

St. Vincent de Paul

Society of St. Vincent de Paul - Rogue Valley District Council

A Quarterly Newsletter ■ Volume 5, Issue 2

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Upcoming Events

- School supply distribution:
August (date to be announced)



Editors: Patrick Wilson and Dianne Erickson

What goes on behind the doors?

A look at the internal workings of the Thrift Store...

The largest enterprise at SVDP is our Thrift Store. Last year this business generated nearly one-half million dollars thereby significantly supporting our other charitable services. What isn't always obvious is how hard the volunteers at the Store, all 130+ of them, work to get these results.

It all starts at receiving which is open ten to four daily, Monday through Saturday. At these times volunteers are prepared to receive donations. Some people, understandably, need to drop things off earlier, on their way to work, and some show up after-hours as the volunteers are going home, following a long and tiring day. Unfortunately a few donors use the *wee hours of the morning* to deposit furniture and other items that are

often neither suitable for sale or giveaway. Every month we spend significant dollars paying to have unusable discards hauled off. This kind of behavior is frustrating and our volunteers try to remain positive in spite of it. As a friend from years ago reminded me when he heard me lamenting about obnoxious behaviors, "Considering the struggle Jesus had finding twelve good men and having one of them turn out a rascal, you should expect the same percentage of rascals in the general population." I often find his words comforting.

The receiving door and the cashier station in the store are our two primary interfaces with the public. Many of our customers and benefactors pass through here and that experience sets the tone for

their perception of SVDP. Volunteers in both these roles must demonstrate a good balance of generosity and discipline. The volunteers in receiving are reminded to be friendly but firm, showing appreciation for the donations received but not accepting items that clearly are not suitable for use or are excessively dirty. While we have the rules posted at the door, a select few will argue, "I took the trouble to bring these things down here and you should be glad to get them!" Since many of our volunteers err on the side of tolerance, we have to toss a small percentage of the donations received. A significant amount of clothing that won't pass muster for the Store gets displayed in the dining room for general use. And we even take a portion of our overflow and less salvageable

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear fellow volunteers and supporters of St. Vincent's,

As the Season of Spring materializes this year the

demands for our services continue to present themselves at the same high rate as we have experienced over the past couple of years. Our financial report contained in this issue, demonstrates the wonderful support we have received as well as the expenditures we have incurred providing our services. We remain debt free and our financial reserve strategies are being met. We can do this with the help of over 85,000 donated hours (not expressed in our financials but worth in excess of \$500,000) by our over 230 volunteers who also donate countless levels of compassion and focus toward the needy. None of our volunteers receive a salary, expense accounts, or other benefits.

Our volunteers come from all walks of life and they are here to only serve those more in need than themselves. If you haven't joined our volunteer corps please consider doing so, you will become a part of a great group of people. Our volunteer coordinator can be reached on 541-772-3828. In addition, we are planning a special **Volunteer Information Morning** for **Saturday, May 22nd** between 9 and 10 am at our main building at 2424 N. Pacific Highway. Please come and find out how you may be able to join our special group of people.



Volunteer Profile
Meet Phil Horner

About a year ago Phil Horner and his wife Maggie were attending Sunday mass at Shepherd of the Valley when Father Michael

made an appeal for parishioners to volunteer at Saint Vincent de Paul. A little later Phil called SVDP and got involved, first as part of the Central Point, St. Augustine Home Visits Conference and later as a counselor in Social Services. Since then Phil has been hustling. He is on call for when folks contact Shepherd of the Valley and ask for assistance. He is one of the few members who is retired so he is often asked to respond. His partner for many of the visits is his wife. On average, the conference receives five to six calls a week.

"I like helping people, but it's not always enjoyable. Some days I really wonder how much of a difference we're making. You can say boy, I made sure they still have power on or helped them stay in their home, but many people are in such dire situations. When we see them they

In addition, please mark your calendar on **October 16, 2010**, for our second annual **Light the Winter Fires** event. We look forward to visiting with you at that event also.

Thanks again for all you do toward helping us help the needy in our Valley. Our belief at St. Vincent's is by doing what we do, our area is a better place to live for all of us.

