Living Hope Outreach in Drain serves 6,000 lunches in past year

WHO: Living Hope Outreach
WHERE: Drain Gateway Family Fellowship Church of the Nazarene, 337 W. C Ave., Drain
WHEN: Lunches — 12:30 to 2 p.m. Wednesdays; Food pantry hours — 12:30 to 5 p.m. Wednesdays, 12:15 to 1 p.m. and 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. Sundays
INFORMATION: Volunteering or food, Mike Hoover at 951-204-9026

DRAIN — When Kanya Mehling walked through the door of Living Hope Outreach in Drain on Wednesday, she knew what was coming. “How are you doing?” said volunteer Sharon Hove, embracing Mehling. “Oh your ears are so cold!” Hove reached down to Mehling’s daughter Starlett, 4, and also gave her a hug. “Come here baby girl. Oh your ears are so cold too!”

Mehling has been coming to Living Hope Outreach most Wednesdays for the past two years and looks forward to these welcoming interactions. The fast-growing nonprofit is a part of Drain Gateway Family Fellowship Church of the Nazarene, which serves and delivers lunches every Wednesday to community members who need it. In the past two years, the number of lunches
served has tripled: From November 2013 to the end of October 2014, the group has handed out 6,035 lunches.

Hove is the co-founder of Living Hope, which she began with her mother, Lenore Davidson, in December of 2012. Hove said she had a desire to serve, but didn’t know where. After trying different activities, she couldn’t find one that fit.

“I was walking through my house and I threw my hands up in the air and said ‘God, I give up on doing anything else until I know what I want,’” Hove said.

One week later, she and her mother had crafted a plan for a sack lunch program. Hove still doesn’t know why she chose that service over others. “I just knew, don’t ask me why,” she said.

The program’s original goal was to serve 32 lunches a week. The first week, no one showed up. While Hove said she was disappointed, she wasn’t discouraged. The next week three people came. The next week it was nine. Now the program serves between 170 and 180 lunches per week.

Many of those lunches are now delivered. This is an important part of the program because many of the guests have illnesses, disabilities or lack a vehicle that could bring them to Wednesday lunches, Hove said.

All lunches are made to order. When guests arrive or call in, they get to select their sandwich from a menu. Options include bread, sandwich filling, condiments and vegetable toppings. Guests also get pudding, cookies, coleslaw and fruit. “My family definitely appreciates it,” Mehling said. “When times are rough, it’s handy.”

Volunteers also ask guests if they can pray with them before their meal. Part of the church’s mission with its ministry is to develop spirituality, Hove said. But Pastor Mike Hoover points out that it is first necessary to develop a relationship with people. “We are called to take care of the widows, feed the hungry, clothe the naked,” he said. “The Bible never says only if they go to church.”

Hove agrees that the nonprofit has developed relationships with guests over the years. Most people who come to Wednesday lunches are regulars, and volunteers make an effort to have conversations with the guests.

“My goal is to get them to tell me about them, to promote relationships,” Hove said. Though when the volunteers get busy, she admits there’s not always time to do that.

Relationships extend outside the lunchroom. George McKown received a tarp from Hove after his mobile home started leaking. He’s since returned to volunteer as a way of giving back. Though he added, “You can’t really pay her back.”

“They’re true,” McKown said of the generosity of the volunteers. “They seem to be one way and they are.” Hove is also impressed with her 20 volunteers who deliver lunches and assemble
sandwiches. “The volunteers here are the most amazing people,” she said. “They work so hard and do it with such a spirit of giving.” Volunteer Donna Irons began working with Living Hope because, like Hove, she too was searching for a way to be useful.

“I didn’t realize how many hungry people are in this area until I started it,” she said. Volunteering also caused her to switch churches, because she appreciated how active the community was with service.

At its two-year anniversary, plans are budding for the growing nonprofit. United Community Action Network recently began sending the nonprofit donations for its food pantry. Hove said they go through about 3,000 pounds of food per month.

Hove also has plans to develop a learning space for teens, as some of the guests are homeless teenagers who dropped out of school. She wants to acquire laptop computers to give the teens a warm, safe space to participate in online school.

“You know how good it feels to give, but when you’re in your own world and you’re not doing it, you forget,” Irons said. “I relearned how good it feels to give.”

Friday, December 5, 2014

Helping hands needed for event at retirement center (RSVP)

By Rebecca de Greyt

Sponsored by the United Community Action Network, the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) matches the talents and experience of people 55 and older and channels them into volunteer work that supports public and nonprofit agencies, as well as health care facilities throughout Josephine County.

• **BE A HELPING HAND DURING THIS HOLIDAY.** Oak Lane Retirement is having a community Christmas bazaar next Saturday, Dec. 13, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. To make this a successful event Oak Lane is in need of volunteers for the following positions: four volunteers to manage craft stations, four cookie and coffee hosts, and one greeter. There are two time slots you can sign up for — 10 a.m. to noon and from noon to 2 p.m. If you are interested in signing up please contact Rebecca de Greyt at 541-956-4474.

• **TAKING A MOMENT TO PAUSE, SHARE, AND CARE.** The staff at Lovejoy Hospice, 939 S.E. Eighth St., is holding their annual "Light up a Life 2014" celebration this Tuesday (Dec. 9) from 6-8 p.m. The event is a traditional evening ceremony to honor and remember special people in our lives. Slide show, reading of names, music, candle lighting, and refreshments will be the evening venue. If you have any questions, please call 541-474-1193.

• **OREGONIANS SERVING ONE ANOTHER.** If you enjoy helping others, have computer skills and can volunteer one day per week, we have an opportunity for you! Come join the team where the focus is helping
fellow Oregon residents’ access affordable health care. Health insurance should be affordable, flexible and accessible to everyone. Oregonians can compare and enroll in health insurance plans that fit their needs and budget. To qualify as a volunteer, you must be able to pass a criminal background and fingerprint checks. Also you must be willing to go through an online training module, with a face-to-face training to follow. Interested parties are asked to email Rebecca De Greyt at rebecca.degreyt@ucancap.org.

• BE A PART OF UCAN's MISSION. Helping people! Changing lives! UCAN provides help with utility assistance, housing, weatherization, Head Start, Cover Oregon, senior health insurance, prescriptions, budgeting, case management and transportation. We also provide food to pantries and kitchens throughout Josephine County through our regional food banks.

Our case management team is looking for volunteers to go out in pairs and help with home inspections. We are in need of home inspectors on Tuesdays starting at 9 a.m. Volunteers would need to use their own vehicle and UCAN will reimburse mileage. If you are interested, come to UCAN, 201 N.E. Eighth St. in Grants Pass, and fill out an RSVP volunteer application.

Tuesday, December 9, 2014

Federal funds will be lost if Douglas County turns over its public health authority to the state

Janet Holland presents to the community at the health care forum hosted by the League of Women Voters of Umpqua Valley at the Douglas County Public Library Monday evening Dec. 8, 2014.

Dawnelle Marshall, a member of a panel of experts in Roseburg public health at a health care forum hosted by the League of Women Voters of Umpqua Valley at the Douglas County Public Library Monday evening Dec. 8, 2014, passes off the microphone after answering a question.

