

## Neighbors Helping Neighbors Quarterly: Summer 2017



# Emergency Response to a Tragic Fire

On March 27, a fire swept a residential building two blocks from St. Vincent de Paul's West Oakland campus, displacing roughly 50 men, women, and children. Two managers, Muna Texier and Ryan Uyehara, and Executive Director Blase Bova, met to strategize a way to provide emergency help to the community. They devised a plan to house 22 residents of Project Pride, a supportive living agency located in a building



PHOTO COURTESY OF EAST BAY TIMES



damaged by the fire, which assists mothers in recovery and their children. Arrangements were also made with the City of Oakland to extend our Winter Shelter two additional weeks (through May 1st), to provide time for more persons displaced by the fire to find alternative permanent housing.

Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf wrote a proclamation recognizing SVdP for "living up to

its motto of 'neighbors helping neighbors' by giving shelter to 22 women and children", stating that her "appreciation for St. Vincent de Paul is truly unbounded".

James Leeper of the American Red Cross and one of the first responders on the scene expressed the necessity of SVdP's swift action:

"The American Red Cross can do a lot of things and we have a lot of capacity, but we can do very little without the partners that we work with. Organizations like SVdP make it possible for us to do our job. We have no place to put people. We have no shelter, so as soon as we need a shelter, we need a partner. And you guys are aces. SVdP took care of a particularly needy population right when they needed it and we are grateful for that."



## Service, Hope, and Opportunity at St. Vincent de Paul



Our daily lives at St. Vincent de Paul are filled with stories.

Some are success stories, like the graduates of our Kitchen of Champions culinary training program (one of whom spoke so eloquently at our Spring Fundraising Breakfast). Or former clients like Joseph and Brian, who are featured in this issue.

Some stories are dramatic and bittersweet, such as the tragic fire near our West Oakland campus, and our immediate and long term response to that fire, which provided shelter for men, women, and especially children who would have otherwise had nowhere to go.

But other stories are as varied as the hundreds of Vincentians, volunteers, and guests whom we see each day. Each of us has a story, of what brought us here, what keeps us coming back, and why we choose to be there for someone who needs us. Or what led us to come here when we had nowhere else to turn.

We're proud of our successes and very proud of the individuals who have found their way to us, whether to help, to receive help, or sometimes both. We're delighted that this newsletter can bring some of these stories to our readers, donors, and other supporters. It's a great way to get a sense of the magic, and joy, and sincere human connection that is our hallmark. But there's nothing like seeing it for yourself. If you'd like to see us in action, or learn more about our Society or its work, I'd love to hear from you. Please contact me at any time. My contact info is on the last page.

Thanks to Florinda Larkin, John Sterns, Sacha Kawaichi, and Muna Texier for their work on this issue.

In service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Blase Bova".

Blase Bova, Executive Director  
St. Vincent de Paul of Alameda County

## News Briefs

■ Your online purchases can benefit SVdP. Amazon.com will donate 1/2% of anything you spend on their site, once you sign up. Just visit [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com), and choose "Society St Vincent De Paul Alameda" as your charity. Once you're set up, every purchase you make yields a donation to SVdP. Thanks for making St. Vincent de Paul your charity of choice!

■ Shopping at SVdP helps us all. We hope we're your favorite thrift store. If we're not, let us know why not. We want to keep improving until we're the favorite thrift store for every one of our volunteers and Vincentians.

■ Donating a car or boat to SVdP is easy, through the National SVdP Vehicle Donation Program. Call 877-537-5277 or visit [www.donatingiseasy.org](http://www.donatingiseasy.org)

■ The *Tiny Tickets* Program lets BART riders donate their partially used tickets to St. Vincent de Paul. You can bring your tickets to any SVdP campus. We're also setting up donation boxes at various retail locations. Let Blase know if you'd like to help with this. Thanks to the East Bay Community Foundation, St. Vincent de Paul will receive 100% of the unused value on each ticket.



# The Elements of Neighbors Helping Neighbors



**Gu** **Guests: Charles** A former nurse, Charles stayed at SVdP's Winter Shelter for a month. After leaving a dangerous living situation in West Oakland, Charles is regrouping and is looking forward to securing a room where he can feel safe and comfortable. "Each day brings new tests and lessons for me. I need to take better care of myself so I can continue to give from my heart and respect everyone no matter how people may treat me."



