



# NAMI Blue Ridge Family Alliance Newsletter January 2006

**\*\*Dues Notice on Back Cover\*\***  
**\*\*\*Please Respond\*\*\***

## Upcoming Meetings

### Informal Support Group Meetings

First Thursdays from 5:30pm – 6:30pm

- February 2 at 800 Preston Ave
- March 2, April 6, May 4 at 500 Old Lynchburg Rd

### Speaker Meetings: Visitors Welcome

**January 19, 5:30 at 800 Preston Ave  
New Modern Western State Hospital**

Plans are well underway for a completely new, state-of-the-art Western State Hospital in Staunton. John Beghtol is Director of Community Relations at Western State. John will tell us what to expect. He will also update us on current psychosocial programs at Western State and answer your questions about their program.

**February 16, 5:30 at 800 Preston Ave  
New Crisis Stabilization Unit**

As part of Virginia's move toward community-based services for the mentally ill, Region Ten will open a Crisis Stabilization Unit in mid-February. This will provide an alternative between hospitalization and traditional outpatient services. What does that really mean? Marcia Becker and Mark Ferrington of Region Ten will help us understand.

**March 22-26  
Virginia Festival of the Book**

This Festival will bring to Charlottesville a few authors who have experienced or written about mental illness, including Pamela Wagner (see her book review on the next page). Special events are planned for some authors, but details have not yet been finalized. We will get more information to you. Also see [www.vabook.org](http://www.vabook.org)

**April or May  
Improving Services for Mentally Ill People  
across the U.S.**

Steven Buck, Director of State Policy for our National NAMI organization, and a representative of the National MHA will provide a glimpse of the national landscape for mental health services. Date to be determined.

**\*\*\* New Location \*\*\***

Starting in March, our meetings move to a new Region Ten location at 500 Old Lynchburg Rd. From I64 Exit 120, take 5<sup>th</sup> Street Extended south (away from Charlottesville) for about a mile to Old Lynchburg Rd on the right. (The new county office building will be on your left.) Turn right on Old Lynchburg Rd and then right again at the first driveway. The new Board Room will be in the administrative building at the rear of the property.

## President's Message

On December 6, Governor Warner formally requested that the Virginia legislature allocate an additional \$460 million for mental health, mental retardation and substance abuse facilities and services over the next few years. While the legislature has yet to approve this 2006-2008 biennium budget, we have some great news in our area. A new Crisis Stabilization Unit will open in Charlottesville in February. Please join us at our February 16 speaker meeting to learn more. Also, a new state-of-the-art Western State Hospital will almost certainly be built in Staunton. Join us at our January 19 speaker meeting for more information on the new Western State Hospital.

Unfortunately, things are moving in the opposite direction at the federal level. On December 21, 2005, the Senate passed the Budget Reconciliation Package - S 1932. The bill is projected to reduce spending within Medicare and Medicaid by \$13 billion over the next 5 years. Of concern to NAMI are changes that would allow states to impose higher cost sharing requirements on Medicaid beneficiaries - even mandatory beneficiaries eligible for SSI ( Supplemental Security Income). Due to a last minute "point of order" the bill must go back to the House for a second vote when it reconvenes in January. The House will be required to vote again on the amended budget package which will give advocates an opportunity to block the legislation. NAMI asks that you contact your US Representative to urge opposition to S 1932.

On January 16th, the History Channel will present "Lincoln, The Real Abe. Honest" at 8:00pm. Abraham Lincoln was the 16th President of the United States, and as he led our

(continued on the next  
page) **NAMI-Blue Ridge Family  
Alliance**  
[a 501(c)(3) organization]

**Charlottesville, VA  
22903**

**Voice Mail: (434) 970-1257**

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## NEWSLETTER

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Interim Editor: Mike Kelley  
Circulation: James and Shelah Scott

Newsletter Information:

This newsletter is published quarterly. Persons wishing to contribute an original article are asked to contact the editor.

**WORLD WIDE WEB**

Monticello Avenue site  
<http://avenue.org/brfa>

**Charlottesville Community Calendar**

[www.chvillecalendar.com](http://www.chvillecalendar.com)



**New books...**

- *Planning for the Future: Providing a Meaningful Life for a Child With a Disability After Your Death* by Arnold E. Grant, L. Mark Russell

The completely revised and greatly expanded 5th edition of *Planning for the Future: Providing a Meaningful Life for a Child with a Disability After Your Death* discusses all the steps that parents should take to assure a secure and happy life for their disabled son or daughter.

