



# Hillcrest Calling

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### A WALK THROUGH HILLCREST

In the last several issues of **Hillcrest Calling**, we have focused on asking and answering the question "Why Hillcrest?" Why is it important to so many people? Why does Hillcrest provide the services it does to the children and families it serves? We will continue to highlight services, employees and families who are all part of Hillcrest Family Services. In this issue, we will focus on "taking a walk through Hillcrest." The employees, clients and families who have shared their stories in this issue bear witness to the fact that Hillcrest reaches out to many people in many ways. We invite you to read further, and walk with us through some of the lives of people who are impacted daily by Hillcrest Family Services.

## Walking the Adoption Path

The road to adopting a child can be filled with many ups and downs, fulfilled dreams and disappointments. Maybe some would liken the journey to a roller coaster ride more than a walk.

For Kathleen and Tom Reinwart of Cedar Rapids, their journey has been long but unbelievably rewarding. Today they are the parents of two healthy boys, Tommy (3 1/2) and Sam (14 months). Tommy was adopted in a closed adoption through an attorney. Sam was adopted through a semi-open adoption process with Hillcrest Family Services.

Originally from St. Louis, the couple relocated to Cedar Rapids for Tom's work in 1999. While living in St. Louis, they had begun to research adoption agencies and the steps it would take for them to start their family. After their move, Tom started his job, and Kathleen took a job as a daycare provider in a corporate setting. Their search process for adoption alternatives started all over again.

Kathleen comments that their connection to Hillcrest began in a most roundabout way. "I got to know a mom who had a child at the daycare center where I worked. Over time, she told me that she had been a birth mother and had given up her child for adoption many years before. That mom went through Hillcrest Family Services when she needed help. Then, later I left the corporate setting and started to provide in-home daycare myself. One of the moms I met through my business actually worked at Hillcrest as an adoption facilitator. Wow, I thought! I always try to see the meaning in everything, and this was definitely a sign for me, that Hillcrest kept popping up in my life."

The Reinwarts decided to work through Hillcrest and begin their process. They attended a seminar on adoption hosted by Hillcrest. The same birth mom from the daycare center volunteered to speak, and told of her experiences at Hillcrest. Kathleen and Tom knew they were in the right place. They felt drawn to the people and the services. That's when they met Melissa Anderson, who is the Adoption Coordinator in the Cedar Rapids office.

"We didn't have much background knowledge of open or semi-open adoptions, and we were fearful of them. We were scared of the things that might happen along the way and the disappointments that we might face. Our experience with Tommy, through an attorney, went well and we were thrilled to open our hearts to him as our son. But that was a closed adoption and we did not know or meet the birth parents nor did they meet us." The Reinwarts kept their options open for the future, however, and let Hillcrest know that they wanted to adopt more children.

Two and a half years after adopting Tommy, the call came. A young birth mother was looking at the Reinwarts' profile and wanted to meet them to discuss a semi-open adoption of her yet-to-be-born child. Tom and Kathleen had been working with Melissa, and through her guidance and much soul searching on their parts, agreed to meet the mother.

"We immediately felt like we had a connection with this mom as soon as we met her. The whole situation was relaxed and comfortable. We really felt like this would work," Tom says. And they were right. The very next day, the birth mom agreed to the adoption, and even asked the Reinwarts to be at the hospital with her when she delivered. "That young woman gave us so much. It was the most amazing experience we've ever had. We got to cut the cord and hold our new son, Sam, moments after he was born. Thank-you will never be a big enough word for us to say to this beautiful young woman," says Kathleen.

As they think back on their walk with Hillcrest, they have many positive things to share. Kathleen says, "The staff at Hillcrest is professional in every way, at every turn. But they are our friends now too. We feel like Melissa is a member of our family! She stayed with us in the hospital for 18 hours during Sam's birth. That is definitely 'above and beyond.' She understood our feelings, our fears, our excitement. I never once felt bad calling her to ask questions. She was always professional, supportive and caring."

Tom and Kathleen both see Hillcrest as a blessing. "We are very fortunate to have had the events in our lives that brought us to Iowa and to Hillcrest. Our sons were born in Iowa and now our home is here. Hillcrest fit into our lives at the right place and the right time. We would not be the same family we are today if not for Hillcrest." ■

Kathleen and Tom Reinwart of Cedar Rapids, with Tommy and Sam.



Supporting a Walker: Calvin



**President/CEO:** Gary Gansemer  
**VP of Mission Advancement:** Rev. Ken Gibson  
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**Hillcrest/WIC Office**  
515 6th Ave. S., Clinton, IA 52732

Hillcrest Family Services has been selected to be one of the recipients of a \$15,000 Dubuque Racing Association Grant award. Hillcrest has many ongoing capital improvement needs to support our twenty-five programs in nineteen different communities throughout Iowa.

