

Center for Hope opens doors in Durham

New center offers food, shelter and educational opportunities to homeless

By Marissa Peterson

Durham Voice Staff Writer

Last year on Jan. 24, after reaching their goal of \$4.5 million, the Durham Rescue Mission broke ground on its new Center for Hope. The Mission has been ministering to the homeless, poor, and addicted since 1974, when CEO and founder Ernie Mills and his wife and CFO Gail Mills opened their doors to 12 needy men. Over the past 39 years the Mission has given more than \$9,555,988 back to the Triangle community, with its roots planted in the smaller community of Northeast Central Durham.

After 12 years of planning, the Center for Hope is now open to help those in need throughout the Durham area. The new building adds more space and brings hope for a better future to those the Mission helps. Ernie Mills notes that the Durham Rescue Mission is more than the “3 hots and a cot” stereotype of most homeless shelters. Along with serving three hot meals a day and providing a bed to sleep in, the Mission also provides those it serves with clothing, GED training, biblical counseling, permanent supportive housing, job placement and health care including dental, medical and vision. These lavish offerings are what separate the Mission from other shelters. It’s “a helping hand, not a homeless shelter,” as Marcus Williams, 33, calls it. Williams is a member of the Mission’s Victory Program, a 12-month holistic recovery program in a structured environment focused on helping break the cycle of addiction. Another unique aspect of the Durham Rescue Mission is the scholarship fund donated by GlaxoSmithKline worth \$250,000. The Mission receives this money to further the education of those it helps.

The Center for Hope opened to the public at 6 p.m. Wednesday Jan. 30,

with an Inaugural Dinner celebrating the new 34,000 square foot facility. Over 200 diners enjoyed a generous spread of fried chicken, vegetables, desert, and drinks in the warm and cozy building, equipped with plenty of tables, chairs, couches, and televisions for the Mission’s guests. While many ate, others waited in line for free haircuts from local barbers. One barber, 35-year-old Toby Clayton, served dozens, noting that “a haircut certainly helps” in making someone feel good about themselves, which he says is “the least we can do.” First in line to receive a trim from Clayton was 27-year-old William Henderson from Henderson, NC. Henderson’s family lives in Northeast Central Durham, which is where he returned after losing his job in Illinois, along with countless other Americans during the recession. Henderson learned about the Durham Rescue Mission through word of mouth and is a third year apprentice working with staff in the Development Office, which handles donations to the organization. Despite the hassles of juggling work and paying bills, Henderson is excited for the future, proof of the Mission’s success. “I have everything I need,” said Henderson, “which makes me appreciate the Mission.”

The Mission also provided laundry services for overnight guests, many of whom were busy watching the Duke vs. Wake Forest basketball game being projected on a large screen for viewers. Mills is thrilled with the opening of the new center, which can provide 88 more beds to needy men. Bad weather the night before the opening left the Men’s Division, located on 1201 E Main St., overflowing with guests, causing some men to sleep on the floor. The Center for Hope not only houses more guests, but also works to revitalize Durham by rebuilding lives, restoring families and helping individuals break the poverty cycle.



The new Center for Hope building opens its doors Wednesday, Jan. 30, for its inaugural dinner. (Staff Photo by Marissa Peterson)

The Durham Rescue Mission has also recently opened a new thrift store at 3900 Chapel Hill Blvd. Mills encourages people to help by donating their older possessions. “Many people don’t think their [old] clothes are worth anything to them, but it’s worth 70 jobs,” said Mills. The three thrift stores combined have created 70 jobs in Durham, with 32 coming from the new store on Chapel Hill Blvd. 90 percent of the jobs created employ Durham residents. The actual revenue from the thrift stores is not the prize in Mills’s eyes. “Our goal is to create those 70 jobs,” said Mills. “If it generates income, praise the Lord...create jobs and pay the bills.” The encouragement to pursue education and employment drives the organization, along with a deep anchoring in faith. With the addition of the Center for Hope, the Durham Rescue Mission appears to have no plans of slowing down its effort to spread hope and change lives in the community.

Good Samaritan Inn: offers safe shelter, 3 meals a day, clean clothing, daycare, and parental and housekeeping instruction to women and children.

Address: 507 E Knox St Durham, NC 27701

Men’s Campus: offers safe shelter, 3 meals a day, clean clothing, Bible counsel, financial planning and employment assistance to men.

Address: 1201 E Main St Durham, NC 27701

Thrift Store RTP-919-484-9014

Thrift Store Brier Creek-919-598-7170

Thrift Store Chapel Hill-919-401-1935