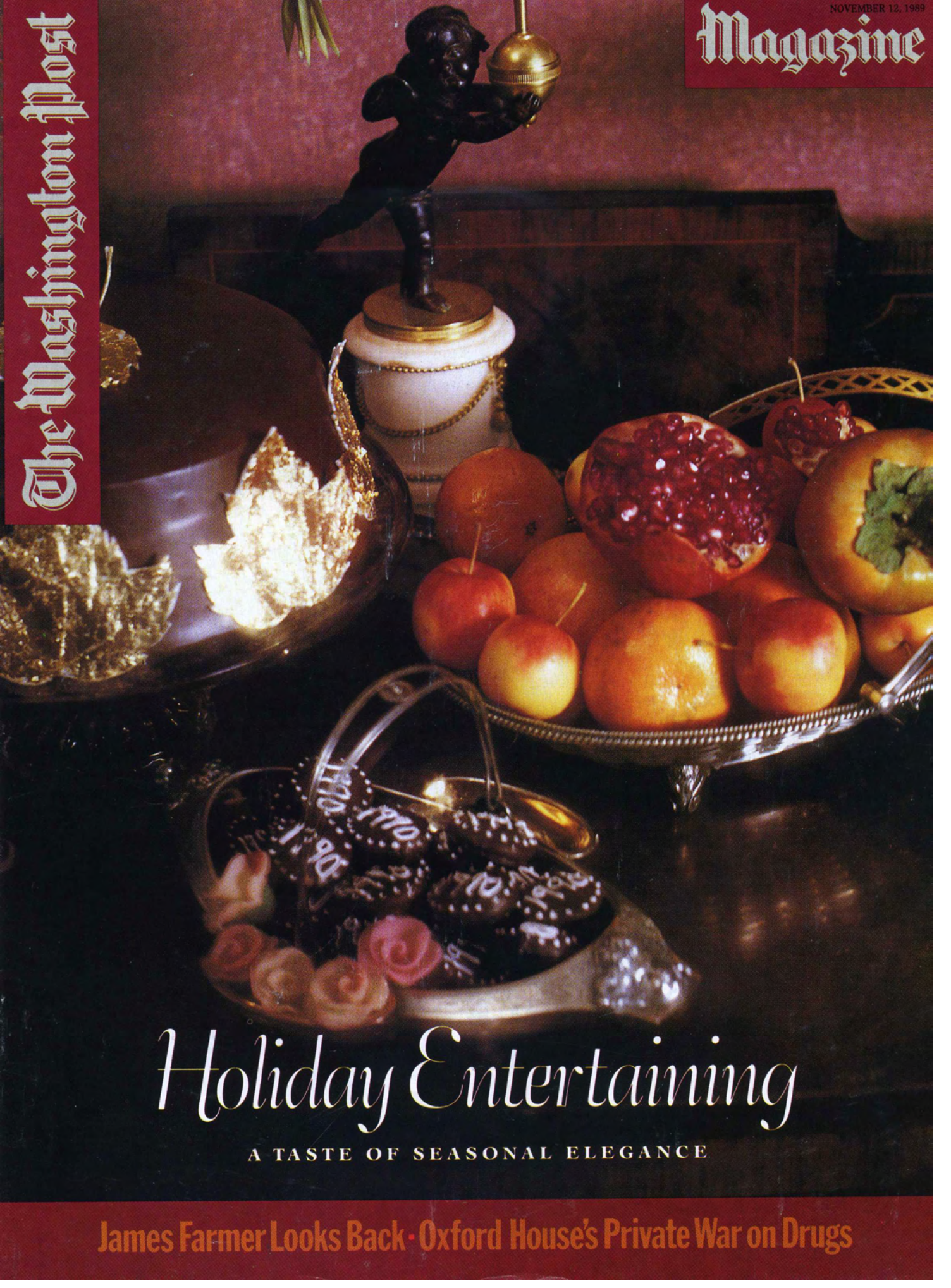


NOVEMBER 12, 1989

Magazine

The Washington Post



Holiday Entertaining

A TASTE OF SEASONAL ELEGANCE

James Farmer Looks Back · Oxford House's Private War on Drugs



NINE REFORMED
DRUG ADDICTS AND
ALCOHOLICS LIVE
IN THE OXFORD
HOUSE ON
GARRISON STREET,
INCLUDING, FROM
LEFT, CHRIS
LEURQUIN, KEITH
RECTOR AND
BRIAN MCCARTHY.



