

THE MEMORIAL TOURNAMENT 6:59 AM Martin Kaymer takes two-shot lead into final round

## Pathway Clubhouse, a haven for those with mental illness, carries on despite 'parent' agency's financial collapse



BUY PHOTO

HIDE CAPTION

Michael Porter, vocational coordinator, has lunch with cook Josie Thompson, center, and Shireen Mehta at the Pathway Clubhouse. The clubhouse, in Olde Towne East, took a hit when its parent agency, Columbus Area Integrated Health Services, collapsed financially. [Eric Albrecht/Dispatch]



By Rita Price  
The Columbus Dispatch  
@RitaPrice  
Posted at 5:53 AM  
Updated at 5:53 AM



Less than a year ago, Greg Shaw wouldn't have been able to explain how much the place means to him because he couldn't carry on a conversation. Venturing outside his home was difficult. On the rare occasions he mustered the courage, he still couldn't look people in the eye.

"Head was always down," Shaw said.

So he figures it's no exaggeration to say that something miraculous happened inside the big, rambling house at 1203 E. Broad St., where people with mental illness come together to help one another wriggle free of the shame, isolation and loneliness that often accompany their journeys.

Officially, the Pathway Clubhouse in Olde Towne East on the Near East Side is a "community-based program of psycho-social rehabilitation."

Get the news delivered to your inbox: [Sign up for our morning, afternoon and evening newsletters](#)

Shaw and other members also think of it as a family home.

"It's changed my life," said the 51-year-old, who lives on the North Side. "My self-esteem has improved tremendously. And, I've made friends."

One of those friends, Shireen Mehta, sat across from Shaw and smiled. She's been spending time at Pathway for more than 30 years and now sits on the board.

"Everyone's real here," said Mehta, 56, of Blacklick. "Not being judged coming through the door is huge."

That clubhouse camaraderie and stick-together spirit have been even more important over the past several months, as Pathway ended its relationship with Columbus Area Integrated Health Services, which had served as Pathway's "parent" agency until [Columbus Area began to unravel financially](#).

Columbus Area — one of the city's oldest and largest mental-health agencies — closed abruptly in April, collapsing in a heap of debt. Mehta and others soon discovered that Pathway's modest fundraising accounts were casualties as well, emptied by Columbus Area administrators as they scrambled to fend off creditors.

"It's so hard for a small place to raise money," said board member and [mental-health advocate Ingrid Silvan](#), 89, whose daughter attends Pathway. "We worked hard. It was cruel for them to take it."

The clubhouse lost more than \$5,000 that was earmarked for trips, outings and special events for members, many of whom depend on Pathway for low-cost opportunities to visit other cities, eat at a restaurant, attend museums and educational events.

"Being on SSI (Social Security), people don't get to go a lot of places," Mehta said. "It's heartbreaking."

Columbus Area leadership also cashed more than \$26,000 worth of stocks that had been given to Pathway by the late Holly Ann Herschede, a Pathway supporter whose obituary said she "took pride in being a loving philanthropist."

Larry James, a Columbus attorney representing the Columbus Area board of trustees, said the money went into the agency's general fund. "To this date, there is no indication that any of these funds were used for personal gain," James said. "But that doesn't make it any softer."

The good news is that the [Pathway Clubhouse](#) operation is on firm ground, administered now by Concord Counseling Services, said Teresa Conley, the longtime Pathway manager.

The [Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Board of Franklin County](#) funds services at the clubhouse, which is open to Franklin County residents with mental illness. Pathway also has gained accreditation from [Clubhouse International](#), a worldwide organization that champions the clubhouse model as a way to help reduce hospitalizations and incarceration, and improve employment and social participation for people with mental illness.

"There's something kind of magical about the whole clubhouse model," Conley said. "You feel the warmth. You can be yourself."

One of the most important effects is a decrease in suicide attempts, said Mehta, who was just 8 the first time she harmed herself. By 14, she was hospitalized.

"It took me a long time to get to this place," Mehta said. "The people who come here are very proud of our program."

She and Shaw and others have been working on new fundraisers — yard sales, an auction, art shows — to make up for the loss to Columbus Area. Members were dismayed last week, too, when someone stole planters off the porch and rosebushes from the yard.

This year's big trip was supposed to be a bus ride to Chicago. Members are scaling that back now, hoping to at least visit an adjacent state or nearby city.

East Side resident Josie Thompson, who cooks many of the meals served at Pathway, said members are among the hundreds of clients who have had to adjust to new service providers since the closing of Columbus Area. The agency's clinic sat just a few blocks from the clubhouse.

"All of us were affected, but all of us are sticking together as a Pathway family," Thompson said. "We help each other."

[rprice@dispatch.com](mailto:rprice@dispatch.com)

[@RitaPrice](#)

### Listen to The Other Side podcast:

From the Newsroom: The Colu...  
program High school student  
00:00 24:25  
Republican Clarence Mingo co... 20:26 Mar 18  
In part two of our interview with f...  
Black Republican talks about b... 21:18 Mar 11  
Politicians aren't usually so candi...  
Wife of ex-NBA, OSU star talks ... 29:12 Feb 15  
Achea Redd, wife of former Ohio ...  
Girls basketball coach on keepi... 27:47