

# St. Vincent de Paul

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



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## Meet Our New President Dennis Mihocko

About two years ago Dennis Mihocko began volunteering at SVDP. Initially he took responsibility for site maintenance and later he picked up the additional work as a day manager at the store. With many other duties added in between, he has been quite busy. On January 1, 2011, Dennis will become our new President. The following is an interview with Dennis, conducted by our editor, Patrick Wilson.

Patrick: How did you come to join SVDP?

Dennis: My wife said to me shortly after we arrived in Medford, we should volunteer at SVDP. One Sunday shortly thereafter Ginger Dickerson was in front of Shepherd of the Valley recruiting volunteers for SVDP so I signed up. By the way, I'm still waiting for my wife to join.

P: As you begin your term as President, what do you see as the major strengths of SVDP?

D: Well, first of all, service. We provide a wide gamut of services to the people in this valley, particularly compared to the other Councils in Southern Oregon. Furthermore, we have a very dedicated group of volunteers who work hard to provide compassionate and quality support to those who come to us for assistance. Frankly, it blows me away how well it all works and how our volunteers get so much done. And lastly, the



organizational structure that is in place and the systems that have been created significantly contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of SVDP. The organization that Len has built will certainly make my job a lot easier.

P: What do you see as key priorities you need to attend to during the coming months?

D: Len and I have already started working on one of the priorities... adding additional space. We do not have enough storage space and because much of our current warehouse space is already cramped, it creates safety concerns. During the last several months we have also lost a number of our Conference Presidents. Nola Ganey left Social Services after nearly exhausting herself doing a great job and fighting valiantly to keep up with ever increasing demands. Mary Hogue left the Kitchen because the job of helping raise her son's infant daughter and continuing her work at SVDP was just too much. Bob Hammer

*President, continued on page 6*



## Living in Our Shelter

If you've lost your job and extinguished your savings or been caught up in the real estate market collapse, thereby losing the home you've had for years, the prospect of living on the street or in your car can be pretty frightening. For young children it can be even more devastating, with the loss of all their daily routines and any semblance of stability. In this kind of situation, it can be at least mildly reassuring to discover that you can secure thirty days of temporary housing at the Saint Vincent de Paul Shelter.

The purpose of the Shelter is to provide temporary housing to homeless families while supporting their search for employment, and eventually, securing a new home or apartment. There are computers available for guests to use to help them seek work and classes are given to improve their skills interviewing and working effectively on the job. The facility has rooms for families and a dorm for single women. To qualify for housing, applicants must pass a drug test. About 40% of those wishing accommodations either fail the test or refuse to take it because of the expectation they will fail. Along with the drug testing, applicants must be willing to abide by the rules for living in the shelter: stay off drugs,

not drink in the shelter, observe the daily 7 p.m. curfew and keep their living area orderly and clean. Living in close quarters with strangers can be difficult, so they must also be able to get along. Fighting can be a cause for expulsion. Al Zon, President of the Shelter Conference, says, "One of my biggest surprises in running the Shelter is the amount of friction and tension that can develop particularly between women living together."

Another major expectation is for people to be looking for a job or working during the day. For that reason guests must be out of the Shelter by 10 am and not return before 4 pm. "Individual initiative and these rules do pay off," says Al. "We have a woman currently living in the Shelter who got a job at Harry and David's and has saved every cent of her income, already accumulating over \$1000 toward a home when she leaves. A good number of people leave the Shelter with jobs and a good start toward a new beginning."

In certain circumstances the Shelter will make special accommodations, for instance, a vet with disabilities currently in the shelter who must have a service dog to protect her against sudden seizures or the elderly woman who needed her son to live with her for help, given her

**"Most people who come to the Shelter are serious about getting a job and getting back on their feet. We work hard to create a friendly and compassionate environment but recognize we can always do better."**

*- Al Zon, Shelter Conference President*

advanced age. (Al also advised me there is no restriction on adult children living with their parents.) The Shelter cannot accept individuals who need assistance and do not have a caregiver living with them.

While some people are initially intimidated by entering the shelter, things soon settle down and they tend to find life there friendly and they like the pleasant and clean environment. Al says, "We probably have one of the nicest shelters most people have ever seen." Many of the families cook together, share meals and socialize in the evenings in the recreation room. Somewhat less than 5% of guests are asked to leave because of drinking, drugs or fighting.