Len Hebert

have often exhausted all other options and other agencies have often turned them down. Recently, Dave Moosman and I made a visit to a woman living in a tiny trailer, no larger than eight by ten. When we arrived, she was in bed and had been for some time. She was in treatment for cancer, in addition to being disabled. Her bed was one of those overhead things you find in tiny travel trailers. The trailer was dark and the floor was about to give way in several places. Her teenage son was also living there, but it wasn't clear how much assistance he was providing.

The woman was on the verge of having her electricity turned off. Can you imagine, in those circumstances? She also seemed to be on the border of being evicted from her home. But she hadn't given up. She was trying to find a lawyer to help her qualify for disability. In the end, I found myself thinking, given a couple of bad breaks, I could have found myself in similar circumstances."

Phil and his wife Maggie lived in Los Angeles for thirty-one years. When they retired they moved to Eagle Point. They had friends in this area and had visited frequently over the years. They have two daughters living on the east coast, one is pregnant and expecting their first grandchild. The other is a teacher in New York. Phil and Maggie are building a new house in Eagle Point.

Phil says he really likes working with the people at SVDP and is impressed by the contributions everybody makes. In addition, he had high praise for Nola Geaney, for her patience and support helping him become a counselor. Phil works in Social Services on Friday so if you're in that area drop in and say hi. •



Jackson County commissioners recognize Nola Geaney for her service to the community.

Nola Geaney Receives Award

When Nola Geaney found out that she was a recipient of the prestigious Community Service Award from the Jackson County Board of Commissioners, she responded in typical Nola fashion: "There are so many other people more deserving of this honor," she said. Fortunately, the Board of Commissioners and the St. Vincent de Paul nominating committee did not agree with her assessment. She was named Volunteer of the Month of April.

Nola, President of the Sacred Heart Social Services Conference, was nominated for her work overseeing the volunteer counselors, clients and large budget that make up this important ministry of St. Vincent de Paul.

Under Nola's tutelage, a new database was put in place to ensure that those who need help receive it. With a budget of more than \$40,000 a month, Nola saw the importance of being a good steward of the money. She implemented guidelines and a tracking system that enables counselors to access the many funds available for use, including grants, council funds and Sacred Heart monies.

She also serves as a liaison with other social service agencies like the Salvation Army and Access. Her networking has resulted in a system that allows valley agencies to work together when a client's needs exceed the budget allowed by St. Vincent de Paul.

Sacred Heart Conference is on the forefront of fighting poverty in Jackson County. This dedicated group of volunteers offer help with rent, utilities, prescriptions, clothes, Oregon ID and a host of services that help the many

people in dire straits. Nola puts in countless hours each week with one goal in mind: Helping the poor and needy.

Congratulations on winning the award, Nola! In the end, however, the real winners are all the families this tireless volunteer has helped. •

Article by Kathy Morgan

John and Nola Geaney, with President Len Hebert



Profile of a Single Mother

Counselor's note: The client was reasonably well dressed and articulate. She was clearly anxious about having to ask for assistance. apparently never having to reach out for help before.

Client narrative: I'm forty six years old, single, and have a seven year old son. I was married in my late teens and have two grown boys. My first husband left me several years ago and I remained single for a time before I met a partner who seemed like a good man. After one week of marriage I realized I had made a horrible mistake. One night he was late returning home, and I became worried and called his cell phone. When he returned home he pushed me into the bedroom, slammed the door leaving my young son outside, shoved me up against the wall and screamed into my face, 'Don't you ever do that again. Don't you ever call to check on me.' This did not bode well for our relationship. Thank God, I'm rid of him."

More than anything I just need to talk to somebody today. I really need somebody to help me figure out what what to do. I stayed in school and have a good job earning \$1800 a month. I've owned my own home for the past five years and have a \$1000 monthly house

Single Mother, continued on page 5



Volunteer groups are recognized:

Left, Store Volunteers; right: Social Services Volunteers

Annual Volunteer Recognition Dinner

On February 13, some 250 volunteers and guests joined together to recognize their accomplishments for the past year and to enjoy a fine meal together. In random interviews several volunteers were asked about what impressed them about SVDP and who they most admire. Here are some of their comments:

Charlie Burgess, pantry: "I never realized there would be so many people coming for food. In the past week we gave away 8,400 pounds of pears plus other fruits and vegetables."

