On January 8, Mayor Libby Schaaf used her first full day of her second term as Oakland mayor to serve at various local organizations, and chose to include our West Oakland direct service campus in her tour. There, she and a group of her office staff spoke with our clients and served food, along with juice, milk and water during lunch.

Mayor Schaaf consistently supports SVdP and our programs. "I could think of no better place to spend my first full day of my second term as the mayor of Oakland. Not only is it about returning to my own roots of community service, but being in proximity to the people I most want to serve as well as the people who are in service to our community’s unsheltered and homeless. This is just a beautiful operation fueled by compassionate volunteers, amazing staff and guests who clearly love not just the tasty meal, but the wonderful community," Mayor Schaaf said.

Over the past year, Mayor Schaaf has visited our shelter, spoken at Kitchen of Champions graduation ceremonies, hosted press conferences and more at St. Vincent de Paul. The city of Oakland funds our shelter, which holds up to 100 guests each night, and is open year-round for the first time ever this year. We are grateful for the support we receive from the mayor’s office and look forward to their next visit!
Upcoming Meetings & Events

- Saturday, January 12th. **District Council**, 9:00 a.m., St. Bede Parish, 26950 Patrick Avenue, Hayward.
- Monday, January 14th, **Finance Committee**, 4:00 p.m., West Oakland Campus, 2272 San Pablo Avenue, Oakland.
- Wednesday, January 16th, **Board of Trustees meeting** - fellowship/meal at 5:30 p.m., meeting at 6:00 p.m. West Oakland Campus, 2272 San Pablo Avenue, Oakland.
- Tuesday, January 22nd, **Special Works Committee**, 1:30 p.m., West Oakland Campus, 2272 San Pablo Avenue.
- Wednesday January 30th, **Spirituality Committee**, 1:30 p.m., Nob Hill Market, Alameda.

News Briefs

- 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
- Want to show the love you feel for SVdP? Come volunteer with us! Play the piano for clients in our Community Center, chop vegetables with Elvis in our kitchen, or help run a craft demo in our Fremont or Livermore stores. There's so much happening here, and most of it goes better with more hands involved. We'd love to train you in a new, rewarding volunteer opportunity. Contact John Sterns for more details. (See back page for contact information.) Your free time can make such a difference in the life of someone in need!
- Legacy gifts, also known as planned gifts, have made a tremendous difference for SVdP and those we serve. Legacy gifts let your charitable giving have a long-term impact reflecting your beliefs, priorities and values. “From general support to job training to our Dining Room and Women’s Center, these gifts have literally transformed lives”, said Blase Bova, SVdP's executive director. For more information about legacy gifts, contact Blase Bova or John Sterns. (See back page for contact information.)

Reasons to Shop Secondhand

Eco friendliness, unique finds and affordability are all wonderful reasons to shop for secondhand goods. Perhaps the best benefit of shopping at a SVdP thrift store is the impact it will have on the homeless and low-income populations of Alameda County. Revenue from our Fremont and Livermore thrift stores goes to programming that directly serves some of our most vulnerable neighbors.

There are many choices you can make about where you shop for your thrift and secondhand items, and choosing a nonprofit enterprise is one more thing you can do to make your shopping decisions count. Please consider donating used clothing, books, furniture and home goods to our SVdP thrift stores in Fremont, at 3777 Decoto Rd., Fremont, CA 94555. Shop in Fremont every day from 10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and donate Tuesday - Sunday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. You can find our Livermore store at 1817 Second St., Livermore, CA 94550. Shop between the hours of 10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. every day, and donate Tuesday - Sunday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. See you at the thrift store!
A New Year’s Message from Santa Claus

We received a special note from Santa Claus, who visited SVdP on December 15th for our Annual Christmas Open House. He helped us distribute toys and take photos with almost 100 families. He even brought ‘elves’ with him to help. We wish continual blessings for all of our community in the coming year. Read below a message from Santa Claus himself:

“Bringing the magic of Santa was terrific for many reasons. First, I was able to hold newborn babies for what was clearly their first visit with Santa. Secondly, the sound of children excitedly exclaiming “Santa! Santa!” as they saw me brought a big smile to my face. Lastly, it was a privilege to be a part of many family photos that will undoubtedly serve as cherished memories for years to come. My wife commented that she did not know who was getting more out of the experience, our children or those we were serving. I hope that the presence of my family to serve others as Santa and his elves provided happiness and a moment of peaceful respite to the children of honor and their parents. We take away a feeling of community and hope that others are inspired to pay this experience forward.”

Knights of Columbus Give to SVdP

St. Raymond’s parish in Dublin has been a long and valuable partner for SVdP. In addition to having a Vincentian conference, the parish has generously donated funds and materials to our Christmas and back-to-school events. During the 2018 holiday season, the St. Raymond’s Knights of Columbus extended the parish’s contributions to SVdP with a gift of $2,000 to support our work at our direct service campus in West Oakland. The check was presented at a Christmas celebration featuring Santa and Mrs. Claus along with a pancake breakfast for parishioners and their families.