The Shelter manager is Nick Koutsouros. He is responsible for maintaining control in the building and providing general management of the Shelter. In addition, Nick spends a fair amount of time seeking to improve the accommodations and services such as collecting magazines for the recreation room, securing furniture for the outdoor family area, and trying to make holiday periods special for guests.

"If other volunteers have comments about the Shelter, please bring it to me. We can't fix things if we don't know they are broken," mentions Al.



This organization seeks to bring compassion and strength to many who are struggling with life's challenges. Special effort is made to create a sense of community.

## The Gospel Mission

The Gospel Mission, with offices and a men's shelter located at 125 West Jackson, and a women's and children's shelter at 534 N. Bartlett Street in Medford, is dedicated to providing housing, meals and basic life needs to the poor and working poor in Jackson County, as well as ministering to their spiritual needs. The organization seeks to bring compassion and strength to many who are struggling with life's challenges.

The men's shelter provides: accommodations for over 100 men; three meals a day for residents, overnight guests, and people living on the street; and a warming shelter for up to 100 during extremely bad weather. Besides these services, they have showers, limited laundry facilities, and a free clothing closet for residents and any other folks in the community needing support.

To maintain a safe and positive environment, the Mission requires all residents, visitors, and guests to be clean and sober. If an individual is found under the influence, they are asked to leave and welcomed to come back when they are not. Residents and guests for the breakfast and noon meal are

expected to attend services prior to benefiting from the support offered. Dinner is offered from five to six p.m. and is free of charge to anyone in the community. Overnight guests are expected to be in by the seven p.m. curfew unless their employment or treatment plan dictates otherwise.

The women's shelter has all the same services and requirements. However, meals at this site are only available to women and children living in the shelter. It has family room accommodations for up to fifty.

Besides providing for families of women and children, this shelter also has accommodations for unwed pregnant mothers. Initially, individuals are allowed to have a bed at these shelters for ten days if they need a place to stay and can adhere to the basic guidelines. If they give up their bed, they may return again after a lapse of thirty days, but they will still have access to all of the other services of the mission. Exceptions are made and longer stays are available.

Some exceptions are: veterans awaiting placement in the VA SORCC in White City, individuals waiting accommodations at the Salvation Army's Hope House or

Saint Vincent de Paul Shelter, guests who are employed and saving their money, or guests who are awaiting entrance into various treatment programs.

Special effort is made to create a sense of community in these shelters. In this past year these included offering special meals on holidays, special sporting event parties, and neighborhood outreach through hot dog feeds. Four permanent staff and ten to fifteen volunteers work in the men's shelter with four permanent staff, and three volunteers work in the women's shelter.

The Gospel Mission offers many of the same core services as SVDP. They are the only major facility offering accommodations for men, and immediate emergency housing (twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week) for men, women, and children.

**Donating funds** to St. Vincent de Paul is easy and quick using our [Donate](#) button on the website using PayPal or a credit card. Go to our website and click on [How to Help](#). Remember, our organization is the **ONLY** all-volunteer charity in Jackson County serving the homeless and poor.



Nola received the Community Service Award from the Jackson County Board of Commissioners this year. Pictured here with spouse John (left), and Len Hebert.

### **A Plentiful Holiday Season**

The holiday tempo began to build in November. Volunteers at the Thrift Store started to pull out all the Christmas decorations, trees and similar items for sale all during December. The Store keeps a large tractor truck trailer for that purpose and it takes until Christmas to empty it and prepare all the items for sale. Every weekend for six weeks a small cadre of dedicated volunteers works to accomplish this.

### **Thanksgiving Dinner**

Again this year the Central Point Presbyterian Church provided a bountiful Thanksgiving dinner with all the trimmings. The meal was enjoyed by 320 people and music was graciously provided by the Country Fiddlers, making the day that much more joyous.

### **Christmas Tree Sales**

The Shepherd of the Valley Knights of Columbus set up to do business on December 3, and began selling fresh trees for the holiday. A special thanks to Ralph Browning who spent so much time making this another success. Proceeds from the event were \$2,200 and a large percentage of that money is donated to SVDP by the Knights.

### **Two Valued Volunteers Leave SVDP**

We recently lost two very valuable volunteers and leaders in 2010: Nola Geaney, President of Social Services, and Mary Hogue, President of the Kitchen Conference.

NOLA GEANEY was President of the Social Services Conference for nearly five years and an individual counselor for over eleven years. She initially volunteered for four years in the kitchen. Nola's tenure as President was during the most difficult period the Conference has experienced since our founding. The day-to-day population swelled 30-40% over our norm. Last year alone we distributed over \$400,000 for utilities and rent.

