



**GIVING
HEARTS
DAY**



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aw

area woman

Celebrating all things woman



**Patti
Senn**

FROM RUINS TO RECOVERY

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From Ruins

to Recovery

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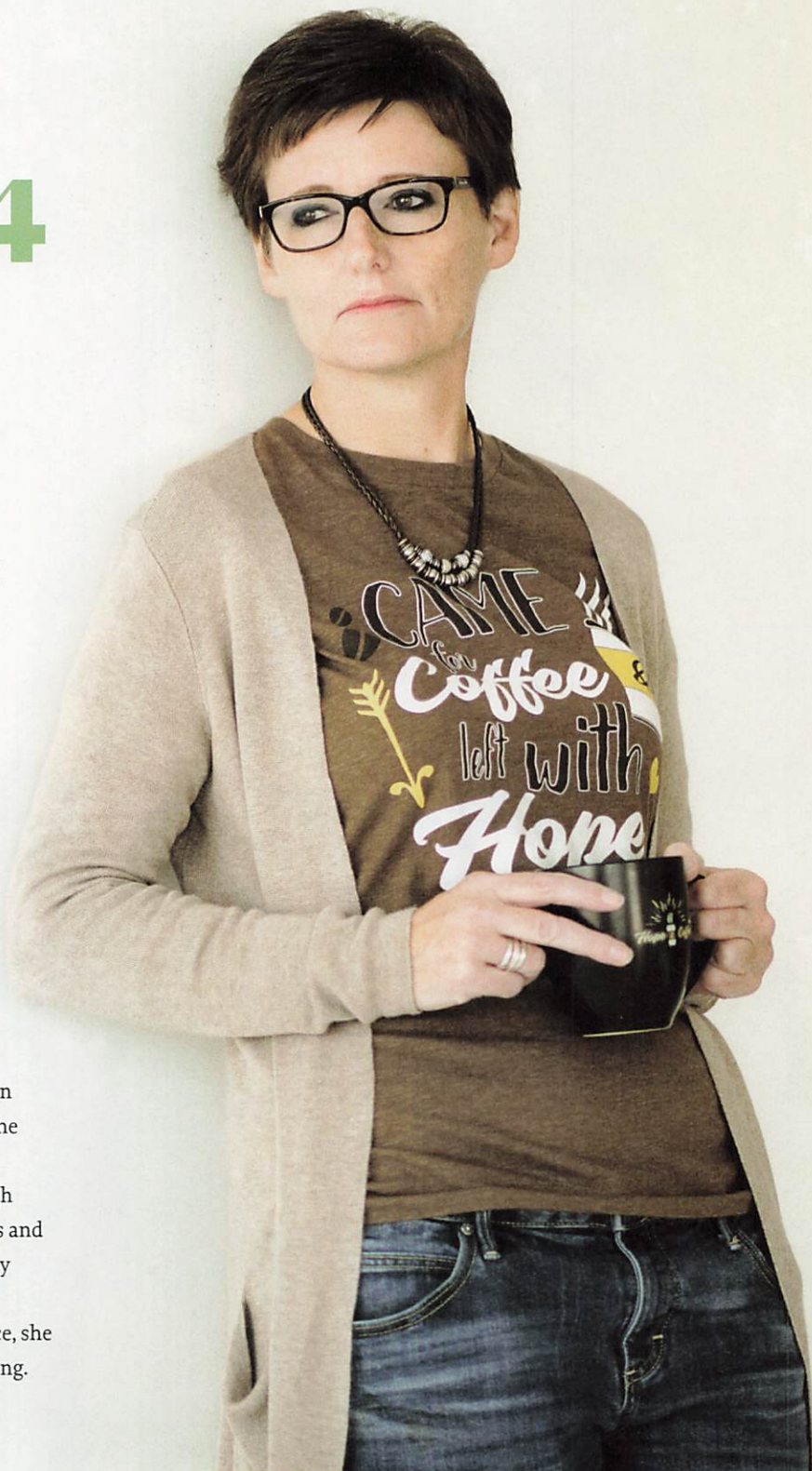
Patti Genn



When she was 24 years old

and being forced into treatment, Patti Senn never could have imagined that, even then, all things were being worked out for good. Struggling along in the ruins of what she calls “raging alcoholism,” Senn went kicking and screaming to the very thing that ended up saving her life. And not just saved her life, but gave it purpose and direction beyond her wildest dreams.