THE

OXFORD HOUSE EXPERIMENT

ROOMMATES WANTED: TO LIVE IN GROUP HOUSE IN GOOD NEIGHBORHOOD. MUST BE RECOVERING ADDICTS OR ALCOHOLICS WILLING TO WORK HARD, PAY THEIR OWN WAY—AND HELP EACH OTHER STAY CLEAN

PAUL MOLLOY INVADED NEW JERSEY IN THE CHEAPEST RENTED CAR HE COULD find, a beat-up Ford with no side-view mirror and a steering wheel that emitted ominous sounds whenever he turned it. He brought along piles of pamphlets, a videotape, a portable computer, an overhead projector, a cellular car phone as big as a shoe box, three recovering drug addicts and his financial adviser, a very respectable middle-aged businessman who jokes that trying to manage the paltry finances of Molloy's organization, Oxford House Inc., may yet drive *him* to drugs.

BY PETER CARLSON

They got lost a few times in the streets around Princeton, but that didn't bother Molloy. He just kept puffing on his pipe and grinning impishly. He figures getting lost is just another opportunity to cruise side streets looking for houses he can rent and fill up with recovering drunks and drug addicts.

Paul Molloy—former associate Republican counsel to the House Energy and Commerce Committee, former Republican counsel to the Senate Commerce Committee, former corporate attorney, former drinker of two-fifths of Canadian Club a day, former wife-beater, former mental patient, former street drunk—is now, at 51, a man

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RUSSELL MONK



AFTER HITTING ROCK BOTTOM AND THROWING HIS WEDDING RING IN A GUTTER, PAUL MOLLOY, AN OXFORD HOUSE FOUNDER, REMARRIED HIS WIFE, JANE, ABOVE. AT RIGHT, MEMBERS OF THE GARRISON STREET HOUSE INTERVIEW A PROSPECTIVE ROOMMATE, SEATED LEFT. HE GOT IN.

driven by a grand vision: He wants to see thousands of self-supporting, self-governed homes for recovering alcoholics and addicts operating all over America.

And he's well on his way to realizing that grand vision.

Since 1975—when Molloy and a dozen other recovering drunks took over a halfway house that Montgomery County was closing for lack of money—he's helped set up 28 "Oxford Houses" in the Washington area and another 10 scattered around more distant parts of Maryland, Pennsylvania, Missouri, Vermont and Massachusetts. Not only that, but he also used his Capitol Hill connections to convince Congress to pass a law requiring every state to set up a \$100,000 revolving fund to lend money to groups of recovering addicts so they can set up similar houses.

Now faced with a cutoff of federal Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration block grants if they don't set up the funds, the states are deluging the Oxford House office—which is located in Molloy's basement in Silver Spring—with demands that he come and teach them how to do it. Which is why Molloy and his team invaded New Jersey on this sunny September morning.

They drove to Trenton, bounded past the bored cop sitting at the front door of a decrepit old government building and started transforming a dreary conference room into the stage for what Molloy calls his "dog and pony show." They set up their computer and their overhead projector, popped the Oxford House

videotape into a VCR and sat waiting for anti-drug bureaucrats to drift in from around the state. Igniting his ever-present pipe and smiling contentedly, Molloy looked confident. And why not? He'd come to deliver a message far more optimistic than most dispatches from the front lines of the war on drugs:

"I guarantee you it will work, and it will cost you nothing," he said. "The houses work in each and every case if you put them in good neighborhoods and throw out anybody who relapses."

HERBERT SITS ON THE EDGE OF THE COUCH AND MAKES A confession: "Guys, I'm really sorry to tell you this, but this weekend I relapsed."

He tells the story: He was on his way to a Narcotics Anonymous meeting when he passed the parking lot on 16th Street NW where he used to cop his crack. "And I saw the guy I used to buy from and so on and so on . . ."