Beth Hunter, kitchen: "Frank and Irma Blaschka are two people I particularly admire. They invited a young man who needed housing to live with them for a time and they show up continuously to help each week in the kitchen in spite of not always feeling well. They really care."

Bob Hernandez, store: "Before I came here to volunteer I never realized how much SVDP does for people in the community... housing, groceries, free clothing, furniture and much more. I really enjoy being a part of helping others."

Dave Hill, home visits Ashland: "Doing home visits can be very compelling. I remember visiting a family in Talent with a father,

mother, grandmother and five kids. The father had just been laid off and the family was pretty desperate. They were all living off the grandmother's social security check. It just happened at that time another family in the community came forward who wanted to help a family in need. They donated a sum of money that went to the family in need and that really made a difference. It was a wonderful to be able to help make this happen."

Don Zimmerer, storage shed: "I really admire our President, Len Hebert. He is able to work with everybody, takes time to talk with volunteers, treats people with respect, and continually stresses focusing on serving the poor."

Debbie Christian, school supplies: "I am so impressed by Charlie Burgess. He is continuously on the go...collecting as many groceries, bread, vegetables and dairy as he can. He is one of the reasons we have so much to offer the poor."



Jasmine, Debbie and Bob Christian

Our President, Len Hebert, recognized the accomplishments of each of the conferences, asking them to stand. He highlighted the extent of the services we offered in 2009... "We had 240 volunteers serving at SVDP last year and they donated over 85,000 hour of charitable work. The numbers of people we served grew considerably, including many who have never turned to us before. The primary source of funding for the Social Services we offer came from the Thrift Store that generated \$585,000 in sales. This was critical because we spent \$408,000 for rent and utilities compared to \$300,000 in 2008. This included providing 8,000 people with vouchers for clothing and household items. Meanwhile, our kitchen served 52,000 meals and our Pantry provided 12,000 bags of groceries. At the Shelter we provided 4000 bed nights along with 1500 showers at our Urban Rest Stop and 400 haircuts by volunteer beauticians. And we provided 2,800 sets of school supplies so young people could more successfully participate in our schools, and treated almost 200 more people in our Dental Clinics. None of this would have been possible without the charity and tireless work of our volunteers and the support of many people in the wider community." •



Volunteer Profile

Meet Wayne Robinson

Wayne Robinson joined SVDP about twelve years ago just after Mother Theresa died. When that happened, considering the contribution she had made, Wayne said to himself, "It will take several people to replace Mother Theresa and the work she did for the underprivileged, I better get busy." And so he joined SVDP a short time later.

Initially Wayne volunteered in the kitchen during the summer while he was still teaching at Eagle Point Junior High. After two or three summers, Wayne switched to the Office Conference where he worked for the next six summers. Besides helping with the office work Wayne also started to help writing grants. When he retired about five years ago, he planned to increase his commitment but was limited by a medical condition. Finally, two years ago Wayne started to work in the Thrift Store repair shop. This was a natural choice, because Wayne likes to work on things. And he also likes woodworking which he does in his spare time. Because of this interest, besides working in the shop, he always has his eyes open for special needs around the facility.

In the last two years Wayne has built the store... a mirror stand so all the mirrors can be easily displayed and contained in a limited space thereby reducing the risk of them being knocked down and damaged, a special rack for skis and ski boots which were previously always getting strewn about by customers looking at them, and a storage rack for collectible art work with a shelf for preparing pieces for display. Recently, Wayne also started working in the kitchen again and is discovering other needs in the main building. So far he has created a half door for the Pantry so they can service clients and still control access to the pantry and he is currently building special shelving in the kitchen to get more of the equipment up off the floor and, as Wayne puts it, "Keep us on the good side of the Health inspector."

Besides his work at SVDP Wayne has served on the boards of and wrote grants for the Children's Advocacy Center and the Magdalene Home. (The guy just likes to help.) Wayne met his wife, Suzy at a party when he lived in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He attended school at the University of Michigan where he got a Bachelors in English and later received his Masters in Education and a business degree at SOU here in Oregon. His move to

Oregon was prompted by a desire to live in a more country-like environment.

