

Open Door Ministries has much to celebrate

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The headlines are fading and the camera lights have dimmed. But for those whose homes have been destroyed or badly damaged by the Palm Sunday tornadoes that ravaged our area, it is the beginning. It is the beginning of the aftermath. Where will these affected families live while their homes are rebuilt? What living costs will insurance cover if any at all? It is hard to imagine everything that these families are now facing. The Thomasville-High Point (and Lexington) Chapter of the American Red Cross has contacted every family affected by the tornadoes and offered assistance.

That is one of the reasons that when Carolyn Smith Kerr (newly married to Richard) called me about their plight, I agreed to be part of the Red Cross Disaster Relief Committee to help with the aftermath and funding. My heart continues to go out to these people. Mayor Becky Smothers told me after her tour of the area, "It is just a miracle that no one died." Truly it is. It was also a wonderful testament to the compassion of our community as so many people volunteered to help their neighbor. We are truly a community of good Samaritans.

What an appropriate segue into the Gala Celebration Dinner, "Reflecting a Light of Change" benefiting Open Door Ministries. Even more befitting is that the "Good Samaritan of the Year Award" was presented at this dinner that also included a silent auction. If you need a quick refresher course, the programs of Open Door Ministries include the homeless shelter, Father's Table that at last count provided meals to over 400 per day not including the food pantry, provides for emergency services (utility bills, etc.), Cassell House, transitional living facility for former homeless men who are working their way back into society, and Housing First, part of the 10 Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness. As you read that and went "wow," please keep in mind that is only a partial list of how Open Door Ministries tries to affect those in our community that others may turn away.

Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church graciously opened their doors for this celebratory dinner that was catered by The Triad Community Kitchen, a 10-week culinary curriculum at no charge to unemployed, underemployed and to formerly homeless individuals. The "Celebratory" was the emphasis of this gala. It was a celebration for those who have come out of homelessness, those who have left their addictions behind, those who now have a new beginning in their lives. Reunise Garner is part of the Ministries' Housing Stabilization Program which strives to keep people in their homes. As you can imagine in this time of economic need, this new budgeted program is overwrought with requests. Garner stepped in front of more than 200 attendees to tell her story.

An immediate hush came over the room as the mother of five spoke so very eloquently. "We are survivors of domestic violence. It took me a long time to say those words because I was embarrassed. Now I want

to become a voice for others, to others. I'll never forget the day I met Steve Key (executive director of Open Door Ministries). He was like Charlie of 'Charlie's Angels.' In the background he guided my 'dream team' to help me finish getting my degree. I am ready to start my new and safe life."

The crowd remained silenced as Barbara Ervin, who is in the Housing First Program stepped up. Although she didn't relate her personal story but she did say that this was her personal day of thanksgiving while on any given night in the state of North Carolina there may be 20,000 to 30,000 without a home ... homeless. She is no longer one of those statistics. Again there was a silenced awe of this very articulate woman.

After the applause, Martha Yarborough emotionally stepped to the podium. Her husband Yogi, who died a few years ago of Lou Gehrig's disease, was a former president of the Board of Directors of Open Door Ministries. Tears began to stream down her face as she presented the Good Samaritan of the Year Award to my friend Raymond Payne for his devotion to working with the homeless. Martha's tears were tears celebrating a wonderful friendship. For the last year of Yogi's life, it was Payne who tended to his friend every day as Yogi progressed from crutches to a wheelchair. I remember when I attended Yogi's funeral at Providence Place, Raymond and his wife Patricia were part of the Yarborough family. That has not changed.

Martha told me that, from the first time that Yogi and Raymond met for breakfast to discuss the needs in our community, they became, "soul brothers." Martha also said, "Since Yogi's death I have remained very close to Raymond and Pat. Raymond is a big part of our family in good times and bad. He has been a wonderful support to me in many ways. I have told many people, 'Raymond is the person who lives Christ for me.' " Well said and congratulations my dear friend.

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