

Vincentian Charities

Newsletter and Chronicle of Activities
DIOCESAN COUNCIL--SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT de PAUL
Serving God's Poor in this Community Since 1865

Diocese of Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Christmas Edition

Vol. XVIII, No. V



Real People - Real Stories

In this year's Christmas appeal, we focused on Skyla, a little girl at our Sweet Dreams Shelter. Skyla, whose picture is in this article, is representative of all the men, women and children we serve at St. Vincent de Paul. Regardless of age, everyone is a child of God.

At St. Vincent de Paul, when you see a photograph of someone we have served, you can be sure that this is a real person with a real story. Some big charities use photos from Internet photo sources, and those people may or may not be someone they actually served. At St. Vincent de Paul, we never do that. All the photos in our newsletters and appeals are real people that we have been blessed to serve.

It doesn't get more *real* than a situation like Skyla's. We can't share the personal details of her life and her family's struggle, and we can only imagine how desperate her mother must have felt, knowing that she had two small children depending on her. What's impossible for most of us to imagine is how terrifying homelessness must be to a child like Skyla. Fortunately, we were there to provide a compassionate helping hand to this homeless family.

Hard times are when we turn to our families for help, but many of the people we serve have no family to turn to and must rely on the kindness and understanding of strangers. At St. Vincent de Paul, we fill that role, but we give a hand-up, not a hand-out.

The people we serve are homeless because of a lost job, domestic violence, mental illness, a drug habit, alcoholism, or simply because they have made poor decisions. But children are innocent victims of circumstance, and the best way to help them is to provide life skills education, case management, counseling and job assistance to their mothers.

Real people can make some really big mistakes, but we are here to help them get their lives back on track. We are so grateful that you share our mission of service to God's poor. Those of you who support our work through prayer, volunteerism or financial support are critical to our mission.

You are all members of the St. Vincent de Paul family, and without you, our work would not be possible.

Lambda Chi Gives a Christmas Gift

The current economic recession has affected some of the larger contributions that St. Vincent de Paul is accustomed to receiving, and this has put an additional stress on our ability to meet the increased demand we are seeing throughout our various programs. Recognizing the need in our community, Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity has once again given a generous donation to the Bishop Ott Shelter Program.

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From left to right, Joseph Cobena and Lance Roberts present a Christmas check to Michael Acaldo.

Holiday Update

This Thanksgiving was our busiest ever. Over 100 volunteers combined forces

to serve a record 739 meals to our Dining Room guests on Thanksgiving Day. Although there are several local organizations that serve meals on holidays, the majority of the people who come to St. Vincent de Paul are truly the most vulnerable – the homeless, the poor, the elderly, and those who suffer from mental illness. They rely on our services year-round.

So many volunteers gave up their holiday to serve the less fortunate on this day of thanksgiving. They willingly shared their time with the poor of our community, and saw their service as an opportunity to see the face of Christ in the people they served. Some volunteers serve every year on Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. They schedule their families' holiday celebrations around their volunteer time at St. Vincent de Paul, knowing that there are others who are not as fortunate as they are.

Last year on Thanksgiving Day, we served a record crowd – over 600 meals – but we had no idea that the demand for

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Their most recent check to us was for \$20,000! Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity has been providing assistance to St. Vincent de Paul since 1997. This funding is raised through their annual *Watermelon Bust*. Through their efforts, they raise awareness at LSU about homelessness and poverty while raising critically needed funds that go directly to the services we provide at St. Vincent de Paul. Over the last 12 years, the fraternity has raised over \$140,000 for our efforts. Their support has helped us expand facilities and provide services that we could not have provided otherwise.

Lance Roberts, Chair of this year's *Watermelon Bust*, stated, "We are thrilled to be able to do this for St. Vincent de Paul and our community. It's one way our fraternity can give back and meet important needs in our area." Michael Acaldo stated, "This support is remarkable, and we count on it. Every year, these LSU students come together as a fraternity to make a difference in the lives of homeless men, women and children."

St. Vincent de Paul would like to thank Lambda Chi for their continued support and community leadership. This gift will greatly help us in our service to those in need.

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our services would continue to stay as high as it has. This year, we are on track to serve approximately 218,000 meals. If we reach that mark, it will be a new record. The only other time we served that many meals was after Hurricane Katrina, when we began serving meals at Renaissance Village and other areas housing those displaced by the disaster. We expect to surpass those numbers this year. It's obvious that we are seeing the local impact of the economic recession. We pray that things will turn around and our numbers will begin to drop in 2010.

In addition to thanking our volunteers, we want to thank everyone that has given in-kind food donations. These donated items really help us to stretch our food dollars. The list below includes items that are still needed.

Please keep the people we serve, our volunteers and staff in your thoughts and prayers during this holiday season.