Bottom line, if you have some special needs for carpentry work in your Conference, Wayne might be one of the folks to talk to. •

Single Mother, continued from page 3

payment. I have fairly large credit card debt from trying to cover living expenses. My home payments along with \$200 in credit card payments and utility bills take most of the \$1800 each month. With extra high utility bills this winter, I have really fallen behind and need help keeping my utilities connected. At the present rate things can only get worse.

I have good credit and want to keep it that way. I don't want to revert to food stamps. There are lots of people who need that kind of help much more than me. I'm planning to refinance my home to make the payments more manageable and am looking at ways to get a better handle on the credit card payments, maybe get a loan and consolidate them."

Counselor's note: We were able to help the client with her utilities and she was considerably relieved. She was very grateful for what we did for her. To my shock she gave me a big hug before she left. That doesn't often happen.



Left:
Volunteer cashier
Juan Rivera helps
out a customer at
the Thrift store.



Far left:
John Hoffman,
receiving
Left:
Harriett Odel,
sorting

Behind the Doors continued from page 1

clothing and ship them to Eugene for sale in their Store or bundling for third world countries.

As soon as items are unloaded, the real work begins. Clothing, bedding and the like are reloaded into carts and pushed forward for sorting. Furniture is cleaned and placed on the showroom floor for pricing and sale as quickly as possible to keep the receiving area reasonably clear. All “male-type items” (as one of our volunteers calls them) are placed on a rack by the back door for movement to the repair shop. This primarily includes appliances, electronics, tools, sporting and garden equipment. The volunteers in the shop ensure that the donations they process are operational, cleaned and priced before putting them out for display. The clothing and household items are also sorted, cleaned and priced. This is a lot of work and generally our volunteers maintain a positive orientation. But some days, when they open bags and discover the contents are dirty, wet, smell heavily of cigarette smoke, laden with debris, bugs and worse; the work can be very dispiriting. Because we use no professional cleaning service (that would cost too much and erode our profits), we still have to clean a portion of the items received before they can be sold.

The reality is we are more flexible with our standards than most of the other organizations operating in this area. Thankfully, the majority of the contributions are in good condition, new, or never used.

Unloading at the Receiving door includes a lot of heavy lifting and guys seem more suited for that work. I’m sure there are women who can do small appliance repair but none have ever volunteered. Likewise, only women tend to work sorting clothing and household items. Occasionally, some guy gets put in this role but that experiment quickly ends. While it is humorous to watch, most men really can’t easily distinguish between men’s clothes, women’s clothes and children’s clothes nor can they understand the intended purpose of a hand driven potato masher or a cherry pitter.

Besides the shop items and the clothing and household items, there are a number of specialty areas...children’s toys, pictures and paintings, shoes, bedding, ornamental flowers, baskets, sewing materials and jewelry, for example. We receive seasonal items all year round and have special areas for Christmas, Easter, Halloween, Thanksgiving and Valentine’s Day, as well as items for the annual Collectibles Sale. Even though most items received are moved onto the floor

in about one to three days, this explains why our storage area is nearly as large as the store. And sometimes even this is not enough. Currently, we have one large room, two trailers and three large storage containers being used to handle overflow, seasonal and collectible items. There is also the monthly “one-half off” sale, the seasonal “\$2 bag sale” in spring and summer, and the huge amount of work it takes to get ready for The Collectibles Sale, both year round and the week of the sale. This is a signature event for our customers, and a critical funding source for school supplies. It takes literally thousand’s of hours of preparation.

Every major product group has at least one volunteer who manages it. Many of our product managers go to considerable lengths to mark items with reasonable sales prices; touring other comparable stores, looking at prices in retail chains for comparison, and even checking the internet. Most of our customers appear to appreciate our pricing and see it fair and reasonable, but again there are exceptions. One woman, from outside the area, recently went out of her way to call me over and strongly assert that our prices were way too high. She said huffily as she went out the door, “And I’m just not going to buy anything here.” When we receive

Behind the Doors, continued on page 7



Left: Joanie Chan, sorting
 Middle: Velma Pippinger, womens clothing
 Right: Patricia Velasquez, sorting



From left:
 Dennis, Charlie and
 Betty in the pantry

Behind the Doors, continued from page 6

items from local stores they are priced at least 30% or more lower than the standard retail price even if new. Our objective is to make items highly affordable but still generate reasonable revenue to support our other services. When a customer looks at a new leather couch and offers \$120, thinking that is reasonable...and following up with a comment like, "Well you got the donation for free," it's difficult to understand why they would even suggest we favor them versus generating monies to help the less fortunate.

