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A Special Thank you to everyone who supported MIRCI during our 27th Annual Low Country Shrimp Boil in October.

We truly appreciate you!

Contributions will be used to fund our housing and homeless programs.

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From the desk of the Executive Director:



Julie Ann Avin, Executive Director

For those of you who know me well, you are all too aware of my drive to be registered, timely and purposeful. For those of you who don't know me so well, you'll probably have a better understanding of my nature after reading this. According to my agenda, today was the scheduled day to write my article for the "Holiday" issue of *Gaining New Ground*, this quarterly newsletter. I almost didn't write this article today – in fact, it's late evening and I've finally accepted that I must write it before ending the day.

By far, today has probably been the most difficult in my tenure at MIRCI. Today I, along with other dedicated staff at MIRCI, had the arduous task of telling the residents of our MIRCI Group Homes that their residency will come to an end. I've known since early June that this ending was almost inevitable, but I've struggled to prevent the ending. The development of the MIRCI Group Homes was a labor of love; a development that required much energy and creativity to complete; and

one that resulted in a final product that provided a "home" for folks who might never have experienced such complete immersion in a community.

Over the past several years, the State of SC has experienced lower revenues and implemented cuts to state agencies to absorb these lower revenues. Until this legislative year – beginning July 1, 2011 – the SC Department of Mental Health has passed along their percentage budget cuts to the MIRCI Group Homes. However this year, the Department determined it would not be feasible to continue funding of the Group Homes.

We've negotiated a transition plan that will allow residents, their families, MIRCI and the Department of Mental Health to work together to identify alternative homes for those currently living in the MIRCI Group Homes. I thought I was all prepared to inform the residents today of the impending transition to new living arrangements. I'd gathered my thoughts, rehearsed my remarks, and made plans to reassure. But nothing I'd done had prepared me for the reaction of these individuals who have called MIRCI their home.

These are folks who have collectively experienced years in institutions; folks who have questioned why

MIRCI didn't "send" them back to the hospital; folks who have lived longer in their adult lives at these homes than any other place; folks who have found their home on Beckman Road in Columbia, South Carolina.

One of the residents at the homes, after having a meeting to address appropriate behaviors earlier this year, stated "just send me back to the hospital...I know that's what you'll do...I always get sent back to the hospital." When we responded that she didn't need the hospital, this wasn't about her illness, this was about learning to manage her behavior to live in the community; she responded with a huge smile, a light in her eyes, and the statement that she wasn't sick and didn't need the hospital.

These residents have made MIRCI their home. They have developed a family among their fellow residents. Most importantly, they have remained steadfast in their recovery; they've lived in their community; and they've proven that folks with serious mental illness can live in the least restrictive environment with the right supports.

The staff here at MIRCI has our work ahead of us. But I'm confident that we'll rise to the occasion, and we'll help our folks to exercise their right to choice. We'll

## Continued, From the Desk of the Executive Director

help them find their voices, and we'll advocate for their choices.

At MIRCI, we can be the advocate, we can support folks' choices, and we can help folks find a way to live in their community – not in an institution. We can do this because of the special people involved at MIRCI. By far, we have the most compassionate, most progressive, and most caring group of individuals on our Board of Directors. We have an associated Housing Board

of Directors with skills ranging from former State Mental Health Administrators to bankers to auditors, but all with a common mission of serving those with serious mental illness in the best possible environment.

So while I'm regimented and purposeful, I'm also emotional and passionate. Purposeful to serve those most needing our assistance; regimented in meeting requirements and standards; emotional in caring for those we serve;

and passionate in uniting all these characteristics to help folks live happy, healthy lives in homes that promote dignity, individual happiness, and success.

Today has been difficult and sad, but today has also inspired me and other leaders at MIRCI to gather our strength; to commit to new ways to assist folks; and to remain true to our mission of providing "homes" to those who need them most.

Join us, and celebrate the vision of South Carolina artists through a collection of individually unique, hand-painted vintage windows. Monies raised through your support will bolster housing and homeless services for those facing chronic mental illness.