Urgent food/supply items: salt, garlic powder, Tony's seasoning, bleach, paper napkins, plastic forks and spoons, oregano, dehydrated onions, salad dressing, hot sauce, parsley flakes, and paper towels. **Urgent food items:** rice, sugar, dry beans and spaghetti; also the following canned goods: tomatoes, green beans, green peas, corn, tomato paste, tomato sauce, and all canned fruits. **Christmas specific items:** ham, turkey, cranberry sauce, sweet potatoes, etc.

Taste & See – the Perfect Gift



Our *Taste & See* cookbook is the perfect Christmas gift for the person who has everything. This book is filled with great recipes from local cooks, but it also

contains a number of short stories about some of the people we have served. It makes a perfect gift for friends and family, but you'll definitely want a copy for yourself as well.

Last December, we unveiled our new cookbook, and since then, we have gotten so many compliments from people who have really enjoyed this publication. We encourage you to support St. Vincent de Paul by giving this great gift to someone this Christmas. *Taste & See* can be ordered through our website at www.svdpbr.org or by using the order form below. It can also be purchased at St. Vincent de Paul thrift stores throughout the area.

Thanks for your continued support of this successful program that is raising awareness and financial support for the services we provide in our community.

Order Your Taste & See Cookbook!

Please send me a copy of the *Taste & See* cookbook at \$21.95 plus 9% tax – a total of \$23.93, plus shipping and handling of \$3.99 for a total of \$27.92. (To order more than one copy or to pick up your book to avoid shipping costs, call us at (225) 383-7837, ext. O.)

My check for \$_____ is enclosed.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip:** _____

Mail your order to St. Vincent de Paul, P.O. Box 127, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-0127 or call us at (225) 383-7837.

Saint Vincent de Paul would have loved Emails

Many people don't realize that Saint Vincent de Paul himself was a tremendous fund-raiser. He accomplished so much in his life because he was great at inspiring people to give to the poor and homeless. In the 1600's he even published a daily newspaper of sorts to let people know what was happening with his soup kitchens, housing facilities, and healthcare services. He would have loved our modern technology that enables charities to send information and updates to supporters via email.

Following Saint Vincent de Paul's spirit of helping the poor, we plan to begin an email newsletter that will update our supporters regarding current activities and events at the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. You can get the news before anyone sees it on television or in newspaper.

We would love to have your email address. Please consider sending it to St. Vincent de Paul through Michael Acaldo's email address: macaldo@svdpbr.com so that we can include you in this new endeavor.

By the way, if you haven't had a chance to visit our website, please do so at www.svdpbr.org.

Ensure that your values and beliefs live forever by remembering the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in your will.

A Shelter of Compassion and Hope

Our Bishop Ott Shelter Program runs two men's shelters, the Sweet Dreams Shelter for Women and Children, and a homeless Day Center. We also operate Myriam's House. These facilities operate on the philosophy of providing compassion and hope in an accountable manner. It breaks our hearts when we see individuals who would rather sleep under an overpass or on the street instead of coming to our facilities. Some of the people who refuse to seek our services don't want to follow the rules of our shelters and will often comment, "I want my freedom."

Our goal is to help people during a crisis, not to enable someone with an alcohol or substance abuse problem. We want to provide people an opportunity to help themselves. Our programs are not for those who refuse to follow rules.

We give people a second chance and help them to regain their independence. Some people are surprised to hear the number of people at our shelters who are working. Self-sufficiency is their objective, and they are working hard to become productive members of our community.

Now that doesn't mean that we don't provide shelter to everyone during the winter months when the temperature drops below freezing. At those times, our main concern is to provide shelter from the cold for anyone who needs it. But we make it clear to every shelter guest that in order to remain at our facilities, they must establish goals and take personal responsibility.

We provide much more than "three hots and a cot." We provide an opportunity for people to stay with us – sometimes well over three months – if that's what it takes to help them obtain employment, establish a savings account, and get their lives back on track. There's a lot of truth to the saying, "Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day. Teach a man to fish and he'll eat for a lifetime."

Yes, there are some individuals that are looking for a hand-out, who want help, but don't appreciate what they are given. We are pleased to report that this is not the kind of people we are helping at our facilities. Our guests are so grateful for the assistance they receive and the chance for a fresh start. They say "thank you" for the simplest things and take nothing for granted. Even everyday items like soap, toothpaste and shampoo are appreciated.

We want to take this opportunity to once again thank WVLA NBC 33, WGMB FOX 44, WBRL CW 21 and KZUP RTV19. They have helped us to collect a lot of the items from the list below, but we still need so much. The items in bold are needed most. Please continue to help our collection campaign, which runs through the end of the year. Just add an item or two to your shopping list. Encourage your family and friends to help out. Any item on this list would be appreciated, and many of them would be a wonderful Christmas present for someone in need.