He doesn't need to supply all the gory details. The other eight residents of the Oxford House on Garrison Street in Chevy Chase, D.C., are all recovering addicts too. They're sitting in their living room, which looks like something in a frat house. On the bulletin board is a photograph of some cheerfully obscene graffiti, and in the corner is Fred the Pig, a porcine statue wearing a baseball cap, a sword and a dungaree jacket with a Jesse Jackson button. This kind of interior decorating causes residents of some of the more staid Oxford

Houses to refer to the one on Garrison Street as "Animal House." That suits these guys just fine. They think the Oxford Houses with air conditioning and spotless wall-to-wall carpeting are a tad too uptight for their taste anyway. Every Oxford House is autonomous, and each takes on its own style. But they all have one thing in common: They evict anybody who drinks or uses drugs. Which is why Herbert knows he's got to leave tonight.

"So what's your plan?" somebody asks him.

Herbert says he's going to live with a relative for a few days. After that, he figures, he'll end up in a shelter. "If I stayed here over the weekend, it would never have happened, man," he says. "Now more than ever, I understand the importance of Oxford House."

"Don't beat yourself up, man," Big Mike tells him. "It doesn't help."

What *will* help, says John, is going to NA meetings every day and avoiding anybody still doing dope.

"You can stop by any time," Chris says. "And I really want to see you reapply."

"I really want to reapply," Herbert says. He gets up to go, and Big Mike gives him a hug. "I love you, man," he says. One by one, the other guys hug Herbert and wish him luck.

Walking out the door, Herbert passes a guy who just got out of a rehab program and heard that there's a vacancy in the house. Two other applicants are already waiting in the basement to be interviewed.

PACING IN A SEMICIRCLE A CORD'S LENGTH FROM THE telephone in the Oxford House office, Paul Molloy was talking to a reporter who had called from Burlington, Vt., where two Oxford Houses had just opened. The reporter was learning that you don't interview Molloy, you just sit back and let him roll. Molloy was rolling into one of his favorite stories: how he wrote the law that set up Amtrak while chasing shots of Canadian Club with bottles of Budweiser in the old Carroll Arms bar on Capitol Hill.

"I wrote everything on these napkins, and my secretary would bring them back to the Senate Office Building and type 'em up. And the sweat off the Budweiser bottles caused some inkblots on those napkins. And I'm sure it's in those inkblots that were the words that would have made Amtrak profitable." He burst out laughing. "But that's what you get when you have a drunk writing laws."

Back then, in the late '60s, Molloy was, he told the reporter, a "yuppie of my day." He was an attorney for the Senate Commerce Committee, and his wife, Jane, whom he'd met while on the University of Vermont debating team in the late '50s, was an attorney for an anti-poverty program. They were living in Silver Spring, raising five kids and trying to hide the fact that Molloy's drinking was out of control. At work, he got in trouble for insulting important pols. At home, he beat Jane. It went on like that for years until the end of 1973, when he overturned the Christmas tree in a drunken rage and then went through the family record collection, sorting out Jane's albums and smashing

them. At that point, she had him committed to the psych ward of Holy Cross Hospital and filed for divorce.

After seven months in two hospitals that he likes to call "nut houses," Molloy was released. He ended up living in a seedy hotel in Washington and drinking like a man determined to drown himself. One night, he staggered out of a bar on Pennsylvania Avenue at closing time, seething with hatred for his wife and his life. He pulled his wedding ring off his finger and flung it into the night. Then, seized with contrition, he crawled around the gutters searching in vain for it.

"I'd ended up about as low as a Republican counsel to a Senate committee can end up," he said.

AFTER A COUPLE OF MONTHS ON THE STREET, MOLLOY entered a halfway house for alcoholics on Fiddler Lane in downtown Silver Spring. Finally, he'd admitted to himself that he was an alcoholic, that he couldn't beat the bottle by himself. He started attending Alcoholic Anonymous meetings and putting his life back together. He even managed to land a job as a lawyer for the House Energy and Commerce Committee. But he still wasn't secure in his sobriety. You could only stay in the halfway house for six months. Molloy had watched a dozen men leave when their time was up, and he'd seen 11 of them back on the booze within 30 days. He figured it could happen to him too.

And then the house manager announced that Montgomery County was going to close the place for lack of money. That news scared the hell out of Molloy and the other five men living in the house.

How could they do this to us? Molloy and the others complained at AA meetings. Here we are, trying to change our lives, and the heartless bureaucrats are throwing us out into the street. How can they do this?

Self-pity is not a quality tolerated for long at AA meetings, and pretty soon somebody asked, Why don't you stop whining and rent it yourself?

But we don't have any money.

I'll loan you the money for the first month's rent, said one AA member.

