

Neighbors Helping Neighbors Quarterly: Spring 2017



Cold Days, Warm Clothes

The Clothing Closet at our West Oakland campus provides women and men with a large selection of clothing, shoes and accessories. The items are continually replenished by donations from individuals, families and organizations located throughout Alameda County, including Vincentians, Conferences and service programs.

Donations are collected at our West Oakland site, where volunteers and staff members begin the process of sorting the items and arranging them on clothing racks and shelves to display in the Clothing Closet. In addition to collecting and sorting donations, volunteers assist in keeping the closet neat, clean, and organized. Donated clothes, shoes and other items for children are collected as well, and then sorted for distribution in our Women's Center.



"My goal is to have everybody be happy and to leave here better off than when they came in," says Mike Jefferson, the SVdP staff member who works in the Clothing Closet.

At the end of 2016, more than one hundred men and women were visiting the Clothing Closet each month. For more information about making a clothing donation and/or volunteering to help collect, sort and display Clothing Closet donations, contact Muna Texier, our Community Engagement Manager. (See back page for contact information.)



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



The work we do at St. Vincent de Paul depends on generosity from all over our community.

Certainly financial support is critical for all that we do. We'd literally be in the dark without it. But we also couldn't touch so many lives if it weren't for the precious gift of time which is made selflessly by individuals and groups from all sectors of our society. The Vincentian members who are committed to our mission "for life"; the many community volunteers who come as individuals to serve wherever needed; and the many businesses and other community organizations who support us, often with both time and treasure.

This issue highlights some of the local businesses and other groups who have done so much for our guests and our work, from volunteering to conducting donation drives in their workplaces. Businesses especially can partner with us in so many ways, and each time the sum is greater than its parts. The employees can have a great team building experience, management can feel proud of their business's contribution to its community, and even customers can feel a part of the positive work that happens here, and of the good it does for so many people in need.

If you'd like to learn more about our Society or its work, or if you have questions, ideas, or concerns, 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, Brianna Glanzman, Natalya Ferdinandi, 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, 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!

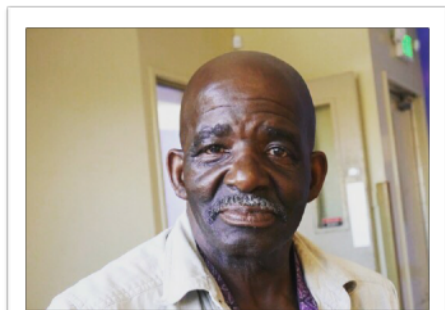
■ Shopping at SVdP helps us all. We hope we're your favorite thrift store. If we're not, let us know why not. We want to keep improving until we're the favorite thrift store for every one of our volunteers and Vincentians.

■ 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

■ 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: Larry rides his bike all over town even though he is disabled from a failed spinal disc surgery. Despite his pain, he is always friendly, kind, and ready to chat in the Dining Room. Larry grew up in Oakland and is a Veteran who was stationed in the Philippines. He sometimes goes by his nickname, Breeze. He takes it easy and brings laughter to the SVdP West Oakland Campus.



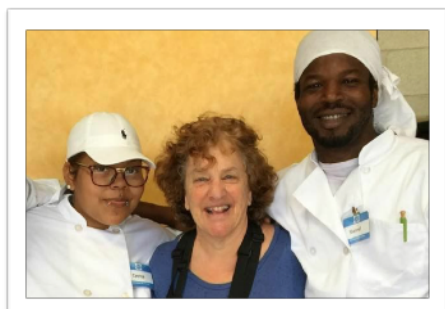
Vi

Vincentians: Conor says, "I am a Vincentian because back in college, in Ireland, I got involved with the Vincentians. That was just for a year or so, but that was my first involvement. That was something like 50 years ago. I'm now part of the Conference at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish and we help people who need funds in an emergency. We visit them in their homes and if we have the funds, we help prevent their electricity from being cut off, or their water. We also collect clothes and other items that come to SVdP. That relationship led me to become a regular volunteer."



St

Staff: Oscar celebrates his 27th year with SVdP in May. He began as a volunteer in 1989, cleaning the SVdP "bodega" and helping however he could. In May of 1990, Sister Jean Marie offered him a paying job as janitor. Today he is the sole janitor, and if you happen to see him, clad in SVdP blue, give him a smile and say hello. He's been a part of our family for over a quarter century. Thank you, Oscar!