With two new Douglas County commissioners taking office in January, the fate of Douglas County’s Public Health Department remains unknown, Public Health Director Dawnelle Marshall said Monday.
Marshall was one of four panelists who answered questions from a packed audience at a health care forum in the Ford Room of the Douglas County Library in Roseburg Monday.

Marshall joined Architrave Family of Companies CEO Bob Dannenhoffer, Community Health Alliance Executive Director Janet Holland and Umpqua Community Health Center Chief Operations Officer Christi Parazoo as they discussed their organizations’ efforts to improve health care for county residents. The forum was sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Umpqua Valley. Marshall said the county’s public health department is here today, but it is unclear what the future holds.

Marshall said one thing she learned from the county commissioners’ recent attempts to shut down most of the public health department and transfer its public health authority to the state was that 90 days was not enough time for such a transition. Another thing she learned was that if the county turned its public health authority over to the state, it would lose state and federal funds, even for the programs it wanted to keep. “It took about 90 days to figure that out,” she said.

Marshall said she was grateful for the Umpqua Community Health Center, which offered to step in and provide public health services to patients. “I truly appreciate their commitment and understanding because I really was concerned about the people that we serve, where they were going to go, how were they going to get service or whether they were going to get service at all,” Marshall said.

Holland said many people have the misconception that the Community Health Alliance, which provides mental health services to low-income and other county residents, simply picked up where the county’s mental health department left off when it dissolved.

Holland said the transition wasn’t nearly that smooth. The organization was built from scratch, she said. They didn’t even have a credit history and had to write checks for supplies. All the county mental health department employees received pink slips and some never returned.

As the new nonprofit got itself organized and underway, some patients were lost too, she said. “There are still repercussions that we’re feeling as a result of this and I’m not going to sugarcoat any of this. It was not easy and it still isn’t easy. Folks were lost in this transition,” she said.

A written question submitted by an audience member asked why county commissioners decided to drop the mental health department in the first place. “That is a question you really need to ask the commissioners,” Holland said.

She said CHA continues to reach out to former patients who suffer severe mental illnesses like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

In response to an audience question, Dannenhoffer affirmed that it is difficult for patients with Medicare to acquire a doctor in Douglas County. He said many doctors refuse Medicare because payments are low and paperwork requirements high. Medicare Advantage plans, such as those
offered by Atrio, have wider acceptance, he said. Dannenhoffer wasn’t complimentary about American access to health care in general, either.

“It really is remarkable that the best health care this country has, is better than anybody else in the world, but the average health care in this country is far worse than many other countries,” Dannenhoffer said. He said Oregon has made “tremendous strides” already, reducing the number of uninsured from about 15 percent to about 5 percent.

At the local level, Dannenhoffer said community health organizations, including Architrave, are working together to improve health through projects like tobacco reduction, creation of a mental health court and helping patients with persistent mental illnesses get the services they need.

“Really my view of future health care would be that everybody has access to the care they need and everybody has a doctor that they know and they trust,” he said.

The panelists also spoke about ways to eliminate barriers to care for the poor, such as ensuring transportation from rural areas or ensuring patients can get different types of health care in the same location. Parazoo said Umpqua Community Health Care Center’s goal is to provide all the services patients need — whether primary care, addiction treatment or dental health care — together in one place. “It’s not just about primary care. Everything that’s happening in a patient’s life is related,” Parazoo said.

Holland said the Community Health Alliance plans to become the first mental health agency in the state to provide dental screening on-site. They also plan to work with United Community Action Network on providing housing for patients who need it.

Are we too friendly toward street people? (Generous to a fault?)

By Jim Moore of the Daily Courier

Is it possible to be too generous? Do the various charitable services such as soup kitchens, free clothing and shelter that are available in Grants Pass attract undesirable characters to town and keep them here? Depends on who you ask. "They know we're an easy mark," says City Councilor Jim Williams, one of several civic leaders who believes that the cities panoply of social services is a magnet for street people. "It's amazing how the word gets around."
Carl Wilson, the owner and general manager of KAJO/KLDR Radio, agrees. Wilson, who was recently elected to the state Legislature, is also a member of the Gospel Rescue Mission board of directors.

"They have an intel network that would make the military blush," he says of transients.

Carl Raskin owns a business called Elegance on Sixth Street in the heart of downtown and has had plenty of brushes with street people over the years. He also volunteers every Monday at the St. Vincent de Paul dining hall, which is located on Southeast Seventh Street in downtown and is a busy place during meal times.

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Raskin believes transients are aware of the services that are available in Grants Pass before they get here. "We treat them pretty good and they know that," he says.

And just how do they know that? "It's a communication thing. It's passed along," he says.

City Council President Dan DeYoung echoes the sentiment, although he's not sure of the mechanics of it.

"I don't know whether there is something on social media or somewhere," he says.

DeYoung says he recently spoke to a man who was sleeping in a large trash bin. "He said he picked Grants Pass because everybody here is very friendly and giving."

As much as those four men can read the pulse of the town, there are others equally in tune who have a different perspective. Grants Pass police Lt. Todd Moran says an informal survey conducted by city police in 2012 determined that the availability of services does not attract transients to town.

Officers spoke to 25 men and women ages 19 to 70, none of whom had a permanent residence or even any shelter they could depend on.

The purpose of the survey was to determine the reasons people were on the streets so that officers could guide them to appropriate services. "The ones we contacted had some reason for being here," Moran says. "The survey fleshed out that pretty much everybody had family here or had a job that fell through."

City Councilor Mark Gatlin says most of the people using services are local homeless people who need help. "I don't have a feeling that the services are attracting folks," Gatlin says.

Former Grants Pass Mayor Mike Murphy agrees with Moran and Gatlin. He has visited other cities in the country and sees transients and street people wherever he goes. "We are not the mecca for (street people)," Murphy says.

Perhaps a more pertinent question, some civic leaders suggest, is whether street people stay because of the benevolence of humanitarian organizations such as St. Vincent de Paul, the Gospel Rescue Mission and the ROC food pantry, to name just a few.

That question is relevant in light of budget cuts in June 2012 that forced widespread layoffs in the Josephine County Sheriff's Office.

Jail staff was reduced and many inmates were released — 39 in one day alone. In addition, the Sheriff's Office had to reduce the jail inmate population to 60 from 150 and nearly all misdemeanor crimes in Grants Pass resulted only in citations, which were frequently ignored.

That led to almost daily confrontations between street people, downtown merchants and shoppers.

In response, the city leased jail beds and police were able to lock up at least some suspects. The numbers of
confrontations and the sheer number of street people in downtown was reduced, but many people believe the overall number of street people hasn't declined.

"When they realize they can come here and get food on a regular basis and clothing on a regular basis, they have no reason to leave," says Wilson, who was recently elected to the House District 3, a position he held from 1998 to 2003. "My concern is that we are so generous to a fault in this community that we just keep people here."

Jack Smith, who owns the iconic Blind George's News Stand on G Street, says he frequently sees local residents giving cash to panhandler's downtown. "People are giving them money and people are giving them free food. Why should they go anywhere?" Smith says.