But how are we going to pay a house manager and a cook?

Why don't you do it yourselves?

The thought had never occurred to them. But what choice did they have? So the original half-dozen residents recruited seven more recovering drunks and rented the house. Determined to run the place democratically, they elected officers and divided up the chores and the expenses. They voted to repeal the six-month time limit and abolish curfews and other petty rules from the old regime, replacing them with two simple

laws: You can't drink or take drugs, and you have to work and pay rent. And they named the place Oxford House, a tribute to the Oxford Group, a religious organization that influenced the founders of AA.

"We were a little afraid," says John O'Neill, a freelance writer who was the first president of that first Oxford House.

continued on page 44



OXFORD HOUSE

continued from page 17

"We didn't know if we could act responsibly, which shows how low our self-esteem was. We agreed to kick out anybody who drank or used drugs, but we didn't know if we could do it. The inclination is to give 'em another chance. But we did it. The first guy who drank, we put him out, bag and baggage. And that set the precedent."

As that first Oxford House struggled to survive, unseen enemies were trying to destroy it. "People working directly for the alcoholism programs were making anonymous phone calls, sending in the fire marshals and the environmental protection people," recalls Riley Regan, director of New Jersey's Division of Alcoholism, who was then Montgomery County's alcoholism director. "They were motivated by a concern that 'My God, this might be able to work without our brilliance,' and they were beating up on me regularly, saying, 'You gotta kick these guys out of there.'"

The harassment only served to psyche up the residents. "We had a chip on our shoulders because the professionals in Montgomery County said it wouldn't work," O'Neill says. "We really wanted to make it work just to demonstrate that we could." They painted the place, put up curtains and asked Regan to pay a visit. He did, and he found that the place was clean and the people were sober. "I told the staff that we should leave them alone," he recalls, "and they just might get some drunks sobered up."

After six months of operation, the Oxford House had a surplus of \$1,200 in its treasury, and President O'Neill asked the members to decide what they should do with it. Buy a color TV? A stereo? Pay less rent? Instead, the residents voted to use the money to rent a second house. "We had something good, and we wanted to duplicate it," O'Neill recalls. "The impetus for expansion was the telephone: It would ring again and again. We had a safe place to live, and others wanted to get in. But there was no room at the inn. And so the idea was to do it again."

Perusing the paper, O'Neill spotted an ad for a house at 41st and Fessenden. He circled it, tossed the paper to Molloy and said, "Let's go."

That was in May 1976. They rented the place, seeded it with a few guys from the first house and recruited new residents at AA meetings. The second Oxford House worked as well as the first, and soon, fueled by a messianic fervor, they opened a third, a fourth, a fifth. By the end of 1977, 11 Oxford Houses were operating in Washington and Montgomery County. Some houses held men, some

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women. The only attempt at a coed house collapsed: One of the men began dating several of the women, and soon nearly everybody was tumbling off the wagon. But that was the sole failure. The other houses quickly became self-governing and self-supporting.

"We knew real fast that we had something good, and we knew it was replicable because we'd done it," O'Neill recalls. "A year earlier, nobody would listen to me because I was a babbling drunk. Suddenly I was leasing houses, taking people in, leading meetings, participating in the management of the house. So it was a heady time."

For Paul Molloy, the Capitol Hill veteran, it was a lesson in democracy. Residents of the first Oxford House had accepted self-government only because they had no other choice. But they quickly came to believe that it was self-government that made the houses work. "There's something about peer pressure that works better than rules and regulations," Molloy says.

Then, unable to resist turning a serious idea into a laugh line, he adds, "You've got to let the inmates run the asylum."

IN THE LIVING ROOM OF THE GARRISON Street Oxford House, the residents are interviewing the first applicant for Herbert's place. Other candidates are down in the basement, waiting their turn.

The rent, John explains, is \$265 a month, plus a \$100 security deposit. Then he asks the standard opening question: Why do you want to live in an Oxford House?

"A drug-free, alcohol-free community is what I need," says the applicant, who washed out of the military on a sea of booze and drugs. Now he's in a 30-day rehabilitation program at the Psychiatric Institute of Washington, but his 30 days are almost up. "I get out Sunday," he says, "and I'm trembling a bit."

Where will you live if you don't get in here? somebody asks.

