

Ron Leitz

Never Forget those Who Help You

At 59 years old, Ronald Leitz suddenly faced the possibility of losing the apartment he'd lived in for many years. Tabor's *Rental Counseling to Prevent Homelessness* program helped avert his crisis and see him through a very tough time in his life. Ron never forgot it.

Owner/courier for Phoenix Courier Company, Ron loved his work and, as a single man, made a good living. In 2005 Ron suffered a stroke, losing 40 % of the field of vision in his right eye. To his crushing dismay, three ophthalmologists as well as a driving school instructor told him he could no longer drive, ending his work as a courier and beginning a downward spiral. "Work was my life," says Ron. "You're so used to being in control. I went through a serious depression."

Without insurance or medical coverage, Ron was suddenly struggling to make ends meet. He applied for welfare and received a medical card, food stamps, and \$215 per month, a significant decline from his earlier income of about \$2,400 per month. He was initially rejected for Social Security Disability, but fought the decision and won with the help of an attorney.

In the meantime, Ron watched his rental debt grow. Thanks to the kindness of his landlord, Donald Henry, and Ron's track record as an excellent tenant, he was able to stay in his apartment and defer paying rent until he could afford to, but Ron worried that his landlord's patience would come to an end. Mr. Henry helped Ron sell his car and linked him with the Community Action Program and the Salvation Army to help pay his rent.

After hearing about Tabor from a friend, Ron met with Tabor intern Lauren Wilkie and then Tammy Martin, Coordinator of Rental Counseling Programs, who reports, "In the process of counseling, I felt that I could, in good faith, extend \$375 granted from a church to save his housing. After our work in dealing with the landlord and getting assurance he would not evict him since he sought Tabor's help, I closed him. I told Ron to call me when he gets his disability check so he can pay back the grant to help someone else in need."

Ron squeaked through the next several weeks, waiting for his check to arrive, noting that "the grocer won't give you food based on a check you are supposed to get." His first disability check arrived on December 15, and he now receives \$1,500 each month.

On December 18, Tammy announced, "I got a call from him today and he is sending a check to Tabor to repay the grant. Not only that, he is going to pay Salvation Army back for the help they gave him! This man's commitment to keeping his promise made my Christmas!"

Back on his feet, Ron wonders what he would have done without the help of a supportive landlord and friends and community service organizations like Tabor. “I don’t know what people do who are alone. It’s got to be a living hell. It was hell. Whatever support you (Tabor) get, you deserve it four times over.”

Ron says finally, “You don’t forget the people who help you. I just wrote a lot of checks, and I feel great!”

Tabor’s *Rental Counseling to Prevent Homelessness* program, in which Ronald was a client,

is available to any Lancaster County resident at risk of eviction due to non-payment of rent.

The cost to prevent homelessness for one family on average is only 2% of the cost of housing that same family in the community’s shelter system for one year.