What led to that point had been a long, rocky road of adolescent alcoholism. Growing up in rural North Dakota, Senn’s addiction started young and strong. Even among the prevalence of teenage drinking in our rural communities, Senn knew that it was different for her. By the time she turned 13, the pull of alcohol was already tugging at her in a dangerous way. It dug its nails in deep and kept its grip on her throughout high school, hidden under her accomplishments in both academics and athletics. After graduation, her disease strengthened in ferocity even as she played college basketball at a community college. Achieving Summa Cum Laude at UND with a degree in finance, she looked like success on the outside; but inside a storm was raging.





THE THING THAT ALMOST RUINED ME
is the thing I'm most grateful for."



← Patti Senn with her mother
Diana at Medora in 2018.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY PATTI SENN

In desperation to save her daughter, Senn's mother Diana reached out to everyone and anyone who could help her. Courageously, she filed an involuntary commitment that forced her daughter into treatment. Despite her initial anger, Senn's greatest thanks and most heartfelt gratitude go to that brave mom of hers. She is her biggest hero. "She saved my life. I would have died if it hadn't been for her forcing me into treatment."

After a year of treatment, which included both inpatient and outpatient services, while participating in a nine-month women's aftercare program and living in a half-way house, it was time to search for employment. Because service to others is an essential component to recovery, Senn decided to find a job that would work toward that need. To her surprise, the founder and executive director of Success Unlimited in Grand Forks (Dianne Werness) took a chance on this inexperienced young woman when she had zero confidence of her own. Through her new role as an employment coach and residential supervisor, Senn realized that helping and counseling others brought her joy and hope. As her spirit slowly came back to life, her confidence grew, and with it a desire to help people who were struggling in the same ways that she had.

Fueled by a new sense of purpose, Senn was determined to bring something good out of the disease that had stolen so much from her. She returned to school, this time at MSUM, for a graduate degree in community counseling, and then obtained her addiction licensure while working at West Central Human Service Center in Bismarck. For the next 15 years Senn served with First Step Recovery Program in Fargo. It was her joy and delight to work with groups and individuals battling addiction, being able to identify with them, empathize, and lead them to healing. The late FSR founders Sue Stenehjem-Brown and Mike Kaspari were Senn's treasured mentors, instilling in her

everything she knows about this field. "They led by example in being humble servants and fierce advocates for patients, as well as being committed to families. I miss their guidance and wisdom every day."

In 2017 at a simple routine mammogram, her life took yet another unexpected twist when she heard the news that every woman fears. Thankfully, the cancer was in its early stages. She triumphed through surgery and radiation, but simultaneously grieved the sudden loss of her boss and mentor, Mike Kaspari. As her cancer journey collided with her grief, Senn leaned heavily into simple but strategic practices that she had put into place many years prior in her addiction recovery: taking one day at a time, practicing gratitude, serving others, and trusting that over time, things will work together for good.

With fresh reminders of the brevity of life, Senn began to feel the stirrings of something new in her soul. Dreams began forming deep in her heart of opening a new center for addiction counseling that would not only provide the initial acute treatment, but would also have a strong focus on long-term recovery. Over her years as a counselor, one of the painful thorns in her work was seeing individuals take great strides during treatment, only to fall back into their same old lives and same old habits afterward. "Short-term treatment doesn't meet the needs of a chronic illness, and that's what addiction is. Treatment is the event, but recovery is the process."



o was born this dream for an outpatient clinic

that focused on both treatment and recovery. Transitioning out of First Step, Senn poured her energy into making this abstract idea become a concrete reality. Because addiction is often described as “having a hole in the soul” Senn chose the name Soul Solutions for her recovery center. Early on, Dakota Medical Foundation caught the vision, serving as the fiscal sponsor, and more recently providing financial support. FM Area Foundation and Essentia also jumped on board to provide support in various ways. Needing to attain a 501c3, Senn gained team members who were experienced in non-profit licensure, as well as additional addiction counselors who wanted to be a part of this new endeavor. Things were moving along — slowly, but forward nonetheless.

