

Dale Moss | Old charity wants new home in New Albany



Written by

Dale Moss

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The Interfaith Community Council keeps people fed and in their homes. It equips students for school, checks up on shut-ins and remembers the needy at holidays.

Interfaith reflects New Albany and Floyd County at their best, and has nearly for a half-century. The nonprofit agency helps all it can, every way it can.

But it wants to help more people, in more ways. It is seeking \$450,000 to enable it to move. "If we make it there as long as we've made it here, we'll be successful," said Christine Harbeson, Interfaith's executive director.

"Most people know we want to help them."

Interfaith has called the old rectory of the former Holy Trinity Catholic Church its home for decades. But too many steps and narrow hallways, and too little space and parking increasingly pinch the cause.

Interfaith has earmarked the Brown-Starks Building, on Bono Road at Graybrook Lane in New Albany, to meet its needs.

"It means bigger and better things not for us, for everybody in the whole community," Harbeson said.

Brown-Starks opened more than a decade ago, a large, handy place for people to receive a range of aid. The approach makes tons of sense. But its good-hearted partners — human services agencies including Interfaith — do not have tons of money even when times are good. Times are obviously not good. The agencies stayed until they no longer could afford, or until priorities changed.

The building, at least 9,500-square feet, is available, Harbeson said. There, Interfaith would again share a site owned by the New Albany Housing Authority. "It's like a renewal, a renaissance," said Bob Lane, executive director of the Authority. "The opportunity is golden right for Interfaith to be there."

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“It will be a tremendous asset for our residents.”

Interfaith’s fundraising total stands at more than \$200,000, including a \$100,000 challenge from the Ogle Foundation. “God’s done amazing things,” said Vern Eswine, Interfaith’s board chairman. “He’s brought the pieces together better than any of us could.”

Interfaith channels outreach for a broad, fluid coalition of churches, 50 or so, on a current budget of \$486,000. Metro United Way pitches in as well, and 100 volunteers donate time weekly, primarily with the food pantry.

Interfaith fed 9,300 people last year, Harbeson said, a relentless demand. It also helped fill 3,200 backpacks with back-to-school supplies for children.

It also provides encouragement and referrals. Eswine is fair to tout the agency’s personal touch. “With very, very little resources, these people are extremely dedicated,” he said.

Little wonder Harbeson wonders aloud what Interfaith can help take on in new quarters. Feeding more people, educating them, guiding them to jobs or health care, Harbeson imagines profound impact. Churches could take turns cooking out for the Brown-Starks neighbors.

Interfaith might organize skill swaps, say, babysitting for plumbing. “My goal for Interfaith is for it to be an advocate for

people, whatever their circumstances are,” Harbeson said.

The ‘Crossing the Threshold’ fund drive is to last through 2011 if need be. The rebirth of Brown-Starks then would take place over a few years. Harbeson said, “We can only do what the community wants us to do.”

Dale Moss’ column appears on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Reach him at (812) 949-4026 or dmoss@courier-journal.com. Comment on this column, and read his blog and previous columns, at www.courier-journal.com/moss.

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