This DRA grant will most directly impact the clients we serve in our Dubuque and Maquoketa programs.

## Walking With Our Youth

Spend a day, so to speak, with John Bellini, the Residential Education Administrator, in his Dubuque environment. If you could keep up, you would follow him in and out of the six buildings that comprise the Residential Education program. You would follow him in and out of meetings with other youth care workers, therapists, on-site supervisors, the admissions coordinator and managers of other Hillcrest programs. You would follow him as he interacts with youth in the programs who are troubled and need help on a daily basis.

John began his career at Hillcrest in 1999 as a night monitor in one of the residential education program houses. He has held every position available in the residential education program, working his way to his present position. With a degree in criminal justice and years of experience with troubled youth, he now oversees nearly 80 staff who work in the group homes and the emergency shelter.

What makes John want to ‘walk through Hillcrest’ every day? “I wanted to work with youth. In college, I did an internship and found my experiences with youth were really rewarding. I found that when kids were given a chance to change and succeed, many of them did. That was important to me. I saw myself as someone who could connect to those kids. That led me to Hillcrest,” he says.

“The people who work in residential education are a special group. They are very empathic listeners. They truly try to understand where the troubled young person is coming from, where they’ve been and what their goals in life really are. They serve as role models and authority figures all at the same time. I’m proud to work with so many professionals, who are flexible, patient and willing to adapt themselves to the individual needs of the young people we serve.”

John notes that “these are the kids that no one else wants, frankly. We take them, work with them, and surround them with resources that will help them not only in the short-term, but for the rest of their lives, when they become independent. We really do have quite a high success rate with them. Hillcrest is unique among other treatment programs in that we have so many resources within our organization that can be shared with troubled youth to make their lives better.”

### A LIFE CHANGED

One of those youth whose life took a turn for the better is Bob. Diagnosed with ADHD, mental illness and a psychotic disorder, Bob entered the New Pathways residential education program in January 2005. Unlike

most young men in this program who enter involuntarily, Bob actually signed himself in when he turned 18. He wanted to graduate from high school and knew that he could not reach that goal alone.

When he entered the program, he was defiant, aggressive and would not comply with the staff or their expectations of his behavior. But with a wide range of support from many Hillcrest staff and other professionals, he was able to stay in the program for 2 1/2 years, work at a part-time job, and earn his diploma from Hempstead High School in Dubuque.

John comments that “Bob was a changed kid! He worked very hard to build a healthy relationship with Hillcrest, learned and used important daily living skills and planned ahead for his future. We were able to teach him life skills, properly diagnose him and provide him with appropriate medications, enrolled him into an employment program, and worked closely with him on his vocational, aptitude and career interests. Bob really wanted to succeed, and through residential education, he did.”

### SUPPORTING A WALKER

Calvin doesn’t have any immediate family. An aunt lives out of town but cannot provide all that he needs. He struggled in the foster care system and ended up at Hillcrest. Diagnosed with ADHD and obsessive/compulsive disorder, he was inattentive and had a hard time connecting to others. He needed a support network. Hillcrest provided that sense of belonging and care that was missing in his life.

Today, Calvin is 18 and is working toward his high school diploma. He attends a support group, receives mental health counseling and is learning how to take care of himself and how to interact with others. John says, “Calvin would eventually have been in a homeless shelter. We have been able to provide a lot of counseling to him. He needed caring adults and a safe place to live. He is a perfect example of why residential education can save someone’s life.” ■

### HILLCREST FAMILY SERVICES RESIDENTIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

- Peterson Lodge
- Pathways and New Pathways
- New Hope
- Molitore
- Emergency Shelter

*Make a difference—support Hillcrest Family Services  
Prayerfully remember Hillcrest Family Services in your will.*

# FROM THE PRESIDENT/CEO

GARY L. GANSEMER

I have been walking around Hillcrest for as long as I can remember. Growing up, I had many opportunities to wonder what was going on within the small campus. Childish questions and pictures entered my head as I walked by “Hillcrest Baby Fold.” Teenage years brought more serious questions of how young women with unplanned pregnancies came to live in Dubuque. An interest in becoming a social worker grew and I began to contemplate a career where I could help others like the nurses and other professionals I saw go in and out the front door. I even told my girlfriend, who I eventually married, that I envisioned working at some place like Hillcrest.

Today, of course, I walk Hillcrest with many different thoughts. I walk by and think how great it was that Hillcrest kept land that now holds four adolescent residential programs and very special education program. I walk by and think how grand it will be when we can fulfill the dreams of a chapel, a gymnasium and classrooms to replace portable ones.

I think of how many people drive by and do not know what goes on behind the office walls, the residential center doors, the lower levels of our build-

ings, and beyond the confines of Asbury, Hillcrest Road and Wilbricht Lane. I walk by and think that Hillcrest serves over 16,000 people, in 24 programs and in 13 cities.