"I'm all for helping people out, but I wonder if we're helping the right people," DeYoung says. Rather than destitute, needy people on the streets, he sees people who are living their preferred lifestyle, hanging out downtown and using the city's various services.

Meanwhile, Wilson believes some organizations should stick to feeding people and not hand out clothing.

"I've got great concerns about some of the charities that are supposed to give out food but give out food and clothing," he said.

According to Wilson, street people wear the clothes until they reek, then they get new clothes, undress in public and leave filthy clothes lying around.

Last summer Wilson said he walked through the community collecting discarded, filthy clothes.

"I speak as a member of the Gospel Rescue Mission board and I have to filter my words," Wilson said.

The Gospel Rescue Mission is a structured, Christian-based homeless shelter at the corner of G and Foundry streets near downtown. It has one residence hall for men, and a separate one, called the Fikso Family Center, for women and children. The mission is not a government agency. If residents don't abide by the rules, they must leave and don't receive any services.

Meanwhile, Kelly Wessels, the chief operating officer of United Community Action Network, fears that negativity swirling around the issue distracts from the bigger picture. UCAN aids the homeless and others who are down on their luck, such as veterans, who often use the soup kitchens and other services in town.

Not all street people are homeless. Not all homeless people are transients.

"It's the transients and street people, they are the ones causing problems," Wessels said. "That same population is not necessarily homeless. They are just hanging out causing trouble."

Wilson concurs. In fact, he has referred to the trouble makers as "professional vagrants." Williams, DeYoung's colleague on the City Council, agrees.

Wessels said she is proud that Grants Pass is willing to help out the needy. Homelessness, poverty, mental illness and substance abuse are problems nationwide. Said Wessels, "We still want to work on the problem on a local level."

**More than 900 homeless in county**

Street people and the homeless are not interchangeable terms. Meanwhile, Grants Pass police estimate a small minority of troublemakers cause most of the problems associated with street people.

Regardless, what is often overlooked is the sheer number of homeless people in Josephine County.

The United Community Action Network began its effort to count homeless in the county in 2007. That year the total was 326. It jumped to 802 in 2008 (most likely in conjunction with the beginning of the Great Recession) and has hovered in that neighborhood since.

**The UCAN Homeless Counts**

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Homeless couple picks up trash, helps out at soup kitchen (Generous to a fault?)

By Melissa McRobbie of the Daily Courier

"Pack it in, pack it out," says Hugh Barnard, who came to Grants Pass six months ago with his wife, Grace.

The two are homeless but aren't part of the "problem" population that draws complaints from downtown merchants and others. They keep to themselves, camping out on a plot of land outside the city limits near Interstate 5 with their dog Eddie Munster, whom they adopted after someone tossed him out a car window in east Grants Pass.

They cook with propane, avoiding open burns. They clean up their trash. They read murder mysteries in their spare time.

The couple spends their weekdays helping out at the St. Vincent de Paul dining hall on Seventh Street, assisting with operations and stepping in to clean up when the janitor can't make it. Patricia Kissinger, who runs the soup kitchen, calls them "the biggest help I've ever had."

The Barnards eat at the kitchen, too, and said it's important to them to give back. They've lived all over the country, and Hugh, 52, said he used to have a good job and a condo on the beach in Florida. When that job ended and finances got tight, Hugh and Grace decided to walk the Lewis and Clark Trail, and eventually ended up here.

Asked what drew them to Grants Pass, Hugh replied with a laugh, "The climate."

The winters here are milder than in Topeka, Kan., where they lived for a while along the Kansas River, which would occasionally freeze over. The Barnards love the outdoors, and prefer the freedom of camping out to seeking shelter at the Gospel Rescue Mission, which requires residents to attend chapel, refrain from smoking, drinking and drugs, follow a strict schedule and abide by other rules.

Hugh said he doesn't mind the drug-and-alcohol rule, but that he doesn't like "forced religion" and is unwilling to be separated from his wife — men and women are housed separately at the Mission. He said he would like to get a job but that for now, he and Grace, who is 47, collect small amounts of income where they can.

"We don't fly no signs at Walmart, we don't panhandle. We collect cans," he said, noting that it takes 20 cans to make $1.

Hugh and Grace say they go out of their way not to be a burden to anyone or leave a mess. They even sometimes clean up after other homeless people. They were the same way in Topeka, according to Topeka police Sgt. Byron Endsley.
"We had a pretty big homeless camp down on the river here that was causing a bit of an issue," he said.
Under pressure from the city, many of them cleared out, leaving behind "mountains and mountains of trash,"
Endsley said. Hugh and another man cleaned it all up, filling about 20 trash bags. "I named him 'mayor of the
river' because he took care of it," Endsley said.

Hugh said he and Grace even planted tulips one year. The couple's campsite was "spotless" and they had no
run-ins with police in Topeka, Endsley said. Hugh, an Army veteran, said he and his wife are "geared up for
winter" but that their life is not without challenges. "You've always got to look over your shoulder," he said.
He doesn't feel threatened by fellow street people; what he's worried about is people who don't like the
homeless. He said homelessness is an issue everywhere. "It's a nationwide problem, it's not just here," he
said.

Key GP social service providers
● Choices Counseling Center: Drug and alcohol treatment
● Dorcas Ministries: Food pantry, clothing
● Edgewater Christian Fellowship: Provides warming center once a week during cold-weather months
● Gospel Rescue Mission: Men's shelter, women's shelter, hot meals and showers, social services
● Homeless Oregon Pet Project: Free vaccinations and other services for cats and dogs
● JOE's Place (Jesus Over Everything): Mobile outreach to youths, including hot meals
● HUD (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development): Housing assistance
● Options: Mental health services
● Oregon Department of Human Services: Various programs
● Salvation Army: Food pantry, social services
● St. Vincent de Paul: Dining hall, social services, clothing
● The ROC (Reaching Our Community): Food pantry, clothing
● United Community Action Network: Housing assistance, food, Head Start, homelessness prevention
● Newman United Methodist Church: Food pantry

Friday, December 12, 2014

Service groups lend hand to those in need (Generous to a fault?)

By Melissa McRobbie of the Daily Courier

In Grants Pass, a town that prides itself on its generous spirit, people come together to help those who have
hit hard times.

When the community learned the St. Vincent de Paul dining hall was short on funds recently, donations
poured in. When Si Casa Xpress employee Juan Granados-Gonzales was seriously injured by a driver fleeing
from police in November, strangers held a spaghetti feed and raised money for his family. In July the
community raised more than $25,000 in just four days to help the family of a 2-year-old girl who drowned
during a trip in Southern California.

Grants Pass has soup kitchens and food pantries, shelter beds and clothing giveaways, free pet food and
vaccinations, and programs to help people get their lives back on track. Low-income and homeless residents
can get help with food, housing and job assistance; drug and alcohol treatment; mental health services;
medical care; help for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence-related; laundry vouchers and more.