“We really appreciate the gift from the Knights of Columbus at St. Raymond’s,” says John Sterns, our community engagement manager. “We treasure our relationship with the St. Raymond parish and are delighted that the Knights of Columbus chose us as one of their beneficiaries.”
Meet Blase Bova, Executive Director

As Blase Bova begins her sixth year as our Executive Director, we want to share the story of her transition to living as a woman. Many of you already know about this and this Q&A is a chance for Blase to tell more of her story and invite conversations with those who support our work.

**What are your pronouns and name?**

My name is Blase Bova. My pronouns are she, her, and hers.

**When did you realize you were trans and how long did it take you to tell anyone?**

I never felt trapped in a man's body, and I was never miserable or suicidal about my dysphoria. But if you’d asked me at any time growing up whether I was happy I had been born a boy or wish I’d been a girl, I’d have said “a girl, of course.” But I never thought of that as anything I had a choice in, just an unlucky hand of cards I was dealt. The images of what used to be called transsexuals when I was young were so extreme that if I’d ever considered that I might be one, I’d have put the thought right out of my mind. It wasn’t until I was in my 50’s that I seriously began to wonder if I was trans and started seeing a therapist to explore the idea.

**How has it been balancing your professional life with your personal life these past few years?**

For more than six months I was “out” and living as myself, everywhere BUT at St. Vincent de Paul. This was a burden both logistically and emotionally. I would bring a second outfit to work in a backpack, complete with shoes and makeup, and have to find somewhere besides work to change clothes. More importantly, it was frustrating not to be able to be more fully open and transparent with my coworkers as my relationship with each of them developed.

**What did you expect to happen when you came out to St. Vincent de Paul’s staff and volunteers?**

I knew the people here were all wonderfully caring and compassionate, but many of them are elderly, devout Catholics who were taught that changing gender, or almost any other expression of queer identity or sexuality, was just wrong. As the visible face of a large Catholic organization with mostly older members and supporters, it was a little frightening to imagine how I might be received.

**Wouldn’t it be easier to go work somewhere else?**

Easier, yes. But that’s not what I wanted to do. I feel very passionate about this organization, how much good we do in the world, and our particular model of volunteer-driven, person-to-person, direct service to those in need. I’ve spent 21 years delightedly serving this mission, even in the wrong gender. I wanted a chance to be an even better leader moving forward as my authentic self. Also, as a transgender leader of a large faith-based organization, I have an opportunity to perhaps make someone else’s journey easier. Someone who is queer or in some other way different from their peers, who must overcome their fear about being themselves when no one is quite ready for that.
How did coming out at SVdP actually go?
Amazingly well. The members of our Board of Trustees and our District Council have shown me such love, respect, and encouragement, sometimes mentioning queer relatives who’ve struggled to come out to them, or simply reflecting that it’s in our nature as Vincentians to be nonjudgmental, tolerant, and compassionate, and to see the face of Christ in each other and in those we serve. I was overwhelmed with just how Christ-like each of them were in their demonstration of support for me. My staff have touched and moved me with their individual expressions of love and support, each wanting to be the best ally they can for me. Staff have reminded me that my transition is such a good thing for our workplace culture of tolerance and diversity. I’m told frequently that I’ve earned the love and respect of our staff and that they sincerely want to be in my corner. I don’t always feel I’ve done anything to deserve this, but I’m blessed and humbled to be receiving it.

Who have been your supporters?
Nearly everyone at St. Vincent de Paul. Lots of friends and family, many of whom I’m in closer contact with now than I had been for years. Civic, corporate, faith-based and community leaders have demonstrated their strong support for me. When I first came out to Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf in October, she told me “I really want to help you. What can I do for you?”

What has been your biggest struggle?
This has all gone so well that any challenges have really paled in comparison to the peace, authenticity, euphoria and love that I’ve felt since coming out. One regret I sometimes feel is that it took me so long to figure out who I really was. I’ll never experience being a young woman, for example. And my face will never look as feminine as a trans woman who starts hormone therapy at an early age, before their face has had the effects of decades of testosterone to overcome. But when I think about it, if I had tried to come out as transgender in the 1960’s or 70’s, things might not have gone so well. So perhaps there’s a reason I figured this out just when I did.