Getting items priced for display requires considerable time and work, and maintaining the showroom floor also demands lots of attention. The display areas need to be attractive, well maintained and clean. Just keeping the dust bunny's up off the floor is a struggle. Between 300 to 700 people can come through the Store daily, and that generates a lot of disorder and need for upkeep.

Maintaining good customer relations is a priority for the staff. Our regular customers expect us to be every bit as professional as Macy's. Again, we also have to deal with a small subset of folks who can make life very challenging. We have seen a significant increase in shoplifting

and a few people think nothing of pulling clothing off the racks and exchanging it for what they wore into the store...leaving their ragged and soiled remains for the staff to deal with. Again, thankfully most of our customers are friendly and appreciate of the work we do. All the same, it means a lot when somebody stops to thank volunteers for their unselfish work.

The final contact by customers is with our cashier staff. Whether they are dealing with our paying customers or voucher users (individuals who can receive free clothing, bedding and household items along with clothing replacements every four months), their aim is to be courteous and professional. The cashier's job is probably the most trying in the store. On a bad day, business remains so brisk it is difficult to take a break, or to do some primal screaming when customers prove particularly trying.

The end result is that we are seen by many of our customers as providing a valuable service in a courteous and friendly manner. We hope that every day we come closer to our objective of providing affordable, quality merchandise to a large cross section of the valley's population. •

Article by Patrick Wilson

An Abundance of Produce

Some while back Charlie and Betty Burgess let Access know the St. Vincent de Paul Pantry would take all the excess they could provide and would pick it up the same day when notified. During January and February this resulted in over 14,000 bags of produce being secured for distribution. The produce included potatoes, onions, citrus, oranges, pears and apples. Most of the pears coming from Harry and David and the Naumes Fruit Company.

Some shipments were so large we passed a portion along to the Sacred Heart Food kitchen, the Magadelan Home and La Clinica, who provides special support to young women with children. The end result is a lot of folks who are struggling had a supply of produce on many days during the last two months. Thanks Charlie and Betty, for going out of your way to help those less fortunate! •



Reaching Out to Bring Joy and Support to Others

Jasmyne O'Conner had a tough youth. Her mother was an alcoholic. "She was continually dragging us around from place to place," says Jasmyne. "In my immediate family were two half brothers and two half sisters, but my mother had a total of twenty-four offspring. Family life was too chaotic. Eventually, I just had to get away. That is why I took off and came to Oregon...the place where I was born."

Initially she stayed at the Gospel Mission and then moved into the SVDP Shelter in an attempt to get on her feet. "A lot of what I saw at the Mission and the Shelter inspired me. I thought about the harshness and difficulty I experienced in my own life and

decided I wanted to use poetry to inspire others to achieve some of the piece of mind I've found."

Jasmyne wrote and self published *Verse to Soothe the Soul...* a short book of poetry. Her work can be found at www.lulu.com under "Golden Jazz Poetry." Our shelter manager, Nick Koutssouros, was inspired by what Jasmyne did called it to our attention. Here is one of her poems:

GO FAR

*Oh to wish upon a star,
to hope in life we all go far.
To the birds may your
feathers be many.
To the bees may pollen be plenty.
In my heart A silent prayer,
may to you life be fair.*



Donate Online

Donating funds to St. Vincent de Paul is easy and quick using our [Donate](#) button on the website. Using PayPal or a credit card, with just a few quick clicks you'll be helping those less fortunate. Go to our website (see below) and click on [How to Help](#). Remember, our organization is the only all-volunteer charity in the Rogue Valley. •

Full Color Newsletter

See the newsletter in full color at www.stvincentdepaul.info. Email Dianne at de137@q.com to receive the newsletter as a .pdf file in your email instead of being sent snail mail. Please put "SVDP newsletter" in the email subject line and include you full name(s). You'll receive it weeks before it arrives by mail. •



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