Service providers say most of their clients are hard-working people trapped in difficult circumstances, but
some others say that offering so many services also attracts transients to the area, including the core group of
"problem" street people who draw complaints about safety issues, nuisance crimes and blight.
Perhaps the most visible organization serving the homeless — and the target of the most complaints from merchants — is the St. Vincent de Paul dining hall on Seventh Street near M Street, which serves breakfast and lunch on weekdays to as many as 200 people. Nearby businesses have complained about some of the clientele causing problems, including loitering, littering, drug use, trespassing and theft.

Patricia Kissinger, the 74-year-old volunteer who runs the kitchen, tries to corral her clients toward the rear of the building and away from Seventh Street, where they are visible to passing traffic.

"They just don't like to see it," she said of motorists. "They think they're all rowdy and rotten … but they're not all bad."

Most of her clients aren't even living on the streets — Kissinger estimated that about 75 percent have a place to stay. They do, however, need the food assistance to make ends meet. On the first Tuesday of every month, the Homeless Oregon Pet Project sets up a mobile veterinary clinic in the St. Vincent's parking lot, offering free general exams, flea and tick control, de-worming, rabies shots and other vaccinations for dogs and cats.

St. Vincent de Paul also has a thrift store on H Street and an adjacent social services office that helps clients with utilities, rent, clothing, furniture and other assistance. St. Vincent council president Ranae Thornton said the social services office serves about 400 people each month, and estimated that 30 percent of them are homeless. The vast majority of her clients were "born and raised" in Josephine County, she said.

Help with housing can be found at the United Community Action Network (UCAN), which works with individuals and families to help them emerge from poverty and become self-sufficient. Its services include rent, mortgage and utility assistance, food and transportation.

**Shelter beds and youth services**

Temporary shelter is available at the Gospel Rescue Mission, a Christian organization that seeks to assist those willing to work to help themselves. The mission, located at G and Foundry streets, has a men's shelter that can house 78 people and an adjacent women's shelter that can accommodate 60 women and children. Guests start with a 30-day stay, and sometimes stay longer if they abide by the shelter's rules and are working to get a job or housing.

Residents are required to start their days at 5:30 a.m., attend chapel twice a day, complete their chores, work in exchange for the shelter they receive, and refrain from drinking, smoking and doing drugs.

"The mission is not designed to be a place to perpetuate an irresponsible lifestyle or a lifestyle of addiction," said Jim Brumbach, vice chairman of the mission's board. "It's a boot camp for people who want to get their lives together, get their family together … become a productive part of the community again."

There is a garden next to the mission, where nearly 10,000 pounds of fresh vegetables were harvested in 2013. There are also two commercial kitchens, which prepare about 6,000 meals a month. The organization has also begun processing food, some of which is packaged and then given to other service organizations.

The mission offers three meals a day to anyone in need, not just shelter residents, as well as free showers at designated times. It also operates a recycling center on Foundry Street and the Second Chance Thrift Store at Sixth and J streets.

Staff members say they often hear the gripe from street people that the Gospel Rescue Mission has too many rules. Some people don't like the mandatory chapel sessions, others want to be able to smoke cigarettes and some don't want to be separated from their significant others or their pets.

Brumbach said those who truly want to change their lives don't mind the rules. "This isn't meant to be mean, but it is meant to be serious about helping people get their stuff together," he said.

The mission connects residents to smoking-cessation programs, drug and alcohol treatment, medical and dental services and more. Although shelter residents are required to attend chapel and learn about Christianity, the mission serves people of all religions.

Women are generally more receptive to the structured environment than men — especially women who have children, said Wendy Davey, who is in charge of the women's shelter. "For the most part, the mothers are appreciative," she said.
The mission is the only regular shelter in town, but during the cold, rainy months, Edgewater Christian Fellowship opens up a warming center once a week on Tuesdays, and those who stay there get dinner and breakfast.

There is no shelter specifically for youths in Grants Pass. The Gospel Rescue Mission doesn't accept people under 18 unless they are with their mother. The Juvenile Justice Center had a shelter in addition to a detention area, but the facility was closed in 2012 due to budget cuts.

JOE's Place Ministries serves youths ages 12 to 23, providing food, hygiene products and clothing, as well as assistance with education and applying for jobs. JOE's — which stands for Jesus Over Everything — has been around for six years and offers mobile outreach on Wednesdays and Thursdays in Riverside Park, and on Fridays at River Valley Church's parking lot, serving hot meals and getting to know local youths.

Eventually, JOE's Place director Daron Williams would like to open a center where youths could get mentoring, life-skills training, counseling or just come inside out of the cold or the summer heat.

"There's not really a place in our community for just the youths," he said.

During summer, Williams will sometimes see young people who are just passing through the region, but most of the youths he serves are local. "I would say over 95 percent are from right here in Josephine County," he said.

Groceries

Adeline Mae Britton, 87, is one of the most dedicated volunteers at the ROC food pantry on Foundry Street. She's also a client. "I feel like this is my second house," she said with a smile.

She works hard at the ROC — which stands for Reaching Our Community — and then heads home, where she chops her own firewood, washes her clothes by hand, keeps house and prepares her meals with groceries from the food pantry.

The ROC's pantry is open two days a week, on Thursdays and Saturdays, and clients are allowed to pick up food once a week. The organization also offers home deliveries, making sure shut-ins have enough to eat. In addition, those in need of clothing can come pick up a bag or two of apparel.

ROC director Ruth Johnsen said the food pantry has a "campers' corner," but most of the people ROC serves have a home. She draws a distinct line between the hard-working poor who constitute the majority of her clients and the street people who cause disturbances and other problems. She estimated that there are only 20 or 30 people in the latter group.

Most of the ROC's clients are on fixed incomes and struggle to pay the bills, she said. Many people need only short-term assistance, and stop coming to the pantry once they find steady work.

When that happens, Johnsen said, "We all celebrate, cheer them on, and out the door they go."

Some later return to make a donation, including a woman with children who got help at the ROC after fleeing an abusive relationship; she came back a couple of years later and donated $5,000. Many clients are embarrassed about seeking help, such as a family man who ended up at the food pantry in tears after he found himself in danger of losing his home.

"They are mortified to be in this spot," Johnsen said.

Visitors need to fill out paperwork, and the staff keeps records of who uses the ROC's services. In 2013, the ROC gave out 40,488 "servings" of groceries. More than 2,700 of those grocery giveaways were delivered to homebound seniors or families. The ROC is one of several food pantries that work with the Josephine County Food Bank to distribute food to people in need.
Early literacy mentor volunteer needed (RSVP)

By Rebecca de Greyt for the Daily Courier

Sponsored by the United Community Action Network, the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) matches the talents and experience of people 55 and older and channels them into volunteer work that supports public and nonprofit agencies, as well as health care facilities throughout Josephine County.

• STIPEND VOLUNTEER POSITION AVAILABLE. The Southern Oregon Education Service District is looking for an early literacy mentor.

The primary goals of this project and position are to expand the reach of evidence-based early literacy programs for children ages 0-6, build adult capacity to support children's early literacy, to increase the frequency and quality of time spent reading between adults and children, and to increase children's access to books, reading materials, and libraries.

The mentor will provide individual shared reading interventions with at-risk toddlers and preschoolers, develop and implement family literacy activities, including small group parent/child story times, and distribute books to families and child care providers.

