

Wednesday, November 15, 2006

Serving the South Coast of Oregon



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Times are tough at T.H.E. House

By Alexander Rich Staff Writer

Help is normally something the T.H.E. House provides, whether to people who are homeless or disabled or residents down on their luck. But with its rooms perpetually filled and its coffers depleted, the Coos Bay nonprofit organization is looking for some assistance of its own.

"People kind of forget about the service we provide to the community, but these people we serve are not going away," said Mary Ann Snow, board president of Temporary Help in Emergency, Inc.

During Hurricane Katrina, there was no support, because local philanthropists were sending their donations to victims in New Orleans, Snow said.

"Now we don't have the money for the extra services we provide."

The primary function of T.H.E. House is offering dinner and shelter to the homeless, the mentally disabled and recently discharged inmates from local correctional facilities. Every evening at 5, people begin arriving to take showers and get in line for dinner, which is available to anyone who shows up after 6. The facility also has 19 beds for those who need a place to sleep.

In recent years, the demand for these services has increased significantly.

According to T.H.E. House Director Eve Farrell, the nonprofit provided 23,367 meals in 2002-03. This past fiscal year, the house served 29,773. Last year, the facility provided housing for 513 men and 82 women for a total of 9,438 nights. The previous year, the latter figure was 7,868.

Asked why the demand for her organization's services has increased, Farrell points to an economic equation that is out of joint.

"My personal view is the cost of living has risen and wages are not, and it's killing people," Farrell said, noting that the 14 beds assigned to men are all occupied about 90 percent of the time.

Despite the rising costs associated with its increased assistance, T.H.E. House has seen a drop in local contributions and state funding. Between July and October, the nonprofit received \$1,947, compared to \$3,164 during the same period last year. Contributions from area churches also fell by more than half, \$8,180 to \$3,985, over that four-month span.

"Our services keep going up but our funding keeps going down," Farrell said, noting that the annual budget this year is about \$103,000. "What is really down is individual contributions. That's where we are really forgotten about."



World Photos by Madeline Steege Food and other donated items can be dropped off at T.H.E. House at 745 Coos Bay Blvd. in Coos Bay any time. There is somebody there most of the time but items also can be left on the front porch if no one answers the door.

The organization has a staff of one part-time and three full-time employees as well as three volunteers who help serve dinner Monday through Friday. Each volunteer works one evening a week, leaving staff stretched thin.

"We are in desperate need of volunteers," Snow said. "We are very blessed to have students from SOCC come by occasionally to help clean out gutters, pressure wash the house and other such things, but on a day-to-day basis, we need more help."

One consistent source of aide has come from Genny Ross, of the Lakeside area, who has volunteered practically every Tuesday night for the last five years.

"I knew they needed volunteers badly so I volunteered," she said. "A lot of people wouldn't have a place to go without T.H.E. House."

On most nights, Ross will arrive a little before 5 to be ready to register guests when they begin checking in. She helps serve dinners and then assists with cleaning dishes before being relieved around 8.

"They keep me busy the whole time I am there, but it's nice to help the part of the community that really needs help," she said.

Although T.H.E. has cut back on luxury services, such as providing cable television, Snow said it will never fail to provide a good meal.

"That is one thing we will not do. I will go out and beg before we do that," she said. "We let everyone eat as much as they want because when you walk around all day, you are going to be hungry."

In addition to food and money donations, the nonprofit also accepts socks, sweat shirts, blankets, towels and personal hygiene products. For those interested, donations to T.H.E. House can be dropped off at its facility, 745 Koos Bay Blvd. Monetary donations can be made through the organization's Web site: <http://thehouseinc.net>.

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