"With my mother," he says. Unfortunately, she lives in a drug-infested neigh-

borhood in Anacostia. "I just hope I can convince you guys this is the place for me."

There's a knock at the door. It's another applicant, this one accompanied by his mother. They too are led downstairs to wait.

The second candidate is a blond Southern Californian who looks like he rode in on a surfboard. He just got out of a 30-day rehab, and he's staying with his uncle. "I need to live with sober people," he says.

He doesn't know much about Oxford House, so Gary explains: "The house is run democratically. If you get in, you'll have one-ninth say in what goes on here, and you'll have one-ninth of the responsibility . . ."

"If you don't get in, keep plugging away," John says. "It's the best thing that ever happened to me. By far."

The third candidate is a middle-aged alcoholic railroad worker who just got out of rehab yesterday. He was living with a woman, but he doesn't want to go back to her. "All my friends are alcoholics or drug addicts. I love 'em, but I don't want to go that way."

Do you have any problems with living in a group house? somebody asks.

He shakes his head no. "I can get along with anybody."

"You gotta be involved with it," Gary says. "You hang with us, you go to meetings with us. You'll find it's better for your recovery. This room has had different faces in it, and the ones who stuck are the ones who got involved. If there's anything that's gonna pull you away, tell us now . . ."

IN 1977, AFTER 2½ YEARS IN OXFORD Houses, Paul Molloy moved out. So did John O'Neill and most of the other founding members. They still loved the organization—it saved their lives, they eagerly admit—but they needed to move on. "We reached a point," Molloy says, "where we just didn't want to be bothered."

For the next decade, Molloy didn't have much to do with Oxford House. He was putting his own life back together. In 1981, he left the House Energy and Commerce Committee for a lucrative post with Isham, Lincoln and Beale, which was, until it dissolved in 1988, one of the country's oldest law firms. And he began the slow, painful process of working his way back into the family that his drinking had nearly destroyed. For years, there were two separate families—Paul and the kids, and Jane and the kids—with separate vacations and separate holidays. But by the mid-'80s, tensions had cooled enough to permit a Christmas truce, and the whole family celebrated the holiday together. Soon Paul and Jane started dating. In 1987, Jane and

continued on page 48



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continued from page 44

the kids moved into Paul's house in Silver Spring—and Jane rented her place in Kemp Mill to a group of women who wanted to start an Oxford House.

Then, on June 18, 1988, 13 years after their divorce, the Molloy's remarried, and Jane presented Paul with a new wedding ring to replace the one he'd hurled into the darkness over Pennsylvania Avenue in drunken despair years earlier.

As he repaired his own life, Molloy day-dreamed about working for Oxford House again, injecting some new energy into the organization. Not that it was failing. It wasn't. In the previous decade, the profile of the average Oxford House resident had changed—now 60 percent were addicted to drugs other than alcohol—but the concept continued to work. Impressed, local rehabilitation programs were routinely encouraging their patients to apply at Oxford Houses. "They're very supportive environments for people coming out of treatment programs," says Joe Marmo, director of the Adult Drug Abstinence Program at the Psychiatric Institute of Washington. "It's a wonderful support system." Meanwhile, Oxford Houses were earning a good reputation among landlords, a group not known for fondness for drunks and addicts. "They're beautiful tenants," says Colette McDonald, co-owner of a development company that rents one Silver Spring house to an Oxford group and volunteered to rent two Baltimore properties to Oxford House. "We'll rent them as many as we can because it's a good cause, and they're good people and good tenants. They all get jobs and they all pay their rent."

So why should these houses exist only in the Washington area? Paul Molloy asked himself. There ought to be Oxford Houses all over the country. John O'Neill agreed. After working at a big Washington public relations firm for several years, O'Neill had quit the rat race in 1984, built himself a cabin in California and started thinking about what really mattered in his life. His answer was Oxford House. So he moved back to Washington and started talking to Molloy about expanding the organization.

Their first opportunity came by pure chance.

Molloy was walking down Connecticut Avenue one summer day in 1987 when he happened to meet Fred Rooney, a former Democratic congressman from Pennsylvania.

Are you still dealing with those drunk houses? Rooney asked.

Molloy said he was.

Rooney, now a Washington consultant, said he wanted to sell his house in Bethlehem, Pa. Would Oxford House buy it?

Oxford House doesn't buy property,

Molly said. But we'd love to rent it.