**Vi** **Vincentians: Stan Peters**, Vincentian and local hero, was recognized in early May for his street ministry to the less fortunate. Stan and his son John collect surplus food from Whole Foods twice a month for SVdP. Stan received the Jefferson Award for a decade of cooking and serving hot meals to his homeless neighbors and his story aired on the KPIX 6 o'clock news on May 10th. Three cheers to Stan and his outstanding helpers for seeing a need in their community and meeting the need with the warmth of a hot meal and a smile.



**St** **Staff: Joseph** is the new Downtown Janitor at SVdP. Although he is a new employee, Joseph has been part of the SVdP community for several years. After six years of being an SVdP guest, enjoying meals in the Dining Room and connecting with staff and volunteers, he decided he too wanted to be a volunteer, because of SVdP's inclusive community where he has noticed compassion and kindness on display every day. Now, as an employee, Joseph continues his journey with SVdP.



**Vo** **Volunteers: Rivi** is the type of volunteer we at SVdP dream about: willing to volunteer wherever she is needed most on any given day. From unloading boxes, to scrubbing pans in the dish room, to chatting with the folks we serve on her way to campus, it's clear that Rivi has a strong sense of service. "I love being here," states Rivi, as evidenced by the 100 hours of volunteer service she has completed in a mere two months. Rivi feels a sense of belonging here, which makes it easy for her to keep coming back.



## Holy Names University

Players from the Holy Names University men's basketball team volunteered in SVdP's kitchen in April. Assistant Coach Geral Lowe said, "Coach Sanchez gets the credit for jump starting our being here three times. We love SVdP. It gives us an opportunity to not only prepare food but to meet and put names to faces of people in our community. We're coming off a great season and our program is focused on preparing our guys to be student athletes AND citizens of our community."



## The Box Brothers

Jacob and Michael, two reps from the Pandora Sales team, pose with their donation of men's clothes and shoes. After volunteering a few times in the SVdP Dining Room, these "box bros" hosted a workplace clothing drive to collect men's wear for our Clothing Closet. SVdP benefits greatly from strong community partners like Pandora. Thank you to all who participated!

## Yoga Tree Gives Mats to Women's Center

Yoga Tree Telegraph studio manager Ana Evans and her husband Kyle dropped off an impressive load of yoga mats recently, after spring cleaning her studio's lost and found closet. Ana decided to donate all the unclaimed mats to us.

The timing couldn't be better as SVdP prepared to host free volunteer-led yoga and meditation classes in the Women's Center. Thanks, Yoga Tree!



## Garden Party



SVdP hosted a Garden Party to celebrate Earth Day in the courtyard adjacent to our Dining Room. Volunteers and guests enjoyed the inviting green space together on what turned out to be a sunny Saturday afternoon. While some volunteers planted and weeded, others oversaw a DIY crafts table where simple rocks were painted into decorative plant labels and markers. Aluminum cans were

transformed into practical receptacles for cigarette butts and other bits of waste. Nicole Jones, head gardening volunteer, emphasized the importance of guest participation in the everyday upkeep of the space: "We want to encourage everyone to take pride in maintaining the garden. Having these cans out here is not only a social prompt, but a lesson in building esteem. There is a sense of worthiness that comes from helping keep this a nice and peaceful garden." If you're interested in sharing your green thumb with our garden, please contact our Volunteer Team (see back page).



### DONOR PROFILE: MARIN

## Charity Starts at Five

Five-year old Marin and her parents attend St. Gregory's of Nyssa in San Francisco and volunteer at its weekly Food Pantry. This experience led Marin to express concern for homeless people, and she wanted to help. Her parents reached out to SVdP to learn about ways they could help their neighbors. Our Volunteer Team encouraged Marin and her

family to host a collection drive, and they partnered with Marin's preschool to make it happen. A few weeks later, Marin and her parents came to our direct service campus with a carload of clothes, non-perishable food, and blankets. Marin even had a personal charity jar filled with change to donate. It's never too early to start talking about these important topics with the young people in our lives. Creating awareness of charitable giving and social disparities is a gift to impressionable young minds.



