HOUSE of MERCY

**INSIDE:** *Remembering Reggie / Summer Danger / People vs Parking Round II / Fundraiser at Mercy H.S.*

.....

For more information,  
contact us today.

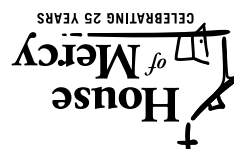
725 Hudson Avenue  
Rochester, N.Y. 14621  
(585) 546-2580  
HOM@HouseofMercy.org  
www.HouseofMercy.org

*The House of Mercy provides  
food, clothing, shelter and  
assistance to many of the poorest  
people in Rochester. With a shoe-  
string budget, very small staff  
and a growing team of dedicated  
volunteers, we operate a shelter  
that stays open 24 hours a day,  
seven days a week. We never  
close our doors on people in need.*

**A House with a big heart.**

.....

725 Hudson Avenue  
Rochester, New York 14621



Non-Profit  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Rochester, NY  
Permit No. 1445

## Remembering Reggie

He was homeless. He had serious substance abuse and mental health problems. And he had a personality that was as big as a hot air balloon.

Over the past 20 years, Reggie Grimes became a prominent member of our family. And when he died in a tragic house fire in our neighborhood, everyone who knew him felt the impact.

“It’s a tremendous loss,” said Sister Grace. “It’s heart-breaking. I’m having trouble getting things done that need to be done, because I keep thinking about Reggie.”

### Finding a family. And a home.

Reggie came to The House shortly after our move to Hudson Avenue. And he quickly found a home.

“He just dropped by one day and never left,” said C.W.

“I think Reggie found peace, safety and comfort here. He knew we were his friends and his mainstay in this world. He became a permanent fixture,” added Sister Grace.

### A promising future derailed by addiction.

At one time Reggie had been a great high school athlete. Later, he worked for great companies like Wegmans and Kodak. But then someone introduced him to drugs. And his accelerating addiction combined with growing mental health problems to end his chance for a stable lifestyle.

After that, Reggie started panhandling and living on the street. And he was never really able to take care of himself again.

Sometimes in the winter he would walk around without shoes or a shirt. His hands would get frostbitten. He would sit down in the snow and get freezing cold. And it was only a matter of time until the elements would get the best of him.

But then he found out about The House of Mercy. And he quickly



became a prominent member of the family.

“Reggie was often the last person I saw at night and the first person I saw in the morning,” C.W. recalled. “Of course, he was still a free spirit. He’d come and go. But he always knew we were there if he needed us.”

### One place in the world he could always count on.

Many times over the years, people at The House tried to help Reggie find a place of his own. But Reggie’s demons inevitably got in the way.

Sometimes he would take furniture out of an apartment and leave it on the curb. Then he’d replace the furniture with bags of trash dragged in from the street.

When that happened, it was only a matter of time before a landlord or motel manager called The House to come get him. Because The House never closes its doors on people in need.

“A lot of the people we help have so many problems,” said C.W. “They’re not really responsible for their actions. But we never give up on them.”

“Some people don’t think of homeless people as human beings,” said Sister Grace. “But despite their struggles, they are God’s children just like ev-

eryone else. We have a lot of Reggies at The House of Mercy.”

### The lovable side of Reggie.

Reggie could be difficult. But he had a sweet, humorous side. And he never lied.

“He could be so funny. He’d come up and kiss me and say he loved me,” recalled Sister Grace. “And he always told the truth. If he did something wrong, he’d always admit it. He was really one of the most honest people you’ll ever meet.”

Whether he stayed at the House or found a place to sleep on the streets, Reggie was a visible member of the community. Everyone knew him by his first name. In his own way, he was a Hudson Avenue celebrity.



“He had such a presence,” Sister Grace said. “He made himself known. And he was such a big part of The House and our neighborhood.”

“He had a lot of problems,” added C.W. “But I don’t know anyone who met Reggie and didn’t like him.”

## Tragedy leaves a terrible loss.

In early April, Reggie found a new place to live. But on April 23—just a few days after Easter Sunday—a fire broke out. And Reggie was trapped in the bathroom. He had severe problems with his feet. He had lost all his toes due to diabetes. And that made it impossible for him to run and escape.

As word of Reggie’s death spread, people from all walks of life stopped by to express their condolences. A bus driver who had seen Reggie panhandling through countless winters came by, deeply saddened by the news.



Someone called to make a contribution to The House in Reggie’s name. And after signs were posted around the neighborhood, a huge crowd turned out for his funeral and wake. Reggie’s death also brought several members of his family back together for the first time in years. His daughter flew in from Arizona. His brother headed to Rochester from Alabama, the state where Reggie was born.