- *Detour: My BiPolar Roadtrip* by Lizzie Simon

"Detour does for bipolar disorder what Prozac Nation did for depression: scopes it out from the viewpoint of someone who is young, hip and vulnerable." Peter Kramer, author of *Listening to Prozac*

- *Divided Minds: Twin Sisters and Their Journey Through Schizophrenia* by Pamela Spiro Wagner, Carolyn Spiro

This harrowing but arresting memoir—written in alternating voices by identical twins, now in their 50s—reveals how devastating schizophrenia is to both the victim and those who love her. The condition, which afflicts Pamela (an award-winning poet), can be controlled with drugs and psychiatry, but never cured. When the twins were young, Pamela always outshone Carolyn. But in junior high, Pamela was beset by fears and began a lifelong pattern of cutting and burning herself. After the two entered Brown University, Pamela's decline into paranoia accelerated until she attempted suicide. During the ensuing years of Pamela's frequent breakdowns and hospitalizations, Carolyn became a psychiatrist, married and had two children. Empathetic and concerned, Carolyn nonetheless conveys her overwhelming frustration, and occasional alienation from her sister, when she is unable to help. Pamela's schizophrenia caused their

father to sever his relationship with her. Remarkably descriptive, Pamela's account details how it feels to hear voices and to suspect evil in everyone. Though she struggles with her medications, Pamela remains a committed poet and is now reconciled with her father and close to her twin. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

## President's Message continued:

country through one of its darkest hours, he also faced debilitating bouts of depression and even thoughts of suicide. His foremost biographers present an in-depth personal portrait of Mr. Lincoln.

The support group meetings continue on the first Thursday of the month - 5:30 - 6:30. As a reminder, if the public schools are closed due to inclement weather, we will not meet. Hopefully, the weather will remain in our favor during the few months.

We hope that you will join us for our meetings. Give me a call at (434)296-2519 if you have any questions. We look forward to seeing you!

Sally Rinehart

## Charlottesville Mental Wellness Support Group

Meets on Wednesday evenings, 6-7pm at "On Our Own", 23 4th St. NW. It is a peer support group offering mutual support, encouragement, and fellowship for those who have experienced health challenges in their lives.

## Richmond Times-Dispatch December 12, 2005

### Bipolar Disorder in the News

**Cynthia Power** has been bipolar since she was 18. **Peter Armetta** has had the disorder most of his life, too. Both say that it's a cruel, complicated mental illness, but also that it can be controlled and life can be good. "You probably know people with bipolar disorder and don't even know it," said Power, who is 58. "I'm not exactly like someone who doesn't have the disorder. Life is more difficult, like breast cancer makes life more difficult. But it makes you stronger, too." "I have wrecked my life," said Armetta, 41, who was only recently diagnosed as being bipolar. "I've lived in 22 places in 22 years. Never been married. I ran away from women, though I always make a great first impression. . . . But now I'm doing well, and I'm hoping to stay that way."

Power and Armetta are two of about 2.3 million Americans who have been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, which is also known as manic depression. It's a mood disorder that's different from the ordinary ups and downs, instead characterized by periods of extreme elation or irritability countered by periods of severe depression.

"It's not just moods," said Gary Sachs, the director of the bipolar mood-disorder program at Massachusetts General Hospital and one of the foremost authorities in the country. "Their thoughts and perceptions color their entire life experience. . . . It's highly treatable. It's just not curable." "It affects men and women equally," said Anita Clayton, professor of psychiatric medicine at the University of Virginia. The mood changes are cyclical and "not driven by anything in particular," she said. "It is biologically based." The disorder has been mentioned in both state and national news stories recently, raising questions about the treatment of the disorder and, perhaps, unfairly stigmatizing those who carry its burden.

On December 7, Rigoberto Alpizar was killed at Miami International Airport after bolting from a jetliner and claiming to have a bomb in his backpack. He was shot by federal agents after ignoring requests to cooperate. His wife said her husband was bipolar and had not taken his medicine.

Are people with bipolar disorder more dangerous than anyone else?