What does being a woman mean to you?
This is a really interesting question, and one that deserves a lot more space than this to answer. I wish I could concisely describe the gender euphoria I now experience daily, the feeling that my body is becoming, and I’m becoming, who I was meant to be. I could also answer this by referencing gender roles, and the fact that that our culture now expects and values the qualities I’ve always had which are considered feminine, but this opens a larger conversation about whether such gendered characteristics should even exist. I’d love a chance to further discuss this issue (or any others) at length with our readers. If you’d like to chat more, just reach out. I’d be delighted to hear from you.
A Legacy of Service from Pedder Family

Brendan Pedder was a dedicated volunteer in the St. Vincent de Paul free dining room at our West Oakland direct service campus. His family, including his father Bill and sister Shannon, continued the spirit of Brendan’s giving after he passed away.

With the generous donations from friends and family members, Shannon has generated more than $40,000 to benefit our dining room, which provided over 20,000 meals for those we serve.

"The Pedders' gifts not only honor Brendan's service to SVdP and his memory," says Blase Bova, SVdP's executive director, "they provide direct and much-needed benefits to our clients in the dining room." These gifts help us continue to provide food, clothing, shelter and healing to our neighbors. We thank all of the donors to the Pedder memorial fund for their commitment and generosity.

SPALEM Starts Annual Giveaway

Georgia Davis-Baker grew up in West Oakland near SVdP's direct service campus. She was always aware of SVdP and its programs and over the years developed an interest in our Women's and Children's Center. "God led me," she says, to create a project providing needed services and a bright spot of happiness to those we serve.

Spreading Positivity and Love Everywhere through Music - SPALEM - was the project that Georgia created and she took advantage of the holiday season to launch SPALEM’s first annual giveaway of purses and hygiene kits. Georgia and her team of volunteers collected new and gently used purses and filled them with clothing and hygiene kits. The group came to our Women’s and Children’s Center on a Saturday in December and handed them out to our clients. In addition, the SPALEM group sang Christmas carols to bring holiday cheer to our guests. "Every helping hand makes a difference," says Georgia. We thank the SPALEM group for sharing the holiday spirit and generosity with the St. Vincent de Paul community.
Introducing Our New Shelter Manager

As many know, our shelter has a capacity for 100 people each night, and is funded for a full year by the City of Oakland for the first time. Since its opening in October, we have seen increased numbers in guests, and we have almost reached capacity a few times. An average night has around 60-75 guests, with the numbers expected to increase through the rainy and cold upcoming months.

To help execute the newly structured shelter, we were able to hire our first Shelter Manager, Marcell Lloyd. Lloyd is a recent graduate of Saint Mary's College of California, with a bachelor’s degree in Leadership and Organizational Studies. He is a father of two and has been married to his wife Kim for eleven years. He coaches basketball, football and baseball in El Cerrito and Berkeley.

Lloyd worked with St. Vincent de Paul as a Saint Mary’s student. His class helped create the soft skills curriculum for our Kitchen of Champions program. “Our goal was for anyone to be able to bring their experience along with the curriculum and provide insight to supplement the course,” Lloyd said. His previous experience with SVdP, Saint Mary’s and coaching at a Catholic school have helped prepare him for the demands of his new job and the structures in place at a Catholic organization.

Lloyd will be instrumental in hiring a case worker for the shelter to help our guests be placed in transitional and permanent housing and make sure they are receiving the care they need outside of our center. Lloyd’s first big project is working with the city to bring storage space to our shelter guests, where they can keep their luggage and large items during the day, so they can have freedom to go on job interviews and do day-to-day tasks without being weighed down by their belongings. “This is a priority of the city and of the mayor, and we will be working hard this week to make sure our guests have a safe and secure place to store their items,” Lloyd said.

We are confident that Lloyd will be a great asset to the SVdP team, and commend our shelter staff for all of their great work so far. “I am very excited to be joining St. Vincent de Paul. As a former student of Saint Mary’s who volunteered time at SVdP, I have a good understanding of the goals and what they are doing in the community. My desire is to have a job that pairs well with my vision of helping people in the community. Being shelter manager is a perfect match,” Lloyd said.

We express gratitude to our shelter staff and volunteers, whose hard work ensures a safe, warm place for our guests each night. We operate the largest shelter in Alameda County, and could not do it without all of you.
For More Information Contact

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Little Caesars Delivers the Love Kitchen

St. Vincent de Paul ended 2018 on a good note by filling our dining room with fresh pizza on December 29. Little Caesars brought their 18-wheeler Love Kitchen to the West Oakland direct service campus to serve enough pizza for 900 people.

Thanks to the pizzas made and donated by the Love Kitchen, we served almost 600 trays to our guests for lunch, with plenty leftover for a pizza night in the shelter. There was a party-like buzz throughout the kitchen and dining room as volunteers, staff and guests shared their excitement about pizza day. It goes to show how a simple menu of pizza, salad, fruit and a sweet treat can bring joy and levity to our community. Thank you to Chef Armando for scheduling the visit, and all who helped coordinate and serve a successful and special lunch to our guests. We are grateful to have Little Caesars as a partner and look forward to having the Love Kitchen back in our neighborhood soon!