



Homeless shelter as leap of faith as church, county work together

By Chris Daley | Democrat staff writer | May 06, 2010 12:06



PASTOR CRAIG KLATT is master of ceremonies at Tuesday, Åôs dedication of Grace Place at Perks Court. His Camino Seventh-day Adventist Church was the original site of a sustained effort to provide shelter to the county, Åôs homeless. The Perks Court facility is a partnership between El Dorado County and United Outreach. Democrat photos by Pat Dollins

County leaders and members of the faith community took a big whack at homelessness Tuesday afternoon when they officially dedicated Grace Place at Perks Court. Located on a steep cul-de-sac off Missouri Flat Road, Grace Place is an example of church and state, while separate, being able to work collaboratively to serve the homeless citizens of El Dorado County.

The facility consists of two main structures, an administrative house and a house for up to six residents. Clients may live there for up to four months as long as they actively participate in regular and intensive mentoring and coaching programs.

United Outreach of El Dorado County has led the effort to establish services for the homeless over most of the past decade. United Outreach's combined vision and mission is to "empower homeless people"

and ultimately "to end homelessness in El Dorado County."

Craig Klatt, pastor of the Camino Seventh-day Adventist Church, served as master of ceremonies and represented the connection between his congregation's early commitment to the homeless and the continuing efforts of the larger community. Klatt's church was the original Grace Place, which opened its doors one night a week to the homeless. Over the years, one night became three then five nights a week until the level of need outreached the church's ability to provide.

Back then, Klatt recalled, "We moved in substantial ignorance until we got our street smarts. We learned not to be enablers."

He stressed that the programs and those working in them had maintained one constant and primary attribute throughout their history - integrity. And integrity would guide them as they "continue to move forward." Klatt also paid tribute to several community leaders who were early and longtime crusaders for development of a comprehensive system of services to the homeless.

Art Edwards of United Outreach was one of the prime movers along with Joyce Aldrich, formerly with the community services division of the county Department of Human Services. They are no longer actively involved in the Grace Place programs, but their legacy has been carried on by Liz Armstrong, Reuben Jessop, Linda Gates and Beth Southorn, all members of the United Outreach board of directors, Klatt noted. In addition to Klatt's congregation, United Foothills Methodist Church, Faith Episcopal and Green Valley Community Church have been deeply involved in the efforts to establish a viable homeless program on the western slope.

He also credited Raj Rambob, former principal of the local Seventh-day Adventist school, with having spearheaded the church's early involvement in the movement to provide for the homeless.

Rambob has since moved on and is now overseeing homeless shelter programs in San Mateo County, but he came back for Tuesday's dedication ceremony.

Along with the acquisition of "street smarts," Klatt also pointed out important aspects of homelessness that had been unknown to many in the early days, and he thanked the education community "who brought to our attention that among the homeless are a significant number of children."

Supervisor Jack Sweeney bridged the divide between county government and the faith community. Sweeney reflected back on the time when the county acquired the Perks Court property.

"The Lord works in mysterious ways," he said. "We bought this property, but it took a while before God told us what to do with it."

He also noted that the United Outreach programs have gone far beyond simply providing a roof and a hot meal.

"Anybody can give them a tent and just watch them survive, but we needed to give more than that. We helped people become citizens, become productive in their lives again, to restore their pride and give them back their self-respect."

Board of Supervisors Chairman Norma Santiago followed Sweeney to the microphone and pointed out the difference between giving a hungry person a fish and teaching him to fish. She stressed the partnership between the county and the church communities "working together to provide reasonable opportunities as not everyone is born into good health and good prospects."

Santiago praised the assembled group for "being the change that is needed, staying the course and building the steps to help our friends climb out of their difficult situations."

Beth Southorn explained some of those steps and the accountability that goes along with each. Beyond the handout is the hard work necessary to make substantive changes in broken lives. Southorn described the process United Outreach has developed as a "go slow approach to find out what exactly needs to be changed." And she called particular attention to mental health problems as a frequent factor in chronic homelessness.

The overall program is divided into four phases, according to a United Outreach informational packet. It describes the services, rights and responsibilities of all participants from intake through assessment and finally an implementation phase. At that point, the successful client has set a move-out date, has secured regular income and has a housing plan. On-site staff include case managers in addition to volunteer coaches who mentor and monitor each client's activities and progress at least every week throughout the program.

The program description states unequivocally:

"Absolutely no alcohol or drugs will be permitted on the property. Use on site will result in immediate dismissal from the program. Persons who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol will not be allowed to stay and will be referred to an appropriate service provider. Participants must submit proof of TB testing or obtain appropriate treatment within one week of entering the program."

United Outreach also offers a more traditional service to the homeless with its Voucher Incentive Program. It is a short-term emergency food and shelter program that provides up to 30 days stay in a local motel and vouchers for the Grocery Outlet as well as access to supplies from the Food Bank of El Dorado County. And like the Transitional Shelter Program, coaches and program staff regularly monitor compliance with the rules and goals of the VIP.

The house that Jesus built

Jesus Lemus owned the Perks Court property when the county came calling a couple of years ago. He had bought the 3.5 acres with two rundown houses and a detached garage about two years earlier. Lemus said he had originally wanted to live in the better of the two homes and use the garage as an

office for a construction business. After some sprucing up, his family moved into the newer house and then he tackled an extensive remodeling project to bring the other house up to snuff. The latter now serves as the United Outreach on-site administrative center, while the other is the client residence.

Lemus was one of the special guests invited to the dedication ceremony. He said he had no idea that the county would be interested in the property when he originally acquired it. And he quipped that the deal took a considerable amount of negotiating and “a lot of give and take,” over the course of a year, but eventually a straight trade was agreed to. He and his family swapped Perks Court for a home and acreage near the community college. No money changed hands, and Lemus said he was very satisfied with the arrangement.

“I’m glad to be here today,” he said as he hugged his 7-year-old daughter Marina in his strong carpenter’s arms.

E-mail Chris Daley at cdaley@mtdemocrat.net or call (530) 344-5063.

The Mountain Democrat Newspaper is published Monday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday by Mountain Democrat Inc.

All images and text within these cyberpages are copyrighted by the Mountain Democrat © 1360 Broadway, P.O. Box 1088, Placerville, CA 95667 (530) 622-1255 Fax (530) 622-7894

Powered by [PHPography](#)