But then, 2020.

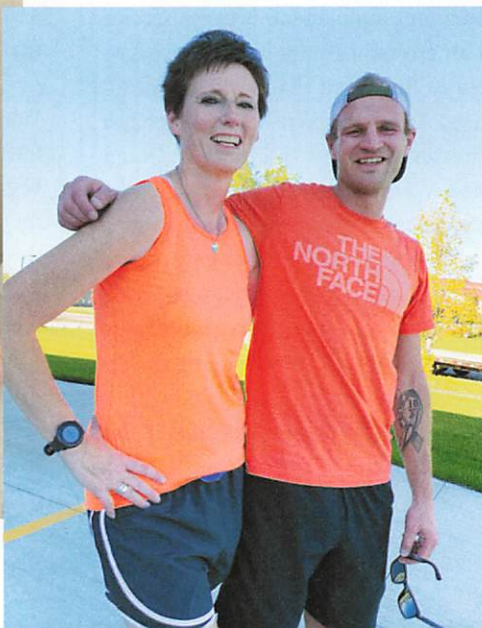
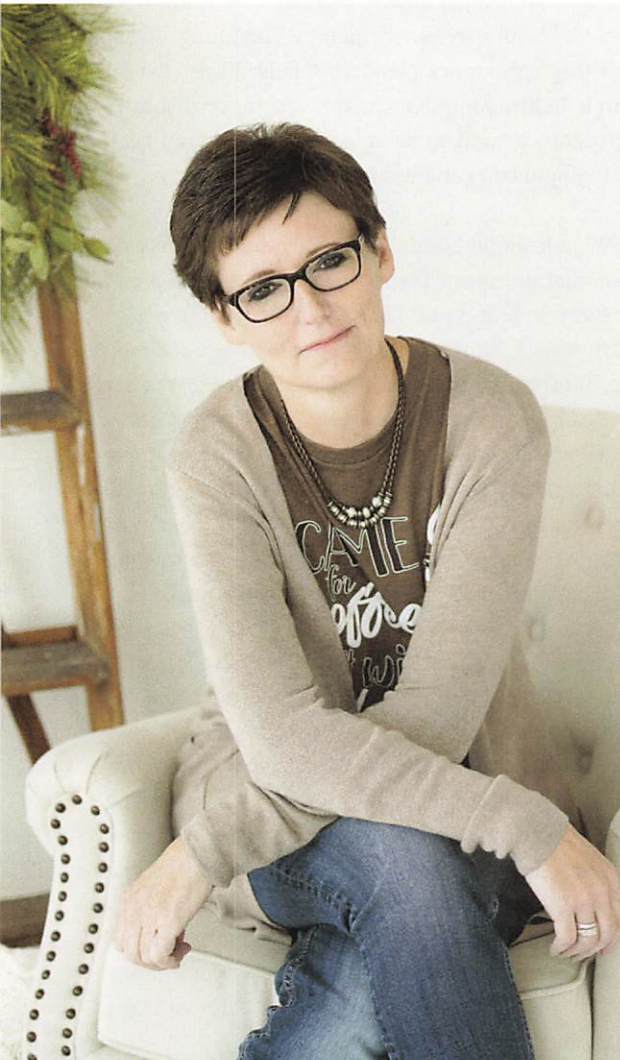
COVID-19. Economic Downfall. Isolation. “So many times I thought the project was dead in the water,” says Senn. “When the pandemic hit, I thought we were definitely done for. But I’ve always believed in the vision, despite my own shortcomings.” Despite all the setbacks, detours and a world-wide pandemic, the road for this recovery center kept reopening. Providence? I think so. Now, after years of blood, sweat and tears, they are ready to go. Staffed with four licensed addiction counselors, a registered nurse, and an executive director, Soul Solutions is indeed a vision that has become a reality. With building renovations expected to be done soon, they eagerly anticipate to begin serving patients in November.