Within a few months, Rooney's house had become an Oxford House, the first one outside the Washington area. It thrived and soon spawned a second house in Bethlehem. Molloy was thrilled. It proved that the concept would work outside Washington. Rooney was thrilled too. Like many Washington landlords, he'd worried how the neighbors would react to the house, and, also like the Washington landlords, he found there was no problem. "There are no complaints from the neighbors," he says. "Everybody loves them. It's a fantastic house."

Soon Rooney was avidly touting Oxford House to his old friends in Congress. So, of course, was Paul Molloy. In 1988, when the House was drafting an anti-drug bill, Molloy and his old friend Rep. Edward Madigan (R-Ill.) talked about adding a provision to use some federal grant money to help start new Oxford Houses around the country.

Eagerly, Molloy brought the issue to the Oxford House board, which is composed of the president of each house. They hated the idea. Government money means government control, they said, which means rules and regulations and bureaucrats to please. That'll be the end of self-support and self-governance. Besides, everything the government touches turns to . . .

Ian McDonald, then the director of the White House Drug Abuse Policy Office, heard the same sentiments when he visited the Oxford House on Northampton Street: "They expressed hostility about what the government would do to this program, which was working."

Deep in his Republican soul, Paul Molloy was proud of that reaction—here, by God, were some people who didn't want government handouts—but he also believed that the country needed Oxford Houses and that Oxford House needed money to expand. So he sat down with Madigan and several House staffers and came up with a compromise: a mandatory \$100,000 fund in each state to provide loans to start "self-run and self-supported recovery housing throughout the country."

"We believe we have discovered a cost-effective program that has had great success in reducing relapse," Madigan told his congressional colleagues.

And in the fall of 1988, Paul Molloy's grand vision became the law of the land.

WHEN TIM MAILLY READ THAT NEW law, he groaned.

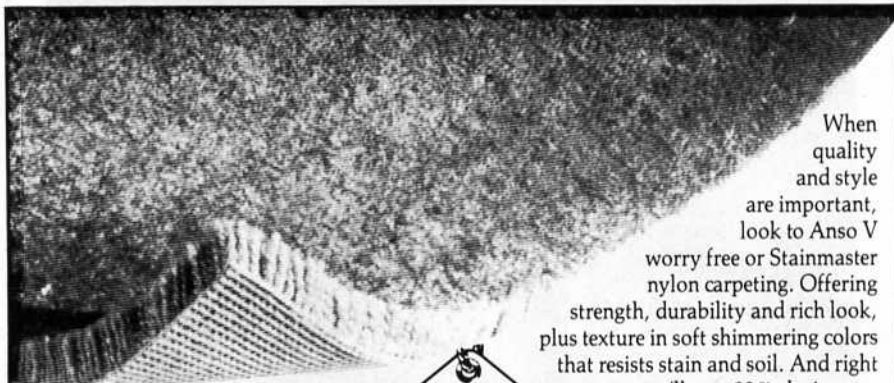
"Who dreamed this up?" he thought. A \$100,000 fund to provide loans of up to \$4,000 for recovering alcoholics and drug addicts to rent houses? And run them without supervision? "They're crazy!"

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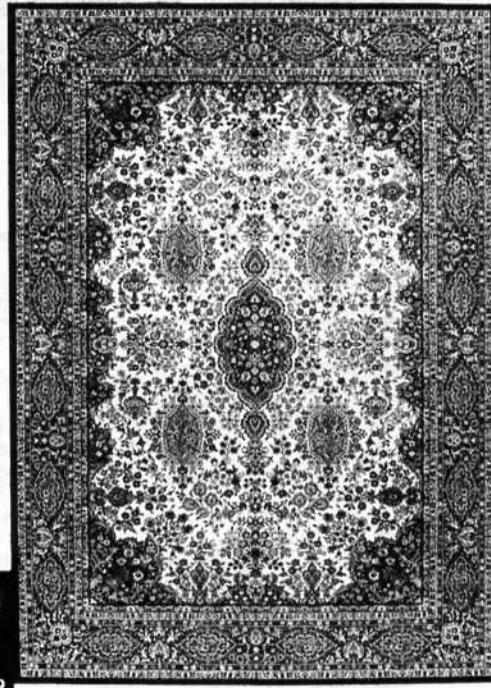
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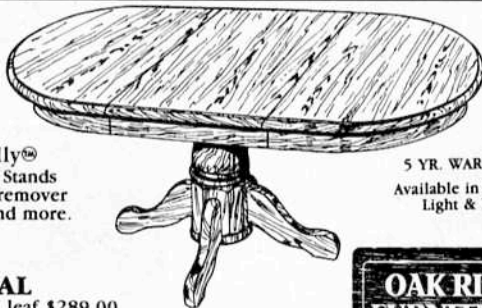
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mont Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse, had reason to be skeptical. He'd run half-way houses for addicts, and they'd never worked very well. The residents avoided employment as long as possible, and then, when they finally got a job and were asked to contribute to the support of the house, they usually moved out. A self-described cynic, Maily couldn't imagine recovering addicts running their own houses.

