

HISTORY

The first planning meeting for a shelter for the homeless in Central Vermont was held on July 28, 1983. It was sponsored by the Central Vermont Community Action Council and held at Bethany Church in Montpelier. Representatives from the Burlington Emergency Shelter, The Burlington Way Station, the Upper Valley Haven, White River Jct., the Open Door Mission, Rutland, Morningside Emergency Shelter, Brattleboro, the John Graham Emergency Shelter, Vergennes, State Department of Welfare, Washington County Mental Health, State Housing Authority, the Salvation Army, Central Vermont Hospital, and Barre and Montpelier clergy attended.

Not long after the formation of a board of directors, the effort to provide shelter evolved into a special ministry of local churches working with area businesses and state agencies. Non profit and tax-exempt status were acquired for the new organization. The most difficult problem was securing a place to house the ministry. Property on Washington Street in Barre and the upper floor of the Project Independence building were carefully considered but eliminated due to fire code restrictions.

Finally, adequate property was acquired on North Seminary Street, Barre, during the spring of 1985. Down payment was made through several generous grants from churches and denominations. Unfortunately, the Barre Zoning Board would not grant the non profit corporation an occupancy permit on the basis of conjectured traffic congestion. The matter was not resolved until January, 1986, when Washington County Superior Court overturned the ruling of the Zoning Board. The Haven opened its doors for operation on Monday, June 23, 1986, and hosted one guest on that initial evening.

A formal dedication and open house was held at the Haven on Wednesday, April 22, 1987. Governor Madeline Kunin was present, made some brief remarks, and participated in a formal ribbon cutting ceremony along with Barre Mayor Bergeron. More than 100 persons were present.

The first director of the Good Samaritan Haven was J. David Book. He served as interim director from June through August, 1986, and was then employed as director in September, 1986. Mr. Book remained Director until his resignation in August 1996.

The facility has been completely renovated in three phases: second floor, first floor, basement. The exterior has been painted, roof replaced, new windows installed, porches reconstructed and insulation, electrical service and plumbing upgraded. The twenty-year mortgage was paid in full after the fourth year of operation. Most of the renovations were financed by Emergency Shelter Grants provided by the Federal Government.

In 1988, the Haven joined forces with Washington County Mental Health and Another Way to write a grant to fund a Homeless Resource Coordinator for Central Vermont. The grant was won and in the summer of 1988, Norma Fleury was employed under the auspices of this grant.

This grant has been renewed for ten successive years providing an extremely important link to community services and housing options.

Volunteers have played a vital role in the ministry of the Haven from its inception. The first year the Board of Directors decided to honor volunteers by selecting an annual Volunteer of the Year. A plaque has traditionally been presented to the recipient at the annual Volunteer Appreciation Banquet originated in 1987. In 1989, the award was named in memory of William A. Morton. Bill Morton was an early volunteer and the first House Manager at the Haven. His warmth and compassion touched many. Recipients of the Volunteer of the Year Award have been: 1986, Barbara Whitmore; 1987, Tim Owings; 1988, Betty Reid; 1989, Jim, Seth, Eban Turner; 1990, Mr. & Mrs. Sherwood Murray; 1991, Ed Perkins; 1992, Lilian Malnati; 1993, Roger McManis; 1994, Ernest Kennedy; 1995, Paul Mascitti; 1996, Bob O'Donnel; 1997, Steve Hebert.

The Board of Directors also initiated a Second Mile award which may be given on special occasion. Jay and Vivian Twiss were the recipients of that award prior to their move to Lexington, Kentucky, 1988. Norma Fleury received the award in 1992. Mike Perrin of Mr. Z's Pizza, Barre, has also been recognized for the contributions of that business to the Haven. In 1990, the Board began the practice of recognizing specific area churches for their faithful support. Barre First Baptist Church, Hedding United Methodist Church and Barre Congregational Church and St. Augustine's Catholic Church have been thus far recognized.

MISSION STATEMENT

The goal of the Good Samaritan Haven is that each man, woman and child who comes to us might not only have physical needs met, but would be enriched in their knowledge of God's love, and find hope and peace within our doors as well. It is our goal that in each volunteer, a guest sees the reflection of Christ, and that the Good Samaritan Haven be a witness to the community of God's power and compassion. This statement, originally penned by an early member of the Board of Directors, is a concise statement of our philosophy and purpose.

A rationale for this mission statement was written by The Reverend David Roones in an early historical sketch: "We feel that Christians can provide loving care to the homeless in a manner more cost-effective and efficient than the care offered by government bureaucracies Churches will provide most of the volunteers, prepare meals nightly for guests of the Haven, do the laundry, and transport guests to Job Service, SRS, and other agencies. Local pastors will be called upon to counsel those who indicate that they have a spiritual problem. However, we wish to stress that the Haven will be open to people of all faiths, and even to those who have no faith at all! Like Jesus, we are interested in meeting human need, and there are no strings attached to the love we offer in the name and spirit of Christ!"

The ministry has several clearly defined objectives: 1) to provide temporary housing to all persons who have a legitimate need for it; 2) to provide two meals each day as well as bedding, soap, towel, toiletries; 3) to offer counsel in securing permanent housing and/or employment; 4) to offer further counsel and referral as may be requested by the guests; 5) to involve the community in volunteer service to the homeless; 6) to educate the community regarding the nation-wide problem of homelessness; 7) to actively advocate change in our society that would benefit the homeless through coalitions and legislative reform.