Additionally the mentor will be a team leader for other volunteers conducting the Start Making a Reader Today (SMART) book sharing sessions. Approximately 70 percent of mentor activity will involve direct contact with children and families.

The remaining time will be spent in volunteer recruitment, team collaboration, training, planning, documentation and travel between sites. If you are interested, contact Rebecca de Greyt at 541-956-4474.

• BE A HELPING HAND DURING THIS HOLIDAY. Oak Lane Retirement is having a community Christmas bazaar this Saturday (Dec. 13) from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

To make this a successful event Oak Lane is in need of volunteers for the following positions: four volunteers to manage craft stations, four cookie and coffee hosts, and one greeter. There are two time slots you can sign up for — 10 a.m. to noon and from noon to 2 p.m. If you are interested in signing up please contact Rebecca de Greyt at 541-956-4474.

• BE APART OF UCAN’S MISSION. UCAN provides help with utility assistance, housing, weatherization, Head Start, Cover Oregon, senior health insurance, prescriptions, budgeting, case management and transportation. We also provide food to pantries and kitchens throughout Josephine County through our regional food banks.

Our case management team is looking for volunteers to go out in pairs and help with home inspections. They are in need of home inspectors on Tuesdays starting at 9 a.m. Volunteers would need to use their own vehicle and UCAN will reimburse mileage.

If you are interested, come to UCAN, 201 N.E. Eighth St., and fill out an RSVP volunteer application.
Charities seek seasonal donations of food, toys, clothing

By Ruth Longoria Kingsland of the Daily Courier

With all of the “nice” kids on Santa’s list this year, local Josephine County charities are scrambling to gather toys, clothing and food to supply the area’s many need families in need.

The Salvation Army’s Angel Giving Tree and the Josephine County Food Bank are both struggling, and organizers say they’re low on resources, but they’re trusting in the generosity of local folks to meet the need.

“There are a lot of good programs that need help this year, and helping everyone is only possible through all of the warm and generous hearts of people in the community,” said Felecia Pederson, who coordinates the Salvation Army’s community service programs with her husband and fellow-pastor, Colin Pederson.

For the past 10 years, the couple has organized the Angel Giving Tree, similar to the Christmas adopt-a-child program in the new holiday TV movie, “Paper Angels.”

The local Salvation Army program doesn’t specify a certain child or family unless the donor knows of a family in need, or asks for one.

People donate new toys and clothing at any of the 10 local businesses with Angel Giving Trees, or donation boxes. The items are given to families in need during a distribution day from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., on Wednesday at the organization’s church at 2545 Redwood Ave.

There is no advance registration and no proof of income necessary to receive toys or clothing on that day. But, it is first-come-first-served, so there’s no guarantee items will be available by the end of the day, Felicia Pederson warned.

Parents should bring their children’s names and ages, as well as proof of address. That’s all that’s required. “Normally, if (families are) coming to us they’re in a hard situation,” Pederson said.

“Most of the people who ask for help at Christmas are really in need.”

Last year, 500 local children received toys and clothing through the Angel Giving Tree.

In addition to dropping off new toys or clothing at local participating businesses, an online site to donate is available at www.salvationarmy.christmas/cs.
The Salvation Army also provides food to families at the holidays and throughout the year, and though there is always a need for food to fill the organization’s shelves, it’s the toys and clothing that’s needed for Wednesday’s event, Pederson said.

- **FOOD BANK.** Over at the Josephine County Food Bank, it’s food and cash that are in short supply.

The recent winter donation request mailing to residents has generated about $45,000 in donations so far, but that only provides for about 20 percent of the food bank’s annual budget, and it’s substantially shy of donations in previous years, said Toni Drew, program coordinator at the food bank.

“It’s only about 60 percent of what we normally get,” she added.

The food bank provides food for about 12,000 people every month, Drew said, adding that’s about 2.5 million pounds of food a year.

Last week’s local concert fundraiser, Fighting Hunger with Harmony at River Valley Church, brought in about 900 pounds of food and more than $500 in cash donations, according to Dennis Roler, a member of the food bank’s Raptor Creek Steering Committee.

“We had a good turnout, about 200 to 300 people came and brought donations,” Roler said.

However, the need is great at the food bank, so it’s hoped the generosity of the public continues through the holidays and beyond, he added.

Food is always appreciated, but cash donations are preferred. Through the organization’s partner, the Oregon Food Bank in Portland, the food bank is able to purchase five pounds of food for every dollar donated, Drew said.

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**Saturday, December 13, 2014**

**Most of the homeless, low-income residents are from the area**

Staff and volunteers who serve Grants Pass' homeless and low-income population say their clientele is overwhelmingly from Josephine County.

Representatives from United Community Action Network, JOE's Place, Reaching Our Community, St. Vincent de Paul, Gospel Rescue Mission, Dorcas and other organizations all said the vast majority of the people they assist are locals.

Grants Pass is along the Interstate 5 corridor, and some transients are just passing through, or decide they like it here and stay after making a stopover in town.

But local service providers estimated that those outsiders constitute 5 to 25 percent of their clientele.

Steve Berg, vice president for programs and policy at the National Alliance to End Homelessness, said he has not seen evidence in either large cities or small towns that offering services to low-income and homeless people attracts large numbers of transients to the area.

"I would say every place we look at, it's sort of similar in terms of how many people come from somewhere outside of the region. It's always somewhere around 20 percent of the homeless people were somewhere else a year ago," Berg said.
Grants Pass police Lt. Todd Moran said police did a survey in 2010 in which local homeless people were asked about their circumstances and why they were here.

"Most of them were from the area or had family in the area," he said.

No simple solution to street people issue

By Melissa McRobbie of the Daily Courier

Social service providers in Grants Pass are quick to distinguish between law-abiding residents who have hit hard times — a group they say makes up most of their clients — and the "problem" street people who sleep behind businesses, damage public property, litter, shoplift and occasionally commit more serious crimes.

But what about that "problem" group — the people who are uninterested in getting off the streets or unable to do so because of mental illness, addiction or other circumstances? Is it a solution to keep adding jail beds and ramping up the pressure from police? What about moving all of the service providers away from downtown so transients will hang out elsewhere?

Grants Pass Department of Public Safety Director Bill Landis, who refers to the troublemakers as the "5 percent committing the crime and causing 95 percent of the problem," said things have gotten better downtown and at other "hot spots" in the past year and a half, during which time the city started renting jail beds and police began intensifying their focus on nuisance crimes.

The city, which does not have its own lockup, started renting jail beds from Josephine County in August 2013, after budget cuts in 2012 decimated the sheriff's staff and slashed jail operations. In the six months before the jail-bed contract took effect, police arrested 1,536 people and issued 501 citations. In the following six months, police made 1,466 arrests and issued just 110 citations.

Having a place to lock people up made a difference — fewer citations were issued because people could be jailed for low-level crimes instead of ticketed and released. The fact that overall arrests also declined shows that having the jail beds served as a deterrent, Landis believes.