"My reaction was, 'I'll set the fund up and I'll just leave it there and never do anything with it.' That was my original intention."

Then he read some Oxford House literature, and he was impressed: The houses had been working for almost 15 years. So he called Paul Molloy. "Jeez, he can talk," Maily says, laughing. "He's really proud of his program, and he's out selling it. Paul's a salesman."

A good one, apparently. Last spring, the state of Vermont hired Oxford House to send up some organizers to help set up four houses. The cost to the state: \$35,000. "In this day and age, that's a steal," Maily says.

On June 1, two Oxford House residents—Steve Polin, 37, a former Justice Department paralegal and a recovering cocaine addict, and Jack Strong, 72, a retired Air Force colonel and recovering alcoholic—arrived in Vermont. The first thing they did was drive to East Dorset to make a pilgrimage to the grave of Bill Wilson, the founder of AA. Then they started searching for houses and for recovering addicts to fill them. Within two weeks, they had a men's house going in Burlington. A month later, a women's house opened in Colchester. A third house is due to open this month.

Watching that process, Tim Maily started shedding some of his cynicism. "Before you knew it, [the residents] were all working," he says. "They feel like they're involved in it, that they have some stake and that they can stay as long as they want. And that's important."

While Polin and Strong were setting up houses in Vermont, John O'Neill and Nkosi Jackson, a resident of an Adams-Morgan Oxford House, were helping to start two houses—one male and one female—in Kansas City, Mo.

"They're doing well," says Lois Olson, director of the Missouri Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse, which oversees the program. Still, she has worries about Oxford House. "It's a great concept," she says, but she fears that government money might ruin it. "Bureaucrats can get hold of things and put all kinds of regulations and provisos on them and end up killing a good thing."

That's a fear frequently voiced by those watching Oxford House expand, and it's not an unreasonable one. After all, the

first Oxford House succeeded in spite of government, not because of it. The first month's rent was lent by a friend from AA, not by a faceless government bureaucracy. "Instead of one group of alcoholics helping another, now the state is helping them," says Paul Behnke, director of Arkansas' drug abuse programs. "All of a sudden Oxford House is getting a lot of money in grants to help them get these houses going. It's no longer one person helping another."

Paul Molloy laughs at such talk. A lot of money in grants? Oxford House is so broke that he has received only one month's pay in the last half-year. In fact, his wife has taken to posting the kids' college tuition bills on the refrigerator as a subtle reminder of financial realities.

Molloy understands the concerns about bureaucracy, but he believes it's a necessary evil. "You've got to be pragmatic. You can't expand unless you're highly organized. There's no way you can take this model and replicate it on a mass basis without a high degree of organization."

Besides, he says, the central office is designed to wither away within three years. "Our goal is to get rid of us. We're not needed. It will take three years to create several thousand houses, and then it's up to the houses themselves to decide what kind of central operation they want. I know that my own involvement will stop on July 1, 1992."

On that day, Molloy swears, he'll quit Oxford House cold turkey and find some other kind of work. Preferably work that provides a paycheck more than once every six months.

AT THE WEEKLY MEETING OF THE Garrison Street Oxford House, the issue is Tim. He hasn't been around the house much, he's been avoiding NA meetings, and he's seeing an old girlfriend who's still doing hard drugs.

"You're at a turning point," John says. "I've been there myself and by the grace of God I made it. People have made suggestions to you, and you've chosen not to take them. We have to deal with the disruption that has caused . . ."

"You're totally obsessed with her, it's like a drug," says Little Mike, who is Tim's roommate. "You're inching closer to the line, and one of these days you're going to step over, and you're gone . . ."