Not only did Nola guide the group during very trying times, she also spent considerable energy ensuring all our counselors were thoroughly trained with special attention given to the needs of each applicant. I remember her saying, "I would rather we see fewer applicants if we had to, so that our guests feel attended to and cared for." In addition, Nola oversaw the introduction of technology to Social Services. An automated tracking system was established so counselors could quickly pull up the profile and history of any applicant requesting assistance. It's difficult to imagine the Conference managing this increased press of demands had not that system been in place.

MARY HOGUE was selected to be President of the Kitchen Conference three years ago, almost as soon as she came to SVDP. Her career in school kitchen management made her a natural and we needed to bring our kitchen standards up to acceptable levels having recently done very poorly on a County food inspection. Mary's attention to food and kitchen management was very appreciated by our volunteers and daily guests.

During Mary's tenure the kitchen underwent major renovations as part of the Capital Improvement Campaign and our facility emerged as a place of superior appearance and quality. The Kitchen Conference has shown considerable growth in recent years with the daily head count increasing 40-50%. The daily meal count now often approaches 200. Mary also oversaw the quarterly dinner/auction events.

Mary's son took on the responsibility for an infant daughter a number of years ago and because of his need to find employment, Mary became a surrogate mother and grandmother. Eventually the demands of her new role became more than could be borne along with her responsibilities as Kitchen President.

We will certainly miss both Nola and Mary and their very positive affect, thank them for their time spent at SVDP, and hope they might rejoin us at some time in the future.



Mary Anne, Sheryl, and Bernice

## The Three Sisters

It sounds like a fable or a new restaurant in Medford, but it's actually my name for three young volunteers who work together in the Kitchen and the Thrift Store. I call them sisters not because they are related but because of the close relationship they've developed.

Mary Anne Blaschka started in the Kitchen three years ago because her dad Frank said volunteers were needed. Mary Anne says, "I was surprised by the relaxed atmosphere and interested in the diverse group we serve, people who are economically challenged and others suffering from poverty. And I liked the variety of things to do from helping the cook, doing food preparation to doing the dishes." Mary Anne defines SVDP as, "A place where people receive guidance and assistance, personally, physically and spiritually." Mary Anne comes from a family of seven children where she learned to share and help and sees her volunteer work as a continuation of that learning.

Sheryl Meads started in the Kitchen over two years ago when she heard one of our people talking on the radio about the work of SVDP. "When I started here my eyes were opened to how difficult it would be to be homeless, a situation I would find hard and very scary." She adds, "It helped me to see how lucky and blessed I am." Sheryl likes the people

here, helping others and doing something worthwhile. She defines SVDP as good people who care about others working together and she likes the fact that all monies donated and raised go to help the less fortunate.

Bernice A. Pearson, a close neighbor to Mary Anne, began volunteering two years ago. "I was on disability and didn't want to stay home and do nothing. Mary Anne invited me to join and I saw the opportunity to do something valuable. Volunteering teaches me about other parts of the community, getting a different view than I would normally." She feels rewarded by knowing she is giving something to the community. She says, "I feel connected to the people I work with."

Mary Anne says, "Bernice and Sheryl are like sisters, loving and vivacious, and I think of them as family." Bernice explains, "We do a lot together. We are more than co-workers. And I really like our luncheons." Sheryl says, "These two are awesome. Mary Anne has gone through a lot and still wants to help others. Bernice is innocent and kind and, although once homeless and having experienced a hard life, is very sweet. It proves even people who go through a hard life can turn out very well."

It certainly is good to see that volunteers who work together can form such fond friendships.

## December Dinner/Auction

A crowd of over 150 guests attended the Home Visit Dinner/Auction on Dec. 4, and enjoyed a delicious ham dinner. The guests were more than generous as they bid on silent auction items and swept through the Pantry securing goodies and gifts for the season to come. Over \$6000 was raised for the Home Visit Conferences serving Ashland and Central Point. It will go a long way in allowing them to pursue their mission in the coming months. The Ashland group will also be assisted by a \$30,000 City of Ashland grant focused on providing monetary relief to individuals and families needing permanent shelter during the winter months.

## Christmas Mural Displayed

Emil Knutson created a beautiful religious mural for the Thrift Store window to remind everyone what Christmas is really about. The mural was enjoyed by all the holiday customers visiting the store and by thousands of daily motorists each week. Thanks Emil for your fine work. (See photo on page 7)



## Christmas Dinner

On Christmas Day over 200 folks enjoyed Christmas dinner with us, assisted by over forty community volunteers who spent the day helping make this event so successful.