**May 10, 2012**

**701 Whaley**

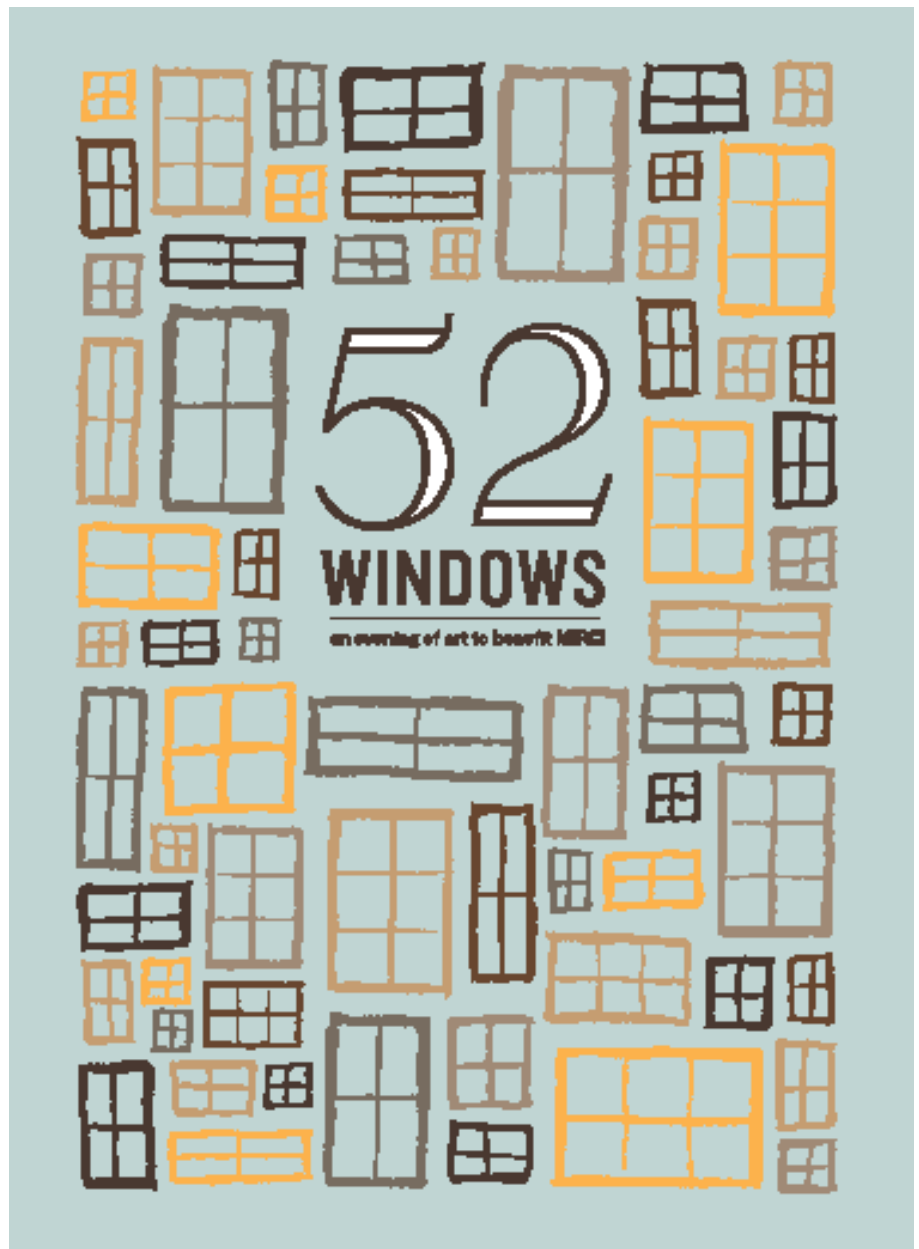
**6-9 PM**

*Live & Silent Auction*

*Heavy Hors D'oeuvres by Jack Brantley, Aberdeen Catering*

*Open Bar & Live Music*

Tickets will be available after the first of the year



## A Season of Caring and Sharing

It's *Jingle Bell* time!! At MIRCI we don't have a bell to ring, but we do have ways for you to help folks in need during the Holidays. MIRCI provides housing and clinic services to 225 individuals with disabling mental illnesses. These folks are living below the poverty level, and struggle just to meet their basic needs.

Saxe Gotha Presbyterian Church is providing a home cooked Thanksgiving meal for all those served by MIRCI – complete with all trimmings! Saxe Gotha has donated this meal for quite a number of years, and our folks are anxiously awaiting all the good food – especially the pumpkin pies!

Elliott Davis & Company is sponsoring the meal on Christmas Day. A group of interns from USC are going to sponsor a holiday party for all the clients a few days before Christmas. The only thing that would be a welcomed addition... something under the tree for our folks.

As you're making your shopping and donation lists this Holi-

day Season, think of MIRCI. When you hear bells ringing, think of how you could help brighten a MIRCI resident's holidays with just a small contribution. All monetary contributions for the Holidays will be combined, gifts purchased, and then given to folks at the holiday party or on Christmas Day. OR, your donation could be a gift card from Wal Mart; hat and gloves; a needed jacket. Items that our folks want are rarely electronics, games or fancy clothes. It is what you and I take for granted as always having available to us...

To find out how to make a contribution or for more information contact Cheryl Scott @ (803) 786-1844, Cscott@mirci.org or MIRCI PO Box 4246 Columbia, SC 29240. We can also accept donations on-line at [www. MIRCI.org](http://www.MIRCI.org).

As ALWAYS, MANY thanks for the MANY ways that you look after the ones we serve... at Holiday Time and throughout the year. *Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells, Jingle all the way.....*

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