“People spoke about how much they missed him,” C.W. said.

For Sister Grace, Reggie’s death has been especially difficult to deal with. Nevertheless, she holds on to one shining thought in the aftermath of the tragedy.

“On Easter Sunday, the Sunday before he died,” she said, “we held a Mass at The House. Our choir was singing. And Reggie jumped up next to the priest and started dancing. He seemed so happy. Now I think of him dancing his way to heaven. We will never forget him at The House of Mercy.”

## Summer in the city: Keeping our children off the streets

Summer is a dangerous time for children in our neighborhood. Without school to keep them occupied, they turn to the streets. And before long, they’re recruited into a life of drugs, guns and violence. It can happen early—when they’re still grade-school age.



“At ten or eleven, they start following an older brother or a drug dealer,” added C.W. The dealers start giving these kids flash gifts like sneakers. And before long, they’re involved in selling and using drugs. We see it all the time. It’s a real tragedy in this part of town.”

“If they’re on the streets, they’ll pick up on the violence and the drugs,” said Sister Grace somberly. “It’s almost inevitable unless you do something to help them.”

### Summer camp as a refuge.

To try to prevent tragedy from recurring, The House sends more than a dozen children off to summer camp each year. Often, the first week is free. But after that, the House pays up to \$500 per child per week.

It’s very expensive. But it’s an important part of our mission to try to help children in one of the poorest neighborhoods in upstate New York

“Summer camp gives them structure in the summer,” said Sister Grace. “It keeps them busy in constructive programs. And they see positive role models, sometimes for the first time in their lives.”

“I’m sure there are 100 kids in our area who could really use camp,” added C.W. “And we might be able to keep them from learning how to hustle on the street. If you catch them at the right time, you can save them. And then they can become positive role models for other children in the neighborhood.”

*“If you catch them  
at the right time,  
you can save them.”*

### Looking back on a popular program.

With help from volunteers, C.W. used to run a vibrant summer program that would attract as many as 60 children in a single day. The group would march off to area parks and museums and swimming pools. They would get healthy snacks, too.

But in 2003, there was a robbery at The House. C.W. was shot and severely disabled. He tried to run the summer program from a wheelchair. But he had to give it up for health reasons.

Now, The House tries to raise money to send children off to camp. And pay their camp tuition.

“The streets are very dangerous,” said Sister Grace. “And there’s not nearly enough help available for the children who live in our area. That’s why we try to do the best we can to help them. And give them a chance at a better life.”

*To contribute to The House’s Summer Camp program, contact Sister Grace personally at 585.259.9580 or hsp1ty1@aol.com.*

## People vs Parking, Round II

The fate of the people who seek shelter in the Civic Garage downtown is still up in the air. They have not been forced out yet. But the garage is clearly not a long-term solution to the growing problem of downtown homelessness.

That's why the House of Mercy is working closely with St. Joseph's House of Hospitality to advocate for the rights of homeless people downtown and find a building that could serve as a humanitarian alternative to a concrete cave designed for cars.

"There are many issues yet to be resolved. But we hope we can work with the City and County to resolve them before another life-threatening

winter returns," Sister Grace said recently.

The House currently makes several trips each week to the garage to provide food and comfort to the people who sleep there in primitive conditions.

"We've been spending a lot of money to feed the homeless in the garage," Sister Grace added.

The House is currently looking for donations to help pay for food for people downtown and eventually purchase a building for a downtown shelter.

*For more information, contact  
SisterGrace@houseofmercyrochester.org*

---

## Thanks Arleen!

The House would like to thank Arlene Hodge for the use of her wonderful photos of Reggie Grimes. Arleen has spent countless hours documenting the plight of homeless and marginalized people in Rochester and other cities. See her outstanding work at <http://arleenphotography.wordpress.com>.

---

# save the date

## for our first Fundraiser at Mercy High School!

The House of Mercy will hold its first ever fundraiser at Mercy High School

**July 19  
9 a.m. — 5 p.m.**

There will be a huge garage sale, a car raffle and a pulled pork dinner.

Volunteers are needed to help staff the event. For more info, contact C.W. at 585-259-1969 or [cwe2288@aol.com](mailto:cwe2288@aol.com)



## URGENTneeds

### *For our people:*

- Men's underwear (*all sizes*)
- Jackets, sweatshirts & socks

### *For The House:*

- Vol. webmaster
- Vol. admin. ass't for Sister Grace
- Donations for a new downtown shelter, our burial fund & capital improvements

Call (585) 546-2580 or email  
[HOM@HouseofMercy.org](mailto:HOM@HouseofMercy.org).



"Give to the poor,  
and you shall have  
treasure in heaven."

— MATTHEW 19:21 —