



No Stress Zone

In a challenging economic climate, one alumna carries on a mission of helping women struggling to make ends meet

BY JAMES K. GLYNN '77



LIVING
THE AMERICAN
DREAM ON \$9 AN
HOUR? "IT'S IMPOSSIBLE,"
ACCORDING TO 1991
GRADUATE KAREN
LAMARINE.

"Wages aren't keeping pace with the cost of living and the problem is not going away any time soon," says the former Viking three-sport athlete. Meanwhile, she is taking action to address the national problem locally. LaMarine is director of the Emmerton House in Salem, where temporary affordable housing is available to women who are either working or attending school.

Built in 1811 and established as a place to provide affordable housing by the Woman's Friends Society in 1876, the distinctive three-story brick Emmerton House on Hawthorne Boulevard is currently at full capacity, providing a home for 20 female residents, including one Salem State nursing student, four recent graduates and, of course, LaMarine. "We offer students and working women a place to land and to not stress about today's ridiculous rent and heating bills," explains LaMarine, who took over as director last year when former director Marie Rodgers announced her retirement after 22 years.

To members of the society, LaMarine was the perfect fit. Key to her hiring was having an understanding and familiarity with the society's mission. Not only did LaMarine understand it, she had experienced it. LaMarine had been a resident in the home's stable environment on four separate occasions. Her first Emmerton experience was from 1991 to 1993 and included her senior year at Salem State where she was pursuing a degree in sport, fitness and leisure studies (now sport and movement

science).

"It was such a great experience to live in downtown Salem while studying at the college," she reflects. "I got more out of my educational experience because the pressure of paying bills was lifted and I could concentrate on my studies."

Two years after graduating, LaMarine departed Salem and spent seven months in Europe before returning to her family home in Fitchburg in 1994. In neighboring Shirley, she settled into a position as a physical education teacher while renting an apartment in Leominster. Nine years would transpire before a revelation of major proportions took place. "Teaching," she concluded, "was not for me."

In 2003, the lure of Salem struck again and LaMarine, now in her mid-30s, returned to the city she had grown to love. No longer teaching, she took a job at the South Peabody Liquor Store and was content to be "home" again. There would be "a brief stint" in North Carolina in 2009, but it was followed by a return once again to Salem and the Emmerton House in 2010.

In January 2012, LaMarine was a natural to take over for Rodgers as director of the 19th-century home, where character and charm abound, especially inside where 10-foot high ceilings accentuate two spiral staircases. There are two majestic fireplaces that feature wood mantel carvings by renowned architect Samuel McIntire. Under LaMarine's direction, society volunteers and residents keep the house tidy and clean while she often applies a considerable amount of paint to keep the impressive stair railings and detailed woodwork looking fresh.

Maintenance was actually a key component of the original arrangement with the Women's Friends Society. In 1879 owner John Bertram gifted half of the house to the society for five years with an understanding that the society would pay taxes and keep the building in repair. "At the end of the five years, should the society have perfected their plans and find themselves in a condition to make wise use of the property, the house would be presented to them as a free gift," he is quoted as saying in *The History of the Woman's Friend Society*.

When Bertram died in 1882, his daughter, Jennie Bertram Emmerton, became a trustee of the estate. She determined that the Woman's Friend Society had indeed performed well, reached its goals "in admirable fashion," and had earned her father's gift. The society became owners of 12 Hawthorne Blvd. in 1884. Caroline Emmerton (John Bertram's granddaughter) continued the family's philanthropic tradition with involvement in the Woman's Friend Society for many years.

With today's tough economy putting added strain on low and middle income Americans, the need for the Emmerton home is as high as it has ever been. It's as if the original members of the society looked into the future with 20-20 vision. ■

Facing page: Karen LaMarine '91, left, is director of the Emmerton House. Among the current residents is Salem State student Yvonne Makilya, who is pursuing a degree in nursing.