And not a day too soon. Reflecting on the addiction epidemic just in our own city, Senn laments that while it was already a tragic situation before COVID-19, it is so much more so now. “Addiction is a disease of isolation. When people are forced into isolation, addiction skyrockets.” Addicts who were working through recovery in 2020 took massive and devastating blows when they had to transition to virtual peer support meetings, virtual counseling sessions, and online recovery groups. “It just doesn’t work as well. Recovery is all about personal connections. Addicts need people. My desire is to bring the community into the recovery process to help make those connections.”

Because coming out of isolation is essential to healing, community engagement will be at the epicenter of Soul Solutions. Many endeavors are in the works to bring the community into the healing process to fight this battle as neighbors and friends. While possibilities for this are endless, current plans include bringing in art teachers, musicians, potters and yoga instructors — people who are willing and excited to share their own passions with those in recovery. Bridges are also being built with organizations that rely on volunteers, creating opportunities for those who are in recovery to serve the city. Because every person’s recovery is unique, Senn envisions a multitude of partnerships, giving each individual access to something that will encourage their heart, bring joy and purpose to their days, and enhance their healing.

For Senn, that thing was running. During her first year of treatment over 27 ago, Senn fell in love with running, which became, and still is, a key component of her personal recovery. She is sharing that love with Soul Solutions by bringing Fargo its first chapter of Runners Against Destructive Decisions (RADD). Founded in Bismarck by Judge David Reich, RADD offers running as a therapeutic and fitness lifestyle, not only to recoverees but also to the general public, encouraging them to run alongside and empower one another.

A unique element of Soul Solutions is the Hope and Coffee Café, whose motto is “Reduce Stigma, Celebrate Recovery.” Located on the main property, the coffee shop will be open to the public and employ those in recovery, with all proceeds supporting the mission of Soul Solutions. Over time, as the public and the recovery community come together over coffee, barriers will break down, conversations will brew, and hurting people will get help sooner. “We need to catch people earlier in their illness,” says Senn. “It’s like cancer. We don’t want to wait until their disease is in stage 4. That is a very poor prognosis.”



← Patti Senn and Sean Hintz are working together to bring Runners Against Destructive Decisions (RADD) to Fargo.
PHOTO PROVIDED BY PATTI SENN



*We are losing
the battle of addiction.
We need to think outside
the box, and we need
to do it together...*

**The power of a
community to
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is far greater than
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program.”**



As we know, the disease of addiction doesn't affect only the individual; the entire family suffers and needs care and counseling. Many times, as in Senn's own story, the family members suffer long before their loved one ever realizes they have a problem. In fact, often the family members desire treatment even if their loved one never does. Therefore, a robust family program will play an essential role in Soul Solutions, offering group and individual counseling sessions.

Of course the primary aim in community and family involvement is the healing of souls. But another desired outcome is the

destigmatization of addiction. It is critical that we change the narrative of what addiction is in this community. We must become more aware of its dire prevalence while also being much more willing not only to talk about it but also engage in it. We need to be willing to get messy, to climb into the ruins, because, as Senn says, "This is about all of us. We are all recovering from something. But we need to be more creative; we are losing the battle of addiction. We need to think outside the box, and we need to do it together. The power of a community to support recovery is far greater than any treatment program." Let's be that powerful community that works together for good.

Looking back over the decades of her own life, Senn can most certainly see that the good, the bad, and the ugly have all been working toward a greater good. Even the most painful and broken places along her journey are being used now for the healing of others. Nothing is wasted. And her own addiction story? "It's actually my biggest gift. The thing that almost ruined me is the thing I'm most grateful for."

Yes, she has certainly been on a journey — from ruins to recovery. *Aren't we all?*

[aw]