# Kitchen of Champions

Five trainees of Kitchen of Champions Cohort 52 completed their nine-week program and graduated on Thursday, May 4th. These individuals worked hard to learn their way around SVdP's kitchen. Chef Ryan could tell early in their training that "this was an extremely good group." The trainees worked cooperatively and were not afraid to let their individual strengths shine throughout the course. They learned how



to prepare the meals in our dining room, sort and organize reclaimed food, and perfected many different sauces under Chef Ryan's instruction. Natalya, our AmeriCorps VISTA intern, provided guidance for the trainees, helping them with transportation support, their orientation, and any needs that arose throughout the nine weeks.

Natalya is optimistic about the KoC Program: "I am very passionate about this program because I see how it changes peoples' lives." Cohort 52 trainee Natasha Richardson shared: "I love this program. When it comes to this place, SVdP is really a family. I love the sense of unity and the strength of prayer

that is found here. There's a sense of humor here that makes it a comfortable, family-like environment. This program is for everybody - it's here for you if you really want it. It's genuinely loving here. It feels like home for people who do not have a home."

**Legacy gifts**, also known as planned gifts, have made a tremendous difference for St. Vincent de Paul, our programs and those we serve. Legacy gifts offer a way for donors to ensure that their charitable giving continues to have an impact that reflects their beliefs, priorities and values. If you are considering making a

planned gift for SVdP, we recommend you consult with an attorney, tax accountant or other legal and financial advisors.

For more information about legacy gifts for SVdP, contact Blase Bova or Muna Texier. (See back page for contact information.)



# A Path Out of Homelessness

After living on the street and sleeping under the freeway off and on for several years, Brian has had many highs and lows in his life. After working in military bases and at Alameda's Navy Public Works Center for 17 years, his steady income ended abruptly in 1997 when the base shut down. He made things work for a couple years, but by 1999 he found himself living on the streets.

An electrician by trade, he took day jobs as they came. At one point, while staying at St. Mary's Winter Relief Shelter, he learned about SVdP's culinary training program. Brian completed the course, but soon after learned he had developed chronic tendinitis of the knee, making a career in cooking a difficult and painful prospect. In 2005 he landed a job with Amtrak as an electrician. He soon secured a bunk at Open Door Mission in downtown Oakland and over time was encouraged to apply for a job as resident electrician. Brian beams when talking about his current living situation: "I'm more than just a



lightbulb changer. I feel I have a calling." Today Brian is part of their outreach team, going to resource fairs like the recent one held at SVdP's Community Center, answering questions from people needing help and from agency professionals who want to learn more.

Brian is grateful to SVdP and shares his experiences with others who want to gain job training skills. While his health challenges prevented him from reaching his culinary goals, he's used his training in the Open Door kitchen, where he helps cook occasionally. The hardships faced by homeless people today are vast and varied, as Brian's journey shows. Hearing his story we learn to see people who are often marginalized and ignored.

## Handmade by WINGS

*Women in God's Spirit* is a Catholic ministry for women who seek to deepen their relationship to God and one another. D.D. van Loben Sels, who has been a supporter and connector for SVdP for many years, brought members of her WINGS group to SVdP for a tour of our facilities and to deliver their handmade fleece blankets and baby clothes to the Women's Center in person. Later WINGS stopped by again to deliver another round of donated goodies, this time in the form of warm scarves and socks for our guests' winter needs. Thanks for the goodies, WINGS!



# Spring Fundraising Breakfast

On Friday, April 28th, we held a Spring Fundraising Breakfast at the Cathedral of Christ the Light's Event Center. More than 140 guests attended the breakfast, which featured an invocation by Bishop Barber and a community supporter address by Fr. Jayson Landeza, pastor of St. Benedict parish and Chaplain to Oakland's Fire and Police Departments. Mark Everton, CEO of Visit Oakland, was the emcee and testimonials were given by Brenda Cox, a graduate of our Kitchen of Champions job training program, and Jasmine Rogers, coordinator of the Women's and Children's Center. Executive Director Blase Bova spoke about the work St. Vincent de Paul does and what support is required to enable us to do even more. We were pleased to see that many donors chose to make multi-year or monthly commitments of support. Thank you to all our guests and donors for making the breakfast a memorable event.



## Your Gift Transforms Lives

The Spring Fundraising Breakfast turned out to be a great opportunity for SVdP to engage some of our core donors who chose to make recurring monthly donations.

This way of giving is especially important because it provides a level of ongoing support that helps us meet the most pressing needs of those we serve. These regular contributions are most often made through a monthly credit card charge.

