

Ideas & Voices

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To provide an open forum of community voices.

To offer a balance of views.

To seek solutions to important regional problems.

To help make this a better place to live and work.

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COMMUNITY PROFILE

Idea people: A conversation with David Bohardt

Starting today, Ideas & Voices is beginning a regular series of quick conversations with local people who are making news, promoting good ideas or getting important things done to improve the community.

To get the feature rolling, we checked in with David Bohardt, a familiar face in Dayton. A former mayoral candidate, executive vice president of St. Mary Development Corp. and executive director of the Home Builders Association of Dayton, Bohardt, 65, is newly the executive director of St. Vincent de Paul. We asked him a few questions about his new job and the current challenges in helping the Dayton area's homeless.

Q What has been the most surprising thing to you, in your new position?

A First is the scope of the challenge St. Vincent de Paul faces and manages every day. Last night (Oct. 18), we sheltered 420

homeless men, women and children. Second would be the number of ways the homeless can break your heart. All have a story, most often tinged with tragedy, which belongs only to them.

Third are the hundreds of volunteers from across the community who devote their time in service to the poor. Fourth are the many clients, faced with challenges many of us couldn't imagine, who have the resolve and discipline necessary to rescue themselves from lives of despair and dependency.

Q What are some of the challenges you and your staff are facing to get the job done, especially in this difficult economy?

A Like all non-profits, we feel the pinch of cutbacks in government funding. And so our challenge is to more successfully galvanize public attention on the impact of St. Vincent de Paul's mis-



David Bohardt, executive director of St. Vincent de Paul, and Krysa Davidson, director of retail operations for St. Vincent de Paul, discuss an upcoming shipment of deconstructed materials to Japan at St. Vincent's Community Store's Deconstruction Depot on Monday, Oct. 24. The program deconstructs homes in the Dayton area, rather than send demolished materials into area landfills. STAFF PHOTO BY TEESHA MCCLAM

sion and work — on the individuals and families we serve every night, and on the overall well-being of the community.

Q What are some things you think are most misunderstood, or not widely

known, about your organization and your clients?

A Three things occur to me:

First, employment is not an absolute defense against homelessness. Approximately 30 percent of our shelter residents are work-

ing. The lack of affordable housing, on the other hand, drives working households to homelessness.

Second, most of us are the beneficiaries of at least one significant intervention in our lives: a parent whose tough love set us straight; a teacher who guided and inspired us; a friend who refused to give up on us. Many of our shelter residents have had no such interventions — and no such heroes — in their lives.

Third, children are the invisible face of homelessness. Each night, we serve up to 100 children, most under the age of 6, at our Gateway Shelter for Women and Families on Apple Street.

Q What is the current state of local homelessness, and is the community meeting the need?

A We are very concerned about the recent spike in numbers at our shelters,

especially among adults we have not seen before and very young children. While the need for services is very high, St. Vincent's mission and core values, and especially our sense of social justice, call on us and our partners to do whatever is necessary to meet it. This is the work that defines and energizes all of us at St. Vincent de Paul.

Q Is this mostly a Dayton problem, or is it bigger than that?

A Homelessness is a global problem of epic proportions. Locally, inspired leadership from Montgomery County and the city of Dayton has enabled us and our partners to address the issue with compassion and effectiveness. But our collective job will not be complete until our shelters are empty, and the promise of personal safety, affordable housing and employment are within easier access to everyone in our community.