I walk by and think about the board and staff leaders that guided Hillcrest. Worrying at one time about the number of chickens available for eggs and the number of \$5 annual gifts needed to make the organization run. I walk by and appreciate the mission work of the United Methodist and Presbyterian Church USA that has inspired our ministries.

I no longer walk by Hillcrest as a red-haired, freckled-face kid with inquisitive questions. I walk by today as the grey-haired, freckled-face man who sees an unbelievable past and a bright future. I see a bright future where Hillcrest is the premier faith-connected health and human service agency not only in Iowa, but the entire Midwest.

Please join me as we walk through this and future issues of Hillcrest exploring the present and the future of Hillcrest. You are also invited to come to any of our locations to see our special ministries first hand. ■



GARY L. GANSEMER

## FROM CARE GIVEN TO CARE GIVER

A walk through Hillcrest can take many forms. For Penny Dondiego, she walked into the doors of the Clinton office in 1996 because she needed help. Today, she walks into the same office because she helps others.

In 1996, Penny was pregnant with twins. She and her husband faced some financial challenges during the pregnancy when Penny was placed on bed rest. She wanted to provide a healthy start to her children when they were born, and was determined to breastfeed. She went to the Hillcrest/WIC office in Clinton, Iowa to seek out support.

The babies were born healthy and Penny credits Hillcrest with helping her get a successful start as a mother. “When I came in for visits, the staff was very supportive of my desire to breastfeed. They gave me encouragement, made me feel confident, and provided me with education and support as a new mom. I never once felt embarrassed or stereotyped in any way. The staff was very welcoming,” she says.

While she was there, the staff learned that Penny was fluent in Spanish. As her way of giving back, she began to volunteer at the office as a translator. Her talent and caring attitude didn’t go unnoticed. In 2001, she was offered a full-time job with Hillcrest. Today, she answers phones, greets clients, processes their paperwork, and continues to translate between mothers and the dietician during their appointments. The staff in Clinton includes six full or part-time staff as well as child health nurses, maternal health nurses, social workers and dental hygienists who come to the clinic at regularly scheduled times each month.

“The best thing about Hillcrest/WIC is their consistency,” Penny notes. “The things that drew me to the clinic when I needed care are the same things that keep me here as an employee and caregiver. It’s about truly helping other people. No one looks down on anyone else. People need help during their lives, and Hillcrest is there to provide that help through a variety of support systems. I can truly sit with a pregnant or post-partum mom and say ‘I know how you feel. I was there.’ That is what caring is about.” ■





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# Hillcrest Calling

*Our Vision*

Children, families and adults will be safe and healthy and will gain greater control of their lives.



REV. KEN GIBSON

## A Walk through Hillcrest

It has been nearly three months now since I began my new role, and in my short time here, I have already received many wonderful gifts as I have “walked” through Hillcrest Family Services.

In an effort to better understand all of the ministries that we are called to do here, I have asked many folks to “walk” me through their area to allow me to see in person what is happening. First, let me say there is no such thing as a quick walk through Hillcrest! With over twenty different services/ministries being delivered every day, I am still walking and will continue to do so for some time to come. Please let me share one of the highlights that has touched me deeply in this “walk.”

As I entered a family’s home where I was making a visit, I saw the little 2 1/2 year old girl peek out from behind a chair. As we made eye contact and I offered a smile, she smiled back and came out from behind the chair. This beautiful child of God came forth to me and opened her arms to me. As I bent down to pick her up, she immediately gave me a huge hug. Her loving arms embraced me and she gave me unconditional love. This may not seem out of the ordinary until you hear about this little girl’s “walk” in life, which has connected her with us at Hillcrest.

This special little girl was born a crack baby. Her entry into this world was more horrific than many experiences any of us will ever face in our lifetime. But through Hillcrest, a successful adoption was made to give this child the love and care she needed — and will continue to need for many years to come.

As it came time for me to leave, she cried and did not want me to go... to be honest, I did not want to stop holding her and feeling her love. The good news is that I can continue my walk through Hillcrest and find my way back to her home along the way.

This encounter in my walk is only one. There are many others about which I hope to share with you during the weeks, months and years to come — as we walk together in the mission and ministry that is Hillcrest Family Services. ■

*EDITOR’S NOTE:*

*The child in this story is not any child which is mentioned anywhere else in this issue of Hillcrest Calling.*

[www.hillcrest-fs.org](http://www.hillcrest-fs.org)



Hillcrest Family Services is a ministry of the Iowa Conference of the United Methodist Church, and they Synod of Lakes and Prairies, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Hillcrest is the only childcare agency related to both the Iowa Conference and the entire six-state region of the Synod.