Visit <http://www.svdp-alameda.org/donate.html> to make your monthly gift.



# Dinner and a Movie

What originated as a simple question has turned into a crowd-pleasing evening: how can we bring some levity and fun to the guests staying in SVdP's Winter Shelter? Christ the Light conference members decided to host a series of movie nights, and after a successful first go in late February, they decided to add a second movie night in March.

On the evening of March 17th, parishioners from Christ the Light of Oakland cooked a corned beef and cabbage dinner for our Winter Shelter guests, and hosted a showing of the comedy film *Medea's Boo*. The St. Patty's Day theme stretched beyond the night's menu, with volunteers decorating the Community Center tables with green plates, napkins, and cutlery, and covering the festive white and green tablecloths with popcorn and snacks aplenty for all.

All the meal's ingredients were provided by Christ the Light, courtesy some very generous donors. St. Joseph Basilica of Alameda provided \$270 worth of gift cards from Starbucks, Subway and Taco Bell. These gift cards became prizes that were raffled after the movie - anyone who did not win a prize received a food gift card, making everyone a winner.



Jackie Mallory, SVdP's Vincentian Support Coordinator, said it was a successful endeavor from all perspectives: "Thank you to our donors who made this possible and to all the volunteers



who cooked, arranged and served in our Community Center. Our Winter Shelter guests appreciated an evening full of laughter and good food."

The Winter Shelter team hopes to recreate this fun event when the seasonal shelter reopens in late fall of 2017. If you are interested in sponsoring a Movie Night, please contact our Volunteer Team (see back page).



# Sutter Health Donates to the Podiatry Clinic

The monthly Podiatry Clinic jointly run by the Order of Malta and SVdP received a generous donation from Sutter Health in early February. The gift of two exam tables in SVdP blue have spruced up the clinic exam rooms, making our guests' visits more inviting and comfortable. Janet Waring and Betty Wolverton, two dedicated, long-term volunteer nurses, set up the rooms with care and posed with Executive Director Blase Bova.

Practical and thoughtful donations like this go a long way to help existing programs thrive at SVdP. Thank you to Sutter Health and to the volunteers for their monthly commitment in



serving our guests in the Podiatry Clinic. The Podiatry Clinic is open on the third Wednesday of every month from 8:30 am to 12:30 pm. Please contact us if you'd like a tour!

# Volunteer Appreciation Week

The last week of April was volunteer appreciation week at SVdP - and though we show love to our volunteers every day, this was the official time to recognize them with a few swag items that say THANK YOU! SVdP is



blessed to have a large family of amazing and dedicated volunteers who help us offer direct support to our neighbors in need. Thank you to all who walk through our doors to serve others with an open heart and a compassionate smile. You are the gift at SVdP!



# Easter Open House

Our Easter Open House on Saturday April 8, was an egg-cellent event! We hosted 26 families with 77 children to a day of gifts, activities (think stickers everywhere), food and fun. The children (and adults) had their pictures taken with the Easter bunny and everyone enjoyed the chance to spend time with their families and neighbors. Each family also received a gift card contributed by our many generous donors. Thanks to all (including our awesome volunteers) for making it a special day!



# For More Information Contact

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Wesley Palmquist	Facilities/Tenant Services Manager	(650) 796-7349	wpalmquist@svdp-alameda.org
Volunteer Team	Volunteer Coordinator	(510) 877-9252	volunteer@svdp-alameda.org

## Betty Jo Celebrates 30 Years as SVdP Volunteer



For the past thirty years, Betty Jo has been a regular presence in the SVdP Dining Room. Almost every Saturday you'll find her handing out trays of food to her neighbors on the "front line." Her smile lights up the place, and she's not afraid to be no nonsense when the situation calls for it. When sharing her volunteering history with

us, Betty Jo describes her first involvement with SVdP as a simple case of being in the right place at the right time. She had been asked to accompany a dear friend to the annual Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon to model the friend's fashion clothing that day. Before she knew it, Saturday became her regular Dining Room shift, and she kept coming back.

Luckily for the SVdP family, Betty Jo plans on remaining a regular volunteer for years to come. Born

and raised in Oakland, she is proud to say that she has stayed in town. A happily retired foster care professional and full-time grandmother, Betty Jo looks forward to Saturdays, where she now models her colorful aprons, accessorized with her beaming smile.

