

## New Shelter to Provide More Opportunity

News > aboutTcommunity



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Stories of people being laid off from work and losing everything they own are hitting closer and closer to home these days. For Twin City Mission, these stories and others are all too familiar. For the past 44 years, they have been helping people who find themselves facing homelessness.

The Bridge Emergency Shelter, which is part of Twin City Mission's Homeless & Housing Services, is currently located in a building that is more than 100 years old and was never designed or intended to be a shelter. In the men's dorm there are 48 beds, one toilet, two showers, and two sinks. The numbers for the

women's dorm are slightly better, but with 12 beds, one toilet, two showers, and two sinks, the facilities are far from adequate.

"It's like a big barracks, and there's very little storage space for people's belongings. It's just a bare necessity place that's better than sleeping on the street," said Tim Halbrook, a long-term resident at the shelter and client of Twin City Mission.

Halbrook recalled times when he has seen every bed full and eight men sleeping on mattresses on the floor.

"If you take a look at what we have here, I think it's obvious that there's a need," Halbrook said.

Twin City Mission has been aware of its need for a new shelter for quite some time, and in the summer of 2007, they began the "silent phase" of their \$5.5 million capital campaign to build a new shelter.

Prior to the revitalization in downtown Bryan, the Mission had been planning to build a new facility on the property they owned in the north part of downtown. According to Deputy City Manager Joey Dunn, there was discussion for a long time as to what was best for both Twin City Mission, in terms of facility and location, and what was best for downtown revitalization. In the end the City of Bryan purchased the land from Twin City Mission.

"It's an opportunity for them to get a much better facility and the City to be able to start new in this area. Downtown North is the next phase of revitalization, and it was key for us to acquire, not just the Mission properties, but about 17 properties total," Dunn said.

The Mission owned about two out of seven city blocks in that area valued at about \$600,000. The City paid \$2 million, which allowed for the purchase of the land, as well as a large contribution to help start the capital campaign.

"We realized that, in order to make this win-win situation work, we had to step up and contribute to their cause," Dunn said. "We've got a great relationship with them, and we're proud that they're in Bryan. They provide a vital service to the community. They've got a lot of support from all throughout Bryan/College Station."

As of late March, Twin City Mission has raised \$3.4 million of their campaign goal. They raised \$250,000 during their March 5 fundraising event that featured speakers Ron Hall and Denver Moore, authors of "Same Kind of Different as Me." In addition to this event, Twin City Mission has also been contacting people directly to give to the campaign.

"To our knowledge, from all the feedback that we've gotten from the prominent citizenry, is that this community has never seen a capital campaign of this size for a non-profit, so it's a very ambitious, intense opportunity for us," said Ron Crozier, director of community relations for Twin City Mission.

Twin City Mission was able to purchase land just south of Downtown on South Randolph St. near 30th St. They are currently in the construction phase of the campaign, and the shelter is on track to be finished by mid-June.

The new facility, which will encompass 24,000 square feet, is roughly twice the size of the current shelter. There will be approximately 127 beds among the men's and women's Emergency Shelter, the Family Shelter, and the Long-Term Shelter.

The Family Shelter will allow families to be housed together, which has been an issue in the past. Crozier said they have seen an increase in the need for family shelter and they just do not have the space for them right now.

"[Families] present different obstacles for us. If a mom comes in with a 15 year old son, he's too young to stay in the men's dorm, and he certainly can't stay in the women's dorm because right now our family shelter is on the back end of the women's dorm,"

Crozier said. "There are barriers there that keep us from being able to deliver the services we need."

In addition to being able to accommodate families, Twin City Mission also has other plans for the new facility. Doug Weedon, chief executive officer of Twin City Mission, said they try to help their clients with skill enhancement and one of the things they'd like to do in the future is implement job training programs.

"For once, we'll have a kitchen that is modern, as opposed to what we have now," Weedon said. "If we can take a client that could get a job for \$6.50, and elevate them up to a job for \$8.50 or \$9.00 or \$10.00, the chances of them being successful are a whole lot greater at that level than at minimum wage."

The Mission would also like to have a computer area where volunteers can come and help teach clients basic computer skills so they can search and apply for jobs online.

"There's the desire from the community to provide these volunteer services, and in our current location, we don't have the space for it, so this will allow us to increase our capacity and service provision," Crozier said. "It's more than just putting a roof over somebody's head or feeding them a meal. Part of it is making an investment in them to re-engage and to connect again."

Halbrook says he is indebted to Twin City Mission for the impact they've had in his life.

"Primarily, what this place has done for me is to get me sober and get me out of addiction to where I can look at taking the next step and doing something productive with the rest of my life. Even though I'm 55 years old, I can still be productive in some way, and I can have sort of a new beginning," Halbrook said.

Halbrook is just one of many who have been helped by Twin City Mission. Weedon explained that one of the first issues they deal with when working with homeless individuals is their self-esteem.

"In trying to work with homeless people and rebuilding them as individuals, we help restore their self esteem that, 'I am valuable. I have a function and a use.' In the present facilities, it's hard to convey that because we're so crowded. In the new shelter, it'll be a lot more evident," Weedon explained.

Twin City Mission is an umbrella organization that offers not only shelter, food, and clothing, but they also provide services such as employment counseling, life skills training, case management, and transitional housing. The staff is also equipped to handle clients dealing with mental health issues, alcohol and substance abuse, domestic violence, physical health challenges, and economic problems that can lead to homelessness. For more information on Twin City Mission, you can visit the website at [twincitymission.org](http://twincitymission.org).