

# IRISH VOICE

Vol. 22 No. 9 • Wed., Feb. 27, 2008 • Tues., Mar. 4, 2008 PRICE: \$1.25 Tri-State Area, PA, MA / \$1.50 Elsewhere U.S. / \$2.25 Canada

## IN FOCUS



### SVEIN JORGENSEN

**OCCUPATION:** Chief operating officer at Praxis Housing Initiatives in New York.

#### What is your Irish background?

"I'm originally from Norway. I moved with my parents to Ireland when I was six years old so we could be closer to my mother's extended family. I attended the former Farranferris Seminary in Cork."

#### Why did you come to New York?

"In the 1980s, Ireland's economy hit record lows. It was during this time when, at the age of 23, I made a leap of faith and moved to New York City. The idea of moving was exciting. The city held so many opportunities for me both personally and professionally. I was searching for a career that would give me a great sense of accomplishment and, at the same time, would make me feel like I was making a difference in someone's life."

#### What do you do?

"In 1996, I landed a consulting position with Praxis Housing Initiatives, a New York City nonprofit organization that provides transitional housing to the homeless, many of whom are living with HIV/AIDS. This organization houses nearly 1,200 homeless individuals each year in our four facilities located throughout Manhattan and Brooklyn. We offer more than just housing services for the homeless. Praxis also provides primary on-site health care, clothing, food, counseling, education, legal assistance, job placement help and support groups, and we also teach job readiness, career training and independent living skills. Most importantly, we work with our clients to rebuild their lives."

"More than ten years later, I'm now chief operating officer and am responsible for the day-to-day management of Praxis' housing facilities, as well as quality assurance and ensuring that the organization complies with government regulations."

#### What's the best part of your job?

"One of the most difficult tasks Praxis has is trying to teach clients how to leave their old life of homelessness behind and start a new one — a positive one. Breaking the cycle of homelessness is extremely challenging. It is very common for clients to walk in our doors addicted to drugs or alcohol, incapable of communicating or associating with others and afraid to trust anyone. It's a long process but when they make that transition and become self-sufficient individuals it's truly inspirational."

#### What do you with your spare time?

"I cherish every opportunity I have to spend with my daughter. We're both avid skiers and love to hit the slopes together. We're frequent visitors to the mountains in upstate New York. The last three years my daughter and I have traveled to Ireland to visit our large family in Cork City. To me, it's extremely important to give my daughter the opportunity to experience her heritage, first-hand, and it is always fun to reconnect with family."

"Finally, I wouldn't be a true Irishman if I didn't confess my love for the game of football (soccer). I'm a huge Manchester United supporter and am always happy to see Cork City play when visiting Ireland."

*Interview by April Drew*