Vo

Volunteers: Sacha has been an SVdP volunteer for over a decade. A regular Dining Room volunteer, Sacha builds relationships with many of our repeat guests. She carries her camera around and takes wonderful photos of individuals and families as she listens to their stories. She sees the humanity in each person and her photos show it. We thank Sacha for her commitment and talents in documenting the character and strength of many who are part of the SVdP family.



Pandora Streams into Our Dining Room

Pandora's Advertising Sales team joined SVdP's Dining Room volunteer roster. This is the first of what the team's manager, Chase, hopes to be a regular monthly visit.

Says Chase: "The proximity alone makes sense. We can walk here easily and get to work right away. Plus the size of our team, 8 to 10 people, seems to be a good fit for the Dining Room's needs. We will be back and we're already planning on donating some men's pants since we learned from a volunteer that they're in high demand right now."



Jaimie and her colleagues from the office of the CEO at Kaiser Permanente joined the volunteer team in the SVdP Dining Room. A clear indicator that this group was a perfect fit came from observing their productive and playful approach

Kaiser Keeps Us Thriving

to serving lunch. SVdP staff and regular volunteers, who cajoled and worked alongside them, commented on their strong and effective presence in the Dining Room. They were not only helpful, but also joyful, sharing laughter with each

other and our clients. Their willingness to work hard and have fun while doing so demonstrated their flexibility and productivity. It's easy to get work done when you're having fun and there was no shortage of that!



Marin Academy Gets a Taste of Our Mission



"I was surprised with how fun and enjoyable this was. I thought it would be a lot more prep work and not so much interaction with people. But I was happy to get the chance to talk to many people who came in for a meal."

- Rachel, Marin Academy student.

17 sophomores from Marin Academy in San Rafael joined the volunteers in the Dining Room in January. This is the high school's first time at SVdP, but they have other long standing relationships with direct service organizations throughout the SF Bay Area. Students and their staff shared their previous service stories and gave SVdP a high rating.

"To me there were two types of interactions: either people were really hungry and they just wanted to eat in peace, or they were chatty and glad to have a conversation with us. It was a cool experience."

- Valent, Marin Academy student.

Chez Panisse Brings Talented Volunteers

Chez Panisse Chef Cal Peternell brought along some of his current and former staff to help out in the SVdP Kitchen. Chef Ryan wasted no time in putting the talented crew to good use. Thanks to their can-do attitude and an abundance of donated veggies, this group put their culinary and creative skills to work.

Chef Cal told SVdP staff that this is merely their first visit and that he soon hopes to bring his "teaching kitchen" approach to the Kitchen of Champions program.



Oakland Athletics Show Home Team Spirit



If there's one thing to be learned from watching the Oakland A's volunteer team, it's that those who play well together, work well together. Volunteers bedecked in baseball caps and t-shirts of yellow and green graced the SVdP Kitchen and Dining Room on four consecutive shifts. Gentle ribbing of a colleague who opted to wear red flannel instead of the Oakland team's prideful hues quickly exposed this group as a jovial crew. When asked about the annual volunteering at SVdP, all responses began with a deferential gratitude for Detra Paige as the force responsible for keeping the tradition alive. While the departments represented varied from Data Science to Corporate Partnerships, the

commonality was clear: these folks were friendly, full of smiles, and ready to work.

Tina, an employee with the Oakland A's for the past nine seasons, says she loves the company's annual volunteering at SVdP: "I believe in giving with your heart and soul to those in need. It shouldn't matter where people come



from. I'm happy to see folks eat a good meal here."

Steve, from the A's Corporate Partnerships department, enjoys the camaraderie with his coworkers. He describes the front office as being a fun place to work, full of young people with high energy: "I tell my younger colleagues that we work in the toy department of life. You guys do the real work here at SVdP. It's fun to come and see this important work get done. We always have a good time."



Learning To Give Back

An impressive group of 5th graders from Franklin Elementary toured our West Oakland campus to learn more about SVdP. The students shared how they led a school-wide drive to collect hygiene products for our clients. Thank you to Upward Roots, an Oakland based nonprofit, for making this happen!



A Gift from Fremont Bank

Fremont Bank made a generous contribution to St. Vincent de Paul of Alameda County in December. David Lawrence from the bank brought the donation to our office and met with Executive Director Blase Bova and Community Engagement Manager Muna Texier. The donation is for purchasing food for our Winter holiday programs. We extend deep and warm thanks to Fremont Bank.



St. Joachim of Hayward Brings Lunch and Love

St. Joachim School of Hayward was strongly represented in late January at our West Oakland campus. Two representatives from each grade (2nd through 8th) hand-delivered prepared sandwiches and snacks to guests in the SVdP dining room.

