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**MONTGOMERY ARTIST BEN ARTHUR FITS MENTAL HEALTH EXPERTS'
NEW DEFINITION OF RECOVERY**

MONTGOMERY – The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration recently published its new definition of recovery. SAMHSA, which is the federal agency responsible for substance abuse and mental health services, defined recovery as, “A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life and strive to reach their full potential.”

Montgomery artist, Ben Arthur, is doing just that. He battled through substance addiction and mental illness, achieved independence and has reached for his dreams. Arthur is a painter and poet, and writes and performs his own music. His paintings have been showcased in the Alabama State Capitol, and he has recorded several CDs of his songs. Last year, he sang one of those songs at the groundbreaking event for the Alabama Department of Mental Health’s new psychiatric hospital in Tuscaloosa. The governor and the president of the University of Alabama, as well as other dignitaries, were present. Arthur’s achievements come despite the challenges of his illness – schizophrenia.

Most people will experience a significant illness in their lifetime, and no one wants to be defined by a condition or disorder. People with mental illnesses feel the same way and perhaps more so because of stigma. They do not want to be defined by their illnesses. At the same time, it is true that responses to life’s challenges build respect and play a significant role in validating a person’s character. Arthur decided some time ago to use his story to encourage others. The following is a glimpse into Ben Arthur’s inspirational journey:

Arthur was born in Montgomery in 1957. He graduated from Lee High School and enrolled in the University of South Alabama to study fine art. Arthur recollects, “I was an up-and-coming artist in Mobile and was beginning to think of myself as more important than I really was. Delusional symptoms of my illness were emerging, and I was using alcohol and pot at the same time. It all caught up with me in a real bad way.” Arthur “artistically” painted the floor of his university apartment and turned a ferret loose in his room for several days. He used 45 RPM records as Frisbees and broke out most of the windows. Rather than a Salvador Dali-style masterpiece, Arthur made an awful mess. The project was not appreciated by his landlord, the university or his parents. The exhausted and somewhat delusional artist was placed in the University of South Alabama’s Medical Center. The treatment at the time included hefty doses of a tranquilizer that according to Arthur, “were akin to a chemical lobotomy.” He could not walk or talk and stared into space drooling. Subsequently, he was in and out of hospitals for the next five years. However, with steady improvements in medications and therapy, he was able to return to a life in the community.

Through compliance with medications and therapy in community services, Arthur has sustained his recovery and is now giving back and helping others. “I’ve been away from street drugs for over 24 years and continue to work on my recovery with my doctors and support network,” he said in a recent interview. He serves on the board of The Visionary Guild, an organization featuring the works of artists with mental illnesses. Through his advocacy efforts and leadership, Arthur is helping his peers. He volunteers as the director of The Clearview Center in Montgomery, a consumer drop-in center where people in recovery from mental illnesses visit and socialize. The facility is open two days a week and offers peer support and encouragement. Arthur also teaches art and music there. Arthur says, “Not everyone with a serious mental illness is incapacitated or out of touch. Through the help of professional and consumer support networks, the road to recovery can be made smoother and I dare say fulfilling.”

The song he wrote for the previously mentioned hospital groundbreaking was picked up by a cable access show in Massachusetts called “Musical Talent in Review With Susan Gail.” The show produced a wonderful video that can be seen on YouTube. Arthur’s band, The Arthur Clark Band, can be heard on local radio as well as internet radio stations worldwide. His band’s second CD, “Lifetime,” is an award-winning effort written and produced by Arthur and collaborator Mike Clark.

ADMH Commissioner Zelia Baugh has been canvassing the state recently holding 15 Meet and Greet town hall meetings to provide a forum for consumers, family members and advocates to talk with mental health officials and local legislative delegations about their concerns. At the Montgomery meeting, Arthur stood and emphatically expressed his concerns for the upcoming budget challenges of the 2013 fiscal year. Arthur stated that he, and the whole state of Alabama, owe a great deal of gratitude to the health care professionals and advocacy organizations “who receive precious little” in the way of funding these days to help people with mental health issues. He argued persuasively that professional, family and peer support can divert individuals with serious and persistent mental illnesses from lives of misery, poverty and despair, to lives of joy, prosperity and purpose. He said he is living proof.

Arthur truly epitomizes the new federal definition of recovery: “A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life and strive to reach their full potential.”

*Though the mountains themselves all fall to the sea;
And I breathe the last breath you want me to breathe,
Oh God, how I pray that you see,
The time that you’ve spent, was not wasted on me.*

*Lord, thanks for the visions you let me see.
Thanks for the songs you taught me to sing.
Thanks for the joy I tasted for free!
Lord, none of your love, was wasted on me.*

Ben Arthur

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