Even with the drop in arrests, police are still dealing with street people who regularly commit offenses significant enough to merit a trip to the jail but not serious enough to keep them there.

Kelly Wessels, chief operating officer at United Community Action Network, or UCAN, agrees that having a healthy public safety system would help with the chronic lawbreakers who cycle in and out of jail.

"You can keep arresting them, but if you can't keep them, what's the point? It's unfortunate for law enforcement because they try to do everything they can with what they have to work with, but if our community doesn't support and provide more resources for them to address the problem, then their hands are tied," Wessels said.

One jail regular has been arrested 29 times and cited 88 times since July 2012, when the budget cuts took effect.
During that time, that same man has had a total of 150 contacts with police — some for passing out in public places — and has had 13 warrants issued for his arrest.

A project is in the works to open a “sobering center” at a warehouse on Foundry Street that will be just what it sounds like — a place for people under the influence of alcohol or drugs to sober up. The center will also refer those people to drug and alcohol counseling and other services.

Getting at the bigger issue

Steve Berg at the National Alliance to End Homelessness says a law enforcement emphasis won’t solve the broader issue of people living on the streets.

“Policing approaches to these problems never seem to have any long-term impact,” said Berg, who is the organization’s vice president for programs and policy.

He and Wessels both believe that getting people into housing needs to be the first step.

“You can’t look for a job and stay clean, and look for all the other things that we take for granted, if you don’t have stable housing,” Wessels said. “It just doesn’t happen. You are managing crisis at its highest level, literally moment to moment.”

Among other services, UCAN helps people get or keep their housing, sometimes by providing help with rent and utility bills. Wessels said Grants Pass is in dire need of more affordable housing.

Berg said providing permanent housing with supportive services is key.

“When people have their own place, even if it’s a very modest place, they tend to hang out there,” Berg said. “They don’t get arrested nearly as much, they don’t go to the hospital nearly as much, so it can end up saving the community a lot of money.”

Wessels said another piece of the puzzle is jobs. Grants Pass needs more industry coming into the area that can provide full-time, permanent employment. For many locals who are underemployed, an unexpected car repair or a sick child can set them back and result in a struggle to pay the rent, she said.

Thoughts on the present

In the short term, there are a variety of opinions about what to do to make Grants Pass safer and cleaner right now.

Grants Pass City Councilor Mark Gatlin said the situation would be improved if local services would “self-police” by not serving troublemakers. He thinks that if an individual causes problems at one location, he or she should be banned from all charitable facilities.

“That refusal of services needs to be honored by all other services,” Gatlin said. “If we could do that we could solve a lot of things by getting rid of those folks causing the problems.”

Mayor Darin Fowler lauded JOE’s Place, a nonprofit ministry serving teens and young adults, for its decision to serve food only to youths.

“We saw some significant changes in how JOE’s Place operates. It stopped feeding the adults who were frightening people,” Fowler said.

City Councilor Jim Williams and Council President Dan DeYoung would like to see the St. Vincent de Paul dining hall, located on Seventh Street near its intersection with M Street, be relocated away from downtown.

“I really think the key is having St. Vincent de Paul move,” DeYoung said.

Wessels said she would like to see all services for homeless and low-income residents be consolidated in one place rather than having them spread out all over town. A multi-service center would make things easier for both providers and their clients.
"We could get more done together and faster, hopefully helping that person progress a little more quickly," she said.

One of the things Wessels likes about Grants Pass is that small businesses, nonprofits and other entities work together to address problems. That also needs to happen in addressing the issues of problem street people and homelessness in general, she said.

"We have a problem here, and we still need to come back to the table and work collaboratively," she said. "It isn't just a merchants’ problem, it’s a problem that belongs to the community, and the community needs to come to the table to solve it."

She added, "I go downtown, I want it to be nice just like everyone else."

Because of the nuisance issues, those who work or volunteer at local nonprofits and charities have taken heat from business owners and others.

Ranae Thornton, president of the St. Vincent de Paul Council, said the pushback hasn't distracted her from her mission.

"I feel that there will always be the poor, and I feel that it's our service to take care of those people who aren't able to take care of themselves for whatever reason, and there's a whole variety of reasons for why people are in the situations they're in," she said.

Ruth Johnsen at the ROC food pantry, is also undeterred.

"We are all here because we're passionate about what we're doing," she said. "We don't think anyone should be hungry."

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**Sunday, December 14, 2014**

**Volunteer Opportunities: Help is needed in many areas**

In spite of all the negative publicity, Cover Oregon remains a lifeline for those who need health insurance but are not financially able to provide it for themselves or their families.

Volunteers are needed to assist clients with the information and application process, answering questions and referring clients to other services for which they may qualify. The need is great but the rewards are priceless. Volunteers receive mandatory online training followed by personal instruction. Unless otherwise indicated, for this and all the following volunteer stations contact Karen at 541-492-3917 or karen.scavuzzo@ucancap.org

Senior Health Insurance Benefits Assistance is looking for volunteers 55 or older to guide retirees, or those about to retire, through the Medicare benefits coverage available. The on-going program offers free training by SHIBA field officers as well as mentoring by local team members.
RSVP is in need of 55 or older administrative assistants at the United Community Action Network office, 280 Kenneth Ford Drive, Roseburg. Duties include data entry, filing and processing new volunteer applications Monday through Friday, 12-16 hours a week.

Food pantry and dining sites are looking for volunteers to help distribute food, serve meals or deliver meals to the homebound. There are sites throughout the county, so call for information on the one closest to you.

Foster Grandparent Program needs volunteers to help children in public schools and in non-profit children’s facilities gain basic skills in reading, critical thinking and positive behavior. Volunteers must be 55 or older, will receive training and must be willing to commit 15 hours a week. Tax-free stipend, mileage reimbursement and training are available. Call Seth at 541-492-3927 for details.

Manor House Memory Community wants volunteers three hours a month to stuff envelopes with the facility’s newsletter/calendar. One volunteer is needed on Fridays to accompany staff and residents from 10 to noon on a drive-thru at Wildlife Safari. Volunteers are being recruited to share stories, dances, recipes or artifacts from their country for 30 minutes once a month during the facility’s monthly cultural event. Jamaica and China will be the first two countries to be showcased.

Random acts of kindness, like sending a card or visiting the residents, are always encouraged. Call Sandy at 541-464-5600 for details.

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Sun\_day, December 14, 2014

Learn to recognize when seniors need help

By Rebecca de Greyt for the Daily Courier

Sponsored by the United Community Action Network, the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) matches the talents and experience of people 55 and older and channels them into volunteer work that supports public and nonprofit agencies, as well as health care facilities throughout Josephine County.

**GATEKEEPER TRAINING AVAILABLE.** Have you ever sensed that a person who was elderly or disabled was having difficulties managing on their own, and you suspected that they needed more help then you could give but you did not want to invade their privacy?

The Gatekeeper program is here in Josephine County to help train you and your staff/volunteers/club members. A trainer will come to you and your group and instruct you on how to recognize warning signs and red flags that indicate an older adult or adult with disabilities may need some help.

The Gatekeeper trainer will provide you with a number to call to report your concerns, and the state Aging and Disability Resource Connection (ADRC) will offer support and services as appropriate to each situation.