"Were you high last night?" Paul asks.

"I haven't been high, I haven't used," Tim says. His voice is heavy with emotion. "I was depressed. I've been depressed."

"I love you, man," Rick says, "and it really hurts to see your life go down the drain. All it takes is one wrong move."

"I tried, I tried," Tim says. His voice breaks and he begins to sob. "I got hung

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up on her. It's just like everybody says. I gotta drop her off and get back into the program."

Gary suggests a solution: If Tim attends an NA meeting with somebody from the house every day for the next three months, he can stay. If not, he'll be thrown out.

"I'd be more than happy to," Tim says.

With that settled, Little Mike brings up the next item on the agenda: "Who's gonna cut the grass?"

AT HIS "DOG AND PONY SHOW" IN Trenton, Paul Molloy told the Oxford House story—and his own—complete with dramatic flourishes and comic relief. He even managed to work in the anecdote about the Amtrak bill and the inkblots on the napkins. And his joke about how the residents of the first house had planned to call it "Sobriety Haven in Town" until they realized what the acronym would spell. When he finished, he introduced the three Oxford House veterans he'd brought along.

"My name is John, and I'm a recovering addict," said John Seeland, 33, who had a good job selling computers before cocaine and booze caught up with him. He'd kicked the habit a few times, but he always went back to it until he moved into the Garrison Street Oxford House three years ago. "The guys there cared about me, and they took me around to meetings and introduced me to their friends. That's when my recovery began. After three years, I've slowly progressed to the point where I'm helping the new guys who come in now. And they still help me, mainly just by reminding me how crazy you are when you first come in."

"I never learned to work clean and sober before," said Steve Polin, who moved into an Oxford House three years ago after doing 22 months in a federal prison on cocaine charges. "Oxford House taught me how to learn to do that."

"I couldn't have stayed straight if it wasn't for that house," said Susan Di-Giovanni, 29, a recovering Dilaudid addict who is so excited about Oxford House that she has helped to start six of them. "Those girls helped me and showed me the way, and took me to meetings when I didn't want to go, and guided me and loved me. It's not an institution, it's a family."

"I feel like I'm at a revival meeting," joked Riley Regan, the New Jersey official who had convened the gathering. But Regan, who had, in his days as a Montgomery County official, watched the birth pains of the first Oxford House, couldn't resist doing a bit of testifying himself. "It works," he said, "and I just hope the various bureaucracies don't find ways of putting up barriers to stop this." He also an-

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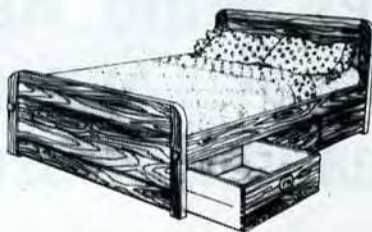
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nounced that he planned to use New Jersey's \$100,000 loan fund to start at least one Oxford House in each of the state's 21 counties.

Charles van der Burgh had an even grander goal in mind. Van der Burgh, 48, Oxford House's money man and technological wizard, used a computer, an overhead projector and a dozen charts and graphs to demonstrate how the state's revolving fund could produce 100 Oxford Houses in 50 months—if all the houses made their monthly loan payments on time.

It was a complicated presentation, and Molloy couldn't resist translating it into a one-liner. "It's a variation of the Ponzi scheme," he said.

There was just one voice of dissent. "The concept bothers me a little bit," said a man who runs a referral service for drug treatment centers. He couldn't believe that recovering addicts with only six months or a year of clean time were ready to help people getting out of 30-day rehabs. "There's not much clean time there," he said. "There isn't anything to go on."

"The fears I hear you expressing," said Steve Polin, "are typical of the halfway house community: How does this thing work if there's nobody there to police these people? One of the reasons Oxford House works is precisely because there are no authority figures there. There's nobody to blame for your problems. It's peer pressure. The authority comes from the group and from what you want to do for your sobriety."

Watching this debate, Paul Molloy puffed his pipe and smiled. "It's a difficult concept to explain," he said, "but once you get it working, you'll have your own experience and your own group of experts, and you'll see that it will spread very quickly."

A couple of hours later, he was back in that rattletrap rented Ford, heading for Wilmington, Del., to see a man who might know about some houses he could rent. ■

Solution to Last Week's Puzzle

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