They brought 400 individually decorated lunch boxes with artful



messages of love. Thank you to all the students who participated in making the sandwiches and to the parents and teachers who helped orchestrate the day. This has been a Catholic Week tradition at St. Joachim for 25 years! Keep up the good work and here's to the next 25 years!



Saturdays in the Dish Room

Four bright yellow aprons set the dish room volunteers apart from the rest in the SVdP Dining Room. Tuesday through Saturday volunteers come together to provide nearly 600 meals a day for the community, and that means 600 dirty trays need cleaning, in addition to all the pots and pans used by the kitchen. The fast-paced and soapy nature of the dish room creates a space that inspires natural bonding between volunteers, and that is no exception for the Saturday crew. Dr. John, Joe, Kevin, and Patrick have been collectively volunteering at SVdP for 56 years! For the past seven years, these four friends have come together every Saturday to volunteer in one of the most critical and often overlooked areas of the dining room, the dish room. To the untrained eye the job is far from glamorous, but the Saturday crew has made the dish room their volunteer home, where they review the week and share their take on politics, sports, and movies.

Their motivations to volunteer at SVdP are as varied and unique as they are, yet the reasons for their successful tenure are the same: they enjoy the friendship and camaraderie that comes from their shared desire to give back at SVdP. Patrick, who works during the week as an engineer, says that he thinks about volunteering when at work and he looks forward to Saturdays. Volunteering at SVdP is a grounding and nurturing experience for him, and while he must focus on materials and objects during his work week, his Saturdays are about good people coming together for those in need. As you pass by the dish room on Saturday mornings, you often hear laughter above the din



of the dish washer and the spray of water against the trays, and you can't help but smile. The bond these four friends share is an example of the special nature of SVdP. As Kevin says, "good people are drawn here and stay here."

Legacy Gifts Make Lasting Impact

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. "Legacies have allowed us to continue and, in some cases, to expand the services we offer," says Blase Bova, SVdP's Executive Director. "From general support to job training to our Dining Room and Women's Center, these gifts have literally transformed lives."

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.)



Finding Support & Friendship, Even On the Street

After Bernie lost his stable housing, he went to live in a tent on the streets in Oakland. He frequented the same park across from his campsite for several months. One day he saw a man in the park, someone he had not seen before. Bernie thought perhaps he was an undercover cop, since he did not look or act like he was from the area. Being curious, Bernie walked over to the man and offered him some of his sandwich. Bernie learned that this man was not undercover, just new to the area. His name was Dave.

After several days of talking together he learned that Dave had left his beautiful home in San Leandro, his two daughters, and his job to go live on the street. To Bernie's surprise he learned that Dave had only a couple months to live. Dave's family was angry at him for not taking the steps to delay his death or cure his illness.

So, Dave turned everything over to his family and left. Bernie felt called to bring Dave into his home and help him out. Bernie and Dave's friendship is unlikely, but unique. There is so much love and respect between them. They are goof balls and enjoy laughing uncontrollably. They can also be very serious when they talk about their past, their families, their struggles and hardships, and especially when arguing over politics.

Dave is dying and in recent days he does not look very well. He misses his family more than ever. He thinks it is his time to go. Meanwhile Bernie quietly hopes for a reconciliation between Dave

and his family. Dave has suffered immense pain because of his disease. There are some weeks they do not frequent SVdP because Bernie is keeping Dave warm, calming him down, and being there for him during the most painful days. One day, while Bernie was in the SVdP's Men's Center, Dave said, "He's the best man I know... He is my brother." They have been a huge source of



happiness at SVdP, and every day we see them is a day that seems a little bit brighter. When you say goodbye to Dave you never know if it will be the last time you'll see him, but when he walks into the Community Center a couple days later, you smile, knowing he has at least one more day. The SVdP Community Center and Dining Room are places where people come together to create and sustain friendships. We see so many people like Dave and Bernie, from all walks of life, who come in to enjoy a free cup of coffee and share fellowship with clients, staff, and volunteers. That is what makes SVdP so special.



