

Local businessman pledges money, manpower to assist needy

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By [Nancy H. McLaughlin](#)

Staff Writer

What's the best way to spend \$25,000 in cash and sweat equity related to housing and hunger?

Businessman and longtime homeless advocate Todd Herman is open to ideas for the money and time he wants to invest.

"In the big picture of needs to be addressed in the Triad, this is only a drop in the ocean," said Herman. "If enough people make those drops in the ocean, the ocean itself will be raised."

Mike Aiken of Greensboro Urban Ministry said some of Herman's contributions could be used by a collaborative community effort to put people from temporary housing into more permanent homes.

The Beyond Pathways project provides case management and support to help families overcome hurdles that keep them from getting their own place — such as past utility bills, security deposits and a few months' expenses.

"What we'd really like to do, besides dealing with the people drowning, is to keep people out of the river so that we won't have to rescue them," Aiken said of the program.

It is supported by volunteer care teams made up of faith communities, civic groups or individuals who wrap themselves around the family.

Herman, the namesake of business consulting firm Todd Herman and Associates, wants to make a similar impact.

His commitment is a combination of 100 hours of employee work at the firm and funds from the Herman Family Hunger and Housing Fund at the Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro. The money and hours would total \$25,000.

Herman is the treasurer of Greensboro Urban Ministry and a corporate sponsor of the CROP Hunger Walk. He also leads Urban Ministry's Friday Breakfast Community. His dream is to set up an endowment to build a Habitat for Humanity house every two years until there's not a need for any more — when affordable housing is available to everyone.

"He's one of those people that lives out what he says is important," said Abby Donnelly, a partner in Sandler Training in High Point who has known Herman for nearly a decade.

Herman knows the problem. He says he wants to encourage solutions.

Those who work with the homeless, for example, know the depth of what the community is facing. Even the area's promised federal stimulus money leaves gaps, said Jehan Benton, director of Guilford County's effort to end chronic homelessness.

"We were making so much progress with housing and reducing our homeless numbers, but with the economic crisis, we are seeing this new swell in the homeless," Benton said. "Time, talent or treasures — the agencies need some form of them all."

Clarke Martin, executive director of the Guilford Interfaith Hospitality Network, appreciates that Herman wants to piggyback on existing programs. The nonprofit coordinates a network of churches and UNCG's Campus Ministries to temporarily house and provide meals for homeless families.

“We could partner his employees with our existing volunteer structure through our host churches, or if they were more of the 'sling paint and do plumbing' type of work, there are plenty of corners of our day centers that could use a helping hand,” Martin said.

“It’s a rare nonprofit in today’s economic climate that doesn’t have four uses for any cash donation,” Martin said of the money.

The Guilford Interfaith Hospitality Network recently sought donations from longtime business supporters for a silent auction fundraiser as part of its 10th anniversary in October.

“There were a surprising number of people who said, 'We love you, and if I could I would, but we as a business are fighting to keep the doors open,’” said Martin, who is at two-thirds staffing because of the economy.

Herman, a frequent speaker to faith communities, civic clubs and other community groups on the issues of homelessness and hunger, is hoping that others replicate or improve upon his commitment so that many other agencies can get more of their wishes fulfilled.

“I hope that this will help encourage others to do what they can with the time and financial resources they have to improve the lives of those with needs,” Herman said.

Contact Nancy McLaughlin at 373-7049 or nancy.mclaughlin@news-record.com

What would you do?

E-mail suggestions to getinvolved@todddherman.com

For more information on Guilford County’s Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness and a list of partner agencies and needs, go to www.partnersendinghomelessness.org or contact Jehan Benton at 889-6105, Ext. 1133.