"In 23 years of treating thousands of patients, there's been no [physical] incidents," Sachs said. "Not a patient of ours has been arrested for anything like attempted murder or murder." Bipolar people have more workplace accidents because of their impulsiveness during the manic phase, Sachs said, and they are "over-represented in prison." In part, that is because during the manic phase "your perception of risk and the downside of things is greatly reduced," he said. "You take a quick read on something and sometimes react inappropriately to the situation." Clayton, who has treated many patients with bipolar disorder, said they "are no more dangerous than anybody else. Almost no one with psychiatric illness is dangerous."

"That guy on the plane [in Miami] seemed to have that anger that some folks with bipolar disorder have," Armetta said. "I had the peace and love aspect. . . . The problem with all mental illness is getting the right treatment. People should be no more afraid of bipolar people than anyone else. That bipolar people are violent has no credence with me." The irony is that bipolar disorder, which makes life so difficult, often is borne by unusually creative, talented people.

"They're very talented and exceptional people on the whole," Sachs said. "They are over-represented at the highest level of corporate America for example," though often no one knows they have the disorder. "They are creative and industrious. A controlled bipolar illness makes a terrific citizen. "They have great facility with language, music and math," he said, noting that a number of historical figures are believed to have had bipolar disorder, including President Abraham Lincoln and writer Mark Twain.

The treatment for the disorder, which includes psychotherapy, has improved over the years with lithium, anti-convulsants and what are known as atypical anti-psychotic drugs used separately or sometimes in conjunction, Sachs said. "We' ve had effective treatments for decades, but in the last 10 years, especially the last five, we' ve had treatments that patients perceive as less burdensome" because of lessened side effects, he said. "It' s been a terrific boon. . . . Patients still get off their medicine, but not like they used to."

Power and Armetta take medication. "I' m doing well on meds, but it' s just a piece of the treatment," said Power, who believes family and a passion for work and other interests make up the framework that stabilizes her. She works in Charlottesville as a volunteer in the mental-health field.

"I look over my life and it hasn' t been so bad," she said. "In fact, my life has been pretty good.

"I know a lot of people with bipolar. Some are well-hidden. There is a community of us. There is a sense of camaraderie," she said. "We live under a stigma and I see our movement as being a civil-rights type of movement. You can' t characterize us. We' re just people like anybody else." Armetta, who says he once lived in a desert for eight months just for the experience, said that though he has been diagnosed as bipolar, "that is not who I am". He now works helping foster children in Charlottesville. "I do a lot of writing. . . . I am creative. . . . I knew I was not a conventional person."

## \*\*\*2006 Annual Dues Notice \*\*\*

### \*\*\* Please Respond \*\*\*

Our mailing list is old. Our files are musty. **We need your help! You can help by returning the application form below.** We will be deleting from our mailing list the names of those who do not respond, except for those who have sent in dues during the past year (who will be retained until the next notice in January 2007). **You must respond to receive future mailings and communication.**

By way of background, several years ago, NAMI-VA offered to send out dues notices and collect dues for the affiliates. This worked well for about one year, until it became too burdensome for them to continue. For the past two years, we have not collected any dues, but now find it necessary to

update our mailing list. Therefore, each year at this time we will ask our membership to renew through us, the local NAMI Blue Ridge Family Alliance. **Thanks you so much for your continuing support!**

## NAMI - BRFA Membership Application Form

**I (We) wish to join \_\_\_\_ or renew \_\_\_\_  
membership in:**

\_\_\_\_ **NAMI dues \$ 35 (NAMI,  
NAMI-VA and NAMI-BRFA newsletters)**

\_\_\_\_ **NAMI-BRFA dues \$ 5 (BRFA  
newsletter only)**

**I wish to support NAMI-BRFA's work to  
improve the quality of life for people with  
serious mental illnesses. I have enclosed  
my additional tax-deductible donation of  
\$\_\_\_\_\_.**

**Total dues and contribution: \$\_\_\_\_\_.**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone (optional)** \_\_\_\_\_  
**and/or e-mail** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please make checks payable to NAMI-BRFA  
and mail : c/o James H. Scott Jr., Treasurer**

**250 Pantops Mtn. Road, Apt. 5325**

**Charlottesville, VA 22911**

**NOTE: We welcome everyone to our meetings,  
but newsletter mailings go only to dues paying**

**subscribers. See our online website for  
newsletter and meeting updates if you do not  
wish to subscribe. See  
<http://avenue.org/brfa>**