Training can be tailored to the specifics of your group and can be 15 to 30 minutes or shorter (depends on audience, agenda and questions). Please Call Rebecca de Greyt 541-956-4474 to set up a Gatekeeper presentation.
CALLOUT FOR CHRISTMAS EVE DINNER VOLUNTEERS. A Christmas Eve dinner is going to be held for people who are in need at the Rogue Valley Community Church, 216 N.E. C St., from 1:30 to 5 p.m. Volunteers are needed for greeting, cooking, serving, decorating, and cleanup. If you would like to sign up to volunteer and spread some Christmas cheer, please contact Teona Mora at 541-479-2356. If you are unable to donate some of your time, please think about donating the following: food, utensils, paper plates, cups, napkins, etc.

STIPEND VOLUNTEER POSITION AVAILABLE. The Southern Oregon Education Service District is looking for an early literacy mentor.

The primary goals of this project and position are to expand the reach of evidence-based early literacy programs for children ages 0-6, build adult capacity to support children's early literacy, to increase the frequency and quality of time spent reading between adults and children, and to increase children's access to books, reading materials, and libraries. The mentor will provide individual shared reading interventions with at-risk toddlers and preschoolers, develop and implement family literacy activities, including small group parent/child story times, and distribute books to families and child care providers.

Additionally the mentor will be a team leader for other volunteers conducting the Start Making a Reader Today (SMART) book sharing sessions. Approximately 70 percent of mentor activity will involve direct contact with children and families.

The remaining time will be spent in volunteer recruitment, team collaboration, training, planning, documentation and travel between sites. If you are interested, contact Rebecca de Greyt at 541-956-4474.

Friday, December 19, 2014

Events set to remember homeless

The fifth Annual observance of Homeless Person's Memorial Day has three events to acknowledge the challenges of those who are without a place to live and call home.

Sponsored by the Josephine County Homelessness Task Force, the event honors those who are homeless and who have been injured, harmed or died due to lack of shelter. The timing is meant to coincide with the winter solstice, Dec. 21, the longest night of the year, according to a news release from the United Community Action Network.

"The homeless face exposure to the elements, violence, lack of medical care, preventable diseases and more," UCAN Executive Director Kelly Wessels said in the news release.

The public is invited to all three events.

• A Memorial Tree ribbon tying event is set for today at 4 p.m. at the UCAN office, 201 N.E. Eighth St.
• A remembrance service is set for Sunday at 9 a.m. at Immanuel United Methodist Church, 200 W. Watkins St. in Cave Junction.
• A candlelight vigil is set for Sunday from 4 to 5 p.m. at Abundant Life Spiritual Center, 598-C N.E. E St. in Grants Pass.

On Jan. 28, the Josephine County Homelessness Task Force will conduct its annual "Point In Time" census of the local homeless population. The event is part of a statewide effort. The annual outreach effort to count the number of homeless in the county is critical in supplying the statistics to Oregon Housing and Community Services, to ensure appropriate funding is allocated to communities, according to Wessels. An accurate count raises awareness, as well as funding, and helps tell the story of many working families today who are experiencing homelessness, she added.
UCAN's mission is to create solutions to poverty and improve lives in the community through the operation of its service programs, including the Josephine County Food Bank, Adult and Child Care Food Program, Case Management-Housing and Emergency Support, weatherization and transportation.

Find out more about UCAN by logging on to www.ucancap.org. Wessels can be reached at 541-956-4050 or kelly.wessels@ucancap.org.

Saturday, December 20, 2014

Gardening a way to help those in need (In the Garden)

By David James for the Daily Courier


A few share the opinion that our town attracts the homeless because of the great services we offer them, such as food and shelter. The word is out: "Come to Grants Pass, It's the Climate."

One solution: If we don't feed them, the "problem" will just go away to another town.

On the other side of the coin are the individuals and organizations that offer food, clothing and even temporary housing to the downtrodden, trying to offer a little hope to their lives.

It's not surprising that most every community the size of Grants Pass and larger offers similar services. The St. Vincent dePaul Society, which operates food kitchens across America, has one here in Grants Pass and in Medford, offering a free meal five days a week.

Over the years, I've talked to friends in other states and towns concerning the homeless problem and they all seem to feel their community attracts "them" because of services offered. One woman from Hawaii shared stories of how homeless people ended up on the island due to so-called friends or family on the mainland paying for a one-way flight. Guess it's hard to turn down a free trip to Hawaii.

Homelessness is a subject that is easy to complain about, but too complex to easily solve. Believe it or not, one part of a solution can be gardening.

Longtime readers of this column will recognize Plant A Row. The program began on a national level in 1995, led by the Garden Writers of America. The goal: to encourage gardeners to grow a little extra and donate it to their local food banks. Nineteen years later, more than 20 million pounds of produce have been grown and donated by America's gardeners.

On a local level, the PAR movement has taken off on its own over the past 19 years, while homelessness has grown as well. In early 1996 (Feb. 29), I wrote a gardening column describing the new PAR program along with a brief interview with Chris Stenger, who was then the Outreach Coordinator at the Gospel Rescue Mission.

Showing great interest in receiving more homegrown vegetable donations to help with meals, he remarked that "last month the mission served more than 1,500 meals, mostly to people in their mid-20s and a majority were Josephine County residents."

Years later, the description of the people is pretty much the same, but the increase in service numbers jumps...
out. Today, the mission serves 7,000 meals a month.

Over the years, local PAR activities grew, as individual gardeners and gardening groups united to join the cause. As a community, we have come a long way in feeding our hungry.

This past year in Josephine County, more than 112,000 pounds of fruit and produce were grown, harvested and fed to local people in need, and the everyday gardener, like you and me, grew nearly half of the total.

The Josephine County Food Bank and the Gospel Rescue Mission have taken gardening to the next level, growing produce for their own use and distribution.

The Food Bank's Raptor Creek Gardens has produced more than 180,000 pounds of vegetables over the past four years. That's a value more than $270,000! Nice self-generated donation.

Drive by the Gospel Rescue Mission and you'll see the raised beds, which annually produce around 8,000 pounds of produce.

Brian Bouteller, the mission's men's coordinator who oversees the garden, described the hundreds of salads harvested nearly year 'round.

"The garden is a practical and positive way to implement change," he said, describing activities including planting, watering, weeding, harvesting and properly preparing the food.

Another project involved nearly 10,000 pounds of corn, which was picked by mission residents and donated by Ft. Vannoy Farms. The corn was cleaned, processed and frozen by mission residents and used for meals as well as distribution in food bags at the Reaching Our Community Food pantry, which provides emergency food boxes twice a week.

While not a part of Josephine County's PAR total, a five-star salute goes out to members of the Rogue River Access Food Garden, which grew and donated just over 6,000 pounds of produce this year. Nice job, especially since it was all distributed to those in need living in the Rogue River area.

As we approach a new calendar year, consider making PAR a part of your upcoming garden plan. Large gardens and small gardens can all come together for a community harvest.

There's good in helping others.