Why Our Winter Shelter Matters

The notion that shelters are dirty is a familiar one to Leslie Oliver. As SVdP's Winter Shelter and Community Center Coordinator, it pains her that people assume shelters are places where one "can catch scabies." Such generalizations



"Winter Shelter is a lot of work, but what keeps me going is knowing that our clients need it. For me, it's also about checking in with them. They recognize what we are doing and they share how appreciative they are. It means a lot to me and reminds me how important the SVdP Winter Shelter is for our community." - Leslie Oliver

keep people misinformed on the needs of the homeless and housing insecure. Leslie and her team take pride in maintaining the shelter as a clean, safe, and warm environment. Despite its temporary nature, there is a sense of home at the Winter Shelter, from how food is presented to the quality of blankets and cots provided. Leslie adds, "We take pride in keeping the shelter clean and making sure that people can get a good night's rest. The idea is to provide space for quality rest so that clients have the energy to tackle bigger

issues like securing housing or landing employment on a more permanent basis. Our clients' long-range goals vary, but without rest and food in their bellies, they aren't getting their most basic needs met. When I hear critical comments about shelters made in casual conversation, I want to invite them to visit and take a tour so they can see what goes into creating this space. It's a lot of work."

SVdP's Winter Shelter opened in mid-November and will remain open until mid-April. With a maximum number of 75 cots per night, 7 nights a week, there's a lot of



basic maintenance involved. Each guest gets the use of two blankets and a sheet per stay, and all linens must be laundered before they can be used again. There is an extensive sign-in and intake process, which requires training and accurate data entering from staff.

Each piece of the Winter Shelter puzzle is important and the puzzle is incomplete without the integral presence of the guests. Guest perspectives include gratitude for warm beds and heated facilities: "I like that there are snacks and food provided", said one guest. Another told us "It is hard to be homeless. But it's a little less hard when we can find a warm place to sleep."



Five Great Reasons to Shop Second Hand

Second-hand items have a story.

There's something much more rewarding about choosing a one-of-a-kind sweater or skirt rather than a generic piece from your fashion big box store. There's the thrill of the find, the conversations you have along the way, or the truly unique looks that you can create. Second hand just creates stories – from where they've been and what you make with them, to what you tell others about their journey.

Saving (yours and the earth's) resources and reducing waste.

There is already enough stuff in the world, and every time you buy new you feed the consumer demand cycle for creation of new goods. Buying thrift is better for the environment, it saves resources, it reduces emissions, and those items don't get shipped to the landfill. Oh, and let's not forget about the \$\$ resources you save.

It's more community-friendly.

Department stores and national or international chains are where most people buy their new clothes and furniture. They rely on global supply chains and overseas manufacturing ordering huge quantities to keep costs low.

Second-hand stores are mostly independent and local. They hire local and often have a great community around the store that know the



employees and each other. Why not choose to support local small business where you can get to know your merchants and neighbors and keep your money in the local economy?

It means stepping off the consumer treadmill.

For many, shopping can be a type of entertainment that means buying stuff that you didn't even know you needed until stepping into a store. Many impulse purchases sit unused in closets (we see LOTS of these things in our donation room). Being more deliberate about the choices we make puts us back in control of our lifestyle – and our pocketbook.

BONUS: Shop nonprofit and you serve people in your community.

St Vincent de Paul's Thrift Stores exist for all of the above reasons, but also to bring revenue to our mission of helping our neighbors in need. This includes food assistance, helping find housing or providing emergency shelter, to job training to provide a path to full time employment. There are many choices you can make about where you shop for your thrift and secondhand items; choosing a nonprofit is one more thing you can use to make your shopping decisions count.



For More Information Contact

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Muna Texier	Community Engagement Manager	(510) 719-0774	mtexier@svdp-alameda.org
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From My Comfy Chair

by Florinda Larkin

Community Engagement Coordinator

From the comfy seat of my chair, I can see some of the Community Center's goings-on through a well-placed window beside my desk. Today I happen to catch a sweet moment between a barber and her new client. I can't hear the conversation, but I notice the calm surrounding them and the inherent trust in how they relate with each other. The setting is sparse, but sufficient.

Angel, our volunteer barber, comes every other Thursday and brings all she needs in a tote and a small case on wheels. She lays out a few supplies atop her "station" and you can't help but notice the elegant simplicity in her service. With a broom, a waste basket, and an electrical outlet nearby, Angel is ready to begin. What is a haircut really? Some may see it as routine maintenance or a hygienic necessity. I'm of the camp that enjoys the entire sensory experience, from cut to

blow out.

Today's stolen moment seemed more intimate somehow, like a spiritual meeting of two. It was an opportunity for them to chat and be

heard, and for a guest to feel taken care of, even in such a brief and understated way.

Being able to catch these interactions is a big part of what I love about SVdP. Hearing folks laughing and connecting over a cup of coffee while they wait out the rain highlights the sense of fellowship in the Community Center. It's another day at work and I'm grateful my desk is near this window so I can enjoy these moments and remember who we serve, how we serve, and why it matters.