Needs List: soap, shampoo, **deodorant**, shaving cream, disposable razors, sheets (twin & crib size); blankets; **pillow**

cases; pillows; disposable diapers; baby wipes; towels; washcloths; **men, women and children's underwear;** disposable cups, plates & bowls; plastic forks, spoons, knives; paper towels; napkins; flannel shirts; sweat suits; jackets; gloves; blue jeans; **duffle bags;** socks; pajamas; diaper bags; sandwich bags; laundry detergent; **hand lotion;** drink mix; toothpaste; toothbrushes; and **feminine hygiene products.**

Pharmacy is a Gift to our Community

Thanks to the generosity of the Huey & Angelina Wilson Foundation, the Greater Baton Rouge State Fair Foundation, Mr. and Mrs. Bob LeBlanc, and many others, our pharmacy expansion is now complete. The contractor is working on some punch-list items, just a few minor things they need to finish up. We are already utilizing the new space.

What a gift our newly expanded pharmacy is to our volunteers, our staff, and those in need. Not many of us think of a prescription as a Christmas gift, but the people that come through our doors during December recognize that the prescriptions we fill are the best gifts they could receive. They know that the gift of health is not something to be taken for granted.

This year, we have received fewer financial donations to our pharmacy than in past years. In addition, we lost one of our grant funding sources for people suffering from HIV. Times are hard, and we ask you to keep our pharmacy in your prayers during this Christmas season.

A ribbon-cutting and official dedication of our newly expanded space will be scheduled soon, so watch for that announcement. In the past, we have opened a number of major programs during the Christmas season. Our original Bishop Ott Shelter for Men opened in December of 1991. Our Bishop Ott Day Center and Night Shelter opened in December of 1997. Our Bishop Ott Sweet Dreams Shelter opened in December of 2001 – just to name a few. These programs have been very successful, and we know this new expansion will be a wonderful gift to our community.

Cash for Clunkers

To help someone in need this Christmas, please consider filling a prescription by making a financial gift.

At St. Vincent de Paul, we don't consider the cars that are donated to us clunkers. Every car that is donated provides financial support for our programs and the people we serve. Unfortunately, the Cash for Clunkers government program had an effect on the car contributions we received, and this year's car donation program was not as successful as it's been in the past. That means that we had fewer financial resources to put into our charitable activities.

Even with this decrease, our car donation program is still making a substantial contribution to the efforts at our Dining Room, Shelter & Housing facilities, Pharmacy and other charitable outreach programs. Please spread the word about this important program that truly makes a difference in the lives of the needy.

You Are My Heroes

On December 3rd, I was honored and humbled to be inducted into the Catholic High School Hall of Fame. This was an extraordinary honor for me. While the word *extraordinary* certainly describes Catholic High and the Brothers of the Sacred Heart, I know only too well that I am just an ordinary person. I was fortunate enough to receive an extraordinary education at Catholic High and to work for an organization that is doing extraordinary work for the needy.

In the late 1800's, St. Vincent de Paul was one of the most recognized and respected organizations in our community. Our members were some of the community's most active "movers and shakers" and they were very interested in seeing the first Catholic school for boys established in Baton Rouge. That vision became a reality when the Brothers of the Sacred Heart established St. Vincent's Academy, naming it in honor of St. Vincent de Paul for their support in helping to establish the school. St. Vincent's would later become Catholic High, the school we all know and love today.

Many years later when St. Vincent de Paul needed leadership, Catholic High graduates gave St. Vincent de Paul a wonderful gift – graduates who wanted to make the world a better place. I was blessed to be one of those graduates. The support that you and other generous friends of St. Vincent de Paul have provided over the years has helped us to grow from a \$200,000 a year organization in 1990 to an \$8 million charity today.

I am so grateful to the leaders of St. Vincent de Paul for giving me the opportunity to be a part of the Society's work. What a privilege it has been for me to be in a position where I can play a small role in Christ's ministry to the poor. Although it's sometimes heart wrenching to witness the effects of poverty, it's always uplifting to see generous people like you who are so willing to help. You are the unsung heroes that make our work possible, and you all deserve awards for your support. Your commitment to our mission of serving the needy has made St. Vincent de Paul what it is today. I was recognized for all the things that you and others have done to make St. Vincent de Paul one of our community's most significant charitable forces.

In addition to my heartfelt gratitude to you (our St. Vincent de Paul Supporters), Catholic High, and the Brothers of the Sacred Heart, I also want to thank my parents, Jay and Dottie Acaldo, who sacrificed to send me to Catholic High. They deserve the credit for any success I have had, or will have. I also want to thank my wife, Paula, for her continued support of me and my work, as well as my daughters, Miranda and Madison, who were two of our youngest volunteers. And I can't forget Brother Donnan Berry for teaching me everything I know about charity and how to run a non-profit organization. You are all truly extraordinary. -- *Michael J. Acaldo, President & CEO, St. Vincent de Paul Charities*

Address Service Requested

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