Besides the delicious turkey dinner, with most of the birds donated during the proceeding month, guests received an abundance of gifts resulting from the Giving Tree at Sacred Heart and the 150 Shoe Box Gifts donated by the students at Sacred Heart School. The volunteers for the two Home Visit Conferences also distributed gifts to the children in their territories during December.

All our volunteers and friends are congratulated for their contributions throughout the year and particularly during this time of love and peace.

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*President, continued from page 1*

left the Store to focus full time on his ailing mother-in-law. This created three big holes in our organization. I need to work with these three Conferences to ensure the right people rise to the challenge. The third priority is to improve how we work together and how we treat each other. In spite of the fact we have great volunteers, many of us seem to lose focus, at least at times, on what the larger mission of SVDP is, a Christian organization dedicated to

bringing joy and compassion to all we touch. Too often we see conflict and hard feelings between volunteers and we still have less than optimal cooperation between our Conferences. We need to guard against this.

P: What do our volunteers need to know about your expectations...What do you value in those you work with?

D: I value playing nice, working cooperatively and working as a team. On the opposite side of the ledger, I dislike negativity in myself and others. We constantly have to look for the good in others even when we don't feel like it. Having said that, I want all our volunteers to know that I prize their commitment and dedication to the needy of Jackson County. I welcome their ideas and comments and my door is always open to them. Of course, if they have problems they want to bring to me, I expect they will first give their Conference leaders a chance to resolve them.

P: What should our volunteers know about your personal leadership style?

D: Being a retired fire captain, I developed the habit of getting things done first and then apologizing later. And, oh by the way, I am impatient. I often am in a hurry and sometimes snap when I should be more tolerant. Let me apologize in advance if I am short with any of you. I know I will have to do it often as we work together. I know I need to learn to be

patient and avoid knee jerk reactions and hasty solutions. Thankfully, I learned from several of my supervisors that enabling and empowering people to act on their own initiative, while sometime difficult in the short term, greatly increases the opportunity to develop needed leadership skills.

P: Are there any special interests you have regarding the work we do at SVDP?

D: I pray we will become better able to serve the disturbed and the mentally ill. Society's failure to adequately provide mental health care has and will continue to have great impact on us.

P: Anything else you'd like to stress?

D: It is still unclear how much longer harsh economic conditions will haunt our community. We will have to continue to be flexible in meeting the demands that come our way, always remaining willing to adjust to the needs of the changing and growing population we are dedicated to serving. In order to meet these changing and expanding needs, we should further develop our relationship with other agencies with a willingness to work closely to leverage our services.

I look forward to this new challenge, to getting to know all our volunteers better and I ask you to be patient with me as I grow into this role.

### The Holiday Season at St. Vincent de Paul



Above left: The Christmas mural at the store  
Above right: Len Hebert thanking Alice Nagel for her term as President of the Ashland Conference

Middle left: Students from Sacred Heart school preparing the shoe box gifts that were handed out at the Christmas dinner

Middle right: Patrons enjoying Christmas dinner

Lower left: The SVDP Christmas elves preparing to serve Christmas dinner



**COMING EVENTS**

Volunteer Appreciation Dinner  
Saturday, February 19, in the  
SVDP dining room. Rosary at  
5:15, dinner at 6:00 pm.

Bag Sale at the Thrift Store in  
Saturday, February, 12

St. Joseph's Fundraiser  
Saturday, March 19, at SVDP

**SVDP Hours**

Office & Social Services:  
541-772-3828

Monday-Friday, 10 - 2

Thrift Store: 779-3648  
Mon-Sat, 10 - 4

Dining Room: Mon-Sat, 11 - 1

Pantry: Last two Fridays of each  
month, 10 am - 1pm

La Clinica: Second Thursday's,  
10:30 - 1:30

Dental Van: Jan 21, Feb 11, Mar 25

Large furniture pickup available, call  
store to schedule, first floor only.

**Full Color Newsletter**

See the newsletter in full color at  
[www.stvincentdepaul.info](http://www.stvincentdepaul.info).

Email [del37e@q.com](mailto:del37e@q.com) to receive  
the full color 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 your full name(s).  
You'll receive it days before it  
arrives by mail, and save printing  
and shipping costs to SVDP.

If you already did this, please send  
again as an email crash erased all  
the addresses.

**Newsletter Editors:** Patrick Wilson and Dianne Erickson



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