Wednesday, December 24, 2014

Work on new warehouse on track to finish in March

Construction of the Josephine County Food Bank’s new warehouse on the Raptor Creek Farm is on schedule and on budget. Adroit Construction of Ashland is expected to complete the warehouse in March. At 10,000 square feet, it's about as large as the warehouse it will replace. "It was important for us to keep that footprint" explains Sam Engel, new manager of the food bank. "We wanted to make sure Oregon Farmland stays Oregon farmland."

Raptor Creek Farm, at 3658 Upper River Road west of Grants Pass, used to be the Sunnybrook Hop Farm. The roof of the new warehouse is modeled after an old baling building that stood on the property before 8 1/2 inches of snow took it down two years ago.

The food bank spent four years raising $1.7 million to build the new warehouse, with a decisive assist from the Grants Pass Rotary Club and its annual Duck Derby fundraiser. Many other organizations also helped, along with the state through a large matching grant. The grand opening is set for the first week of April. Meanwhile, the food bank is leasing a 4,500-square-foot warehouse on M Street in Grants Pass.
Each year, the nonprofit group moves some 2.5 million pounds of food to feed thousands of families and others in need. "We want to be able to increase our emphasis on fresh, local food to try and really promote community health," Engel says.

The food bank and its volunteers produce about 25 tons of fruits and vegetables annually on the 2.5 acres currently under cultivation at the 18-acre Raptor Creek Farm. Additional fresh food comes from the Oregon Food Bank and food donated by other farms, grocery stores and backyard gardeners.

**Familiar face at local food bank**

By Howard Huntington of the Daily Courier

"Every day, you are encountering a lot more people living in hunger than you would ever guess," says Sam Engel, new manager of the Josephine County Food Bank. "They might work at the store you're shopping at. They might pump your gas.

"There are a lot different faces of hunger and poverty. People don't want you to know they're hungry."

Engel started with the food bank seven years ago, through Americorps Volunteers in Service to America. As manager, he supervises a tiny paid staff of two and hundreds of volunteers who each month feed 12,000 people, including 3,500 children, in need in Josephine County.

Those people have nearly doubled in number since Engel came aboard. The increasing presence of street people in Grants Pass has some others questioning the wisdom of accommodating them with free meals.

"I don't think you could say the homeless are indulged," Engel says. "We distribute food to anybody who says they're hungry. A very, very small percentage of the people who receive emergency food boxes are homeless.

"And a lot of that is because of the amount of fresh and frozen produce. You can't really use a frozen chicken very effectively when you're homeless."

Engel, 31, and his wife, Maggie, live in Grants Pass and have three children.

"He has really grown with the food bank," says Mike Fieldman, who oversees the program as executive director for the United Community Action Network, which offers social services in both Josephine and Douglas counties. With Engel's experience, "I'm feeling very comfortable with him being able to step into the leadership. It should be a pretty seamless transition," Fieldman added.

Engel was second-in-command before Susan Scheufele retired as manager.

"She has just really built the support for the food bank and for the Raptor Creek Farm project," Fieldman says. "She really has been the driving force for obtaining the funding and putting together the resources to build our new warehouse. I can honestly say, if it hadn't been for her efforts, it wouldn't have happened."
Partnership between ODFW and UCAN yields fish for food bank

Fish benefits food bank

A partnership between the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Umpqua Fishermen’s Association provided United Community Action Network Food Bank with 1,200 pounds of fresh fish this December. The program started in 2011 when the two groups offered to donate coho salmon from the annual reproduction project at the Galesville Dam. That year, 528 pounds of usable meat were donated from 33 coho salmon.

Retired Roseburg VA worker says volunteering is for her health

Meet Dr. Jeanne Rogness. Originally from Buffalo, New York, Rogness arrived in Roseburg sight unseen in 1974 after residing for a short time in Los Angeles. The move north was a result of a fortuitous opening at the Roseburg Veterans Affairs Medical Center for a mental health practitioner. After a 25-year career, Rogness retired from the VA in 1997, but definitely not to sit home and relax.

A life-long learner and educator, Rogness holds a doctorate in counseling psychology, a master’s degree in mental health nursing and a bachelor’s in education. She had the privilege of being able to teach on five continents and have students from Germany, Poland and Korea stay with her to study English. Whether she’s teaching in the classroom or the community, Rogness strongly believes in the value of education. Rogness also believes in volunteering and has a heart for veterans.

Was there something pivotal that pushed you to take steps to be healthier?
I was experiencing some health issues and knew that getting into shape was part of the answer. I have had hip, knee and shoulder replacements and a pacemaker. I needed the physical activity. I work out at the Downtown Fitness Center three times a week and walk 25 minutes a day the other four days. I’m not concerned so much with the distance, just getting in the time.

Volunteering is part of your overall healthy lifestyle. How did you get started?

Well, someone asked and I said, “Sure.” At the time I didn’t really know exactly what I was saying, “Sure,” to! With my previous experience working at the Roseburg VA, it seemed a natural place to start. At the VA I volunteered as an ambassador and escort. I also volunteered for a number of years with (United Community Action Network’s) prescription program.

I really grew up volunteering, too. I think I was only in the third or fourth grade and I would stay after school to help the teachers.

How did you connect with Mercy’s Volunteer Veteran Visitation Program?

Well, someone asked and I said, “Sure!” Again, I wasn’t too sure what all would be involved with Mercy’s program, but helping veterans is important to me. As a veteran myself, I was a member of the Army Reserves Nurse Corps for 20 years, I grew up really believing in the value of service.

As I learned more about the program, I thought it was great that I would have the opportunity to recognize and honor veterans for their service during an especially difficult time for them. Veteran volunteers present each hospitalized veteran at Mercy with a small flag, thank them for their service and spend some time talking with them about our shared military experience.

We also provide them with a packet of information about VA benefits. Veterans don’t always know about their benefits and the eligibility requirements.

We also place a small flag outside their room to honor them and let Mercy’s staff know that the patient is also a veteran. It’s an important reminder for all of us of their sacrifice.

What else has helped you stay healthy?

Travel has been a big part of my life. It changes how you view yourself and the world. I discovered early on that if you spent a small amount of time learning a few words of the language of the country you are visiting, words like please and thank you, it helps connect you with other people in a unique way. It also almost always gets you a smile!

I also think that spirituality, meditation and prayer are so important to good health. Our minds and our souls need to be refreshed and replenished regularly. I practice daily meditation and spend about 40-50 minutes every day in prayer. I am a firm believer in the power of prayer, and think it’s even in my DNA!

If there was one person you could invite to dinner, who would that be?
Hilary Clinton. I think she’s a dynamic woman in politics in the world right now. She’s bright and articulate and has a heart for the middle class and for women. I’d ask her if she’s going to run for president!

Other thoughts?

While I don’t feel I have had profound reasons for how I ended up in a mental health field working with veterans, or why I teach or volunteer, I do think there’s something to simply saying, “Sure,” when you are asked. Say “Yes,” and get the details later. You won’t regret it.

What are you reading right now?

I am a voracious reader. My goal this year was to read all of the Pearl S. Buck novels by the end of the year. I’m currently finishing “The Dragon Seed.”