

ay, June 25, 2006

◆ Fort Collins Coloradoan ◆

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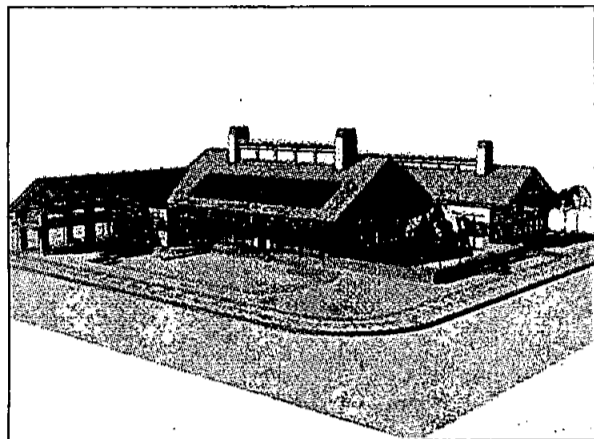
Katy Plotrowski
 On the job

Things ask for rolling

to degree or not to degree? That is the question. It comes a time in workers' lives they ask them- "Should I go back to get a degree

Homeless help in works

Funding drives under way for 2 projects



Courtesy of United Way of Larimer County

A rendering of the Housing Services Day Center shows what the building will look like when it is finished.

By **CHRISTINE McMANUS**
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The Open Door Mission in northern Old Town is beginning an \$800,000 capital campaign to expand its homeless shelter, despite several false starts and tough competition for donations.

A separate capital campaign is under way to fund a \$1.6 million Housing Services Day Center for homeless and nearly homeless people. The

United Way; local governments; faith-based, housing, nonprofit and other human service interests during the past year raised \$1 million of the \$1.6 million needed for the center at Conifer Street and Blue Spruce Drive.

The Open Door and United Way partnerships each still need hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations to achieve their goals.

As the population has grown in Northern Col-

orado, so have the problems of homelessness, domestic violence, single mothers in need, mental health cases and the need for drug and alcohol treatment services.

False starts

Several of The Open Door's recent attempts to expand came up short.

In one attempt, an attorney from outside the region offered to build a new

Open Door shelter nearby, in exchange for the mission's existing property. But that deal fell through when The Open Door attorney and director began reading the 3-inch-thick legal contract, said the Rev. Richard Thebo.

Thebo is the founder, president, CEO and primary paid staff member at The Open Door Mission, 316 Jefferson St., formed in

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Homeless

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1987. Though he would not disclose specific donors who give more than \$200,000 every year, he showed off his tidy, efficient shelter operation and food bank that houses about 40 people each night and serves 400-800 meals a week.

Thebo wants to buy and remodel the building next door at 324 Jefferson St. into a women's shelter. His existing women's shelter has less than 10 beds for a Larimer County population of about 274,000 people.

"They made an attempt to purchase (324 Jefferson St.), but their loan did not materialize at that moment, anyway," said Jimmy Phillips, a Fort Collins resident who has owned the property since 1965.

Phillips declined to disclose the for-sale price of the building.

Thebo estimates The Open Door Mission is worth \$650,000 to \$750,000 but said he does not want to borrow against the property.

New approach

Last month, Thebo refreshed his approach at a homeless shelter conference in Seattle, Wash., sponsored by the Association for Gospel Rescue Missions.

Now, he's focused on an \$800,000 capital campaign for a women's shelter, rather than loans. Debt payments don't fit with his business model, which relies on charity, Thebo said.

If he can't buy the building next door, he will remodel and expand his property at the corner of Jefferson and Linden streets.

The Open Door Mission will likely kick off its official capital campaign next month.

The Open Door vs. United Way partnership

While they compete for donations, The Open Door and the partnership building the Housing Services Day Center differ in their views about the best ways to handle homelessness. Leaders of both groups say their services are worlds apart.

Specifically, the Day Center plans to hire five or six paid caseworkers to help homeless people connect with various

'Poverty is a culture of its own. To many people in poverty, any other way of life is completely foreign. What I try to do is show them another way of life and tell them that they don't have to live that way.'

The Rev. Richard Thebo,
 founder, president, CEO of The Open Door Mission

programs. Other government and human service interests would also participate at the proposed office-like building.

Thebo said his role is that of a parent. "Poverty is a culture of its own. To many people in poverty, any other way of life is completely foreign," Thebo said. "What I try to do is show them another way of life and tell them that they don't have to live that way."

The Open Door offers two programs, one religious and one secular.

A long-term shelter with work opportunities comprises the nondenominational Christian program.

A short-term shelter program for non-Christian people in need is also available. The short-term program includes a day center, where people can take refuge, receive mail, make phone calls, eat and bathe.

"You can't shove God down their throats," Thebo said. "My job is to help people, regardless of whether God has spoken to them."

Ten to 14 homeless people work at the shelter, cooking and cleaning in exchange for room and board. Some also have day jobs, but Thebo did not disclose employers.

The Open Door relies almost entirely upon community donations, solicited through a 4,000-copy monthly newsletter by Thebo. Holiday editions go out to 50,000 households, he said.

Newsletter costs are among the nonprofit's largest, at \$35,000 to \$45,000 annually. Other significant expense categories include Thebo's salary, approximately \$40,000 annually, and shelter services provided

at \$180,000 to \$200,000 per year, according to tax records filed in 2002 through 2004.

The United Way sees an unmet need, said executive director Gordan Thibedeau, even with the existence of a third shelter in Old Town run by Catholic Charities Northern on Linden Center Drive.

In addition to the Housing Services Day Center, Northern Colorado's primary charity distributor is beginning to form a different partnership to build a separate homeless shelter. The United Way might work with Catholic Charities to run its projects for the homeless.

Within the next month, housing center leaders will submit official plans to the city of Fort Collins for the Housing Services Day Center. Once plans are approved by city officials, construction would take about five months, Thibedeau said.

Plans for the 10,000-square-foot building have been controversial in nearby neighborhoods of north Fort Collins.

"This is not an overnight shelter or a soup kitchen," Thibedeau said. "It won't be a place where people appear to be hanging out. It's a services center, like an office for people who want to get out of homelessness."

Two of the seven board positions governing the center will be for neighborhood representatives.

The United Way is the fiscal agent for the Housing Services Day Center. The United Way has a \$5.2 million annual budget and works with 62 nonprofits and health and human service organizations and five local initiatives.