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Giving back to those who give  
Homeless shelter recognizes volunteers

PAINESVILLE – Booker T. Washington once said that if you want to lift yourself up, you should lift someone else up. On Saturday, Sept. 12, staff and aftercare guests from Project Hope for the Homeless in Painesville thanked those who lift the shelter up – the volunteers.

Former shelter guests and staff members served the volunteers during an ice cream social as a thank-you for all of the service volunteers have given at the shelter.

In 2008, hours of service and meals provided by volunteers saved the organization more than \$100,000. Currently, there are about 115 active shelter volunteers, the highest number in Project Hope's 16-year history.

"We've grown in leaps and bounds in the last year, and it's been steady in all facets of the shelter," said Volunteer Coordinator Melissa Knight, thanking the volunteers for stepping up. "It's contagious, because nobody's getting burnt out. Everybody is just pushing ahead and maintaining operations."

Thanks to the volunteers, operations are much easier to maintain. Three to four volunteers work in the shelter, serving dinner and spending time with guests, every day of the year. Each evening, volunteer meal providers from churches, businesses and other groups bring a full, hot dinner, for up to 40 people. Individuals and groups volunteer their time at special events, helping with fundraisers, mailings and speaking to the community. Volunteers bring in in-kind donations which have saved the shelter more than \$20,000, said Executive Director Judy Burr.

"We often say, 'We get way more out of it than the people who live here'," Burr said. "I know that's why we do it. Forgive us when we don't thank you, but every day we thank the Lord for you."

Father Gerald Bednar, **board president** for the Ecumenical Shelter Network of Lake County, the governing board of Project Hope, thanked volunteers for their cooperation in the shelter.

"Everyone has the spirit of Christ moving in this organization," he said. "You may not always get to volunteer the day you want, but you come the day you're needed. We appreciate you and certainly thank you for all you do."

Aftercare clients also gave thanks for and to the volunteers. One former guest who is getting involved with a new Project Hope outreach ministry, Firebrands 11, spoke about his time at the shelter.

"I found hope out of Project Hope," he said. "It gave me hope to carry on."

The former client, who said he had seven heart attacks between 2002 and 2008, said he became homeless and lost everything.

"When I came to Project Hope, they said, 'Hey, there's a better way,'" he remembered. "I started reading my Bible. But through the love and caring they gave me, that carries you a long way.

"I should have been dead a long time ago, but I'm standing here today to tell you about Christ. I thank Project Hope for all that they have done for me. It came so quickly it made my head spin. I pray for Project Hope and I pray with Project Hope because Project Hope is an answer to prayer for those who are out there that seek Him."

Project Hope for the Homeless is the only emergency homeless shelter in Lake County, and serves up to 35 men, women and children in northeast Ohio each evening, providing them with shelter, food, care and guidance that has helped more than half of all shelter guests transition into a better quality of life. Project Hope served 298 individuals in 2008, and is anticipating more than 300 individuals will stay in 2009.

Additionally, more than 50 former guests are involved in the aftercare program, which helps them maintain their transition through security and utility deposit assistance, regular workshops and meetings and referrals to community agencies.

Former guests and supporters are also participating in Firebrands 11, a new outreach ministry that will share stories of hope through skits and individual testimonies in the community.

For more information on volunteering at Project Hope or inviting Firebrands 11 or a speaker to your next group meeting, call (440) 354-6417.

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