

In Service Of Others

Sherleen Mahoney

At the Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Center in Phoenix, 110 men and 10 women are seeking a life of recovery. The beneficiaries are in a six-month live-in program that aims to break the cycle of addiction. They are provided a clean and healthy living environment, nutritious food, individual counseling, spiritual guidance, work therapy assignments and recreational activities.

The women's program is currently located in an offsite facility. The SAARC hopes to have an onsite facility for them in the near future.

The comprehensive program is free and financed solely through five area Salvation Army Thrift Stores.

The 40-year-old two-story facility was in need of attention, and RFMA, which hosted its annual conference in Phoenix this year, wanted to help renovate the building and leave a lasting impact.

Ready to Work

During the initial site visit, Jeff Dover, CRFP, Facilities Resource Manager at RFMA, and the project managers—Micah Dyer, CRFP, formerly with Legacy Air; Vern Huskey with Starbucks Coffee Co.; and Tim VanAcker, CRFP, formerly with Desert West Builders—found a very warm kitchen with broken equipment, exposed wiring, and walls and ceilings that were in need of repair. The 33 bedrooms, each with four twin beds, night stands and closets, had malfunctioning air conditioners, and the community and private bathrooms were in bad shape. The recreation and movie rooms also needed upgrades.

"When we toured the facilities, we knew our membership could make a huge difference," Dover said.

"It was the right challenge for RFMA Gives," added Dyer. "The SAARC is doing great work and needed the help. They couldn't have done it all on their own within a reasonable time."

The SAARC put together a wish list, which Dover disseminated to the membership. Like every year, donations of funds, equipment and services came flooding in.

On a warm and sunny Volunteer Day in September 2017, more than 160 RFMA Gives volunteers traveled from all over the country ready to work.

"Volunteer Day is like a big, giant family reunion," Dyer said.

Outside, a crew covered a dirt break area with 12 tons of crushed gravel provided by DENTCO. A walking path was created, as well as borders around trees and shrubs. The patio furniture was spray painted to add a pop of color. The privacy fence also was repaired. The beneficiaries now have a nice outdoor space in which to relax.

The concrete by the warehouse, where delivery trucks had worn out and cracked the parking lot, was replaced by Mad Jack's Asphalt and Concrete LLC.

An emergency wrought-iron fence replacement project was completed by Starbucks Coffee Co.

inside, a crew painted the entire facility, covering the drab off-white/grey walls with warm earth tones (Sherwin Williams' Sundew and Oak Barrel to be exact), in total, 135 gallons of paint provided by U.S. Exterior Maintenance & Repair LLC and DMC Facility Services covered 9,500 square feet of wall space. The interior is now inviting and feels more like a home.

"We have embraced RFMA Gives as a family and as a business," said Keith Moore, President of U.S. Exterior Maintenance & Repair LLC. "It gives us a way to give back to a community in a way that affects lives. We're able to leave something behind that's ongoing."

Four private bathrooms were gutted and remodeled by Chipotle Mexican Grill, whose crew stayed a few extra days to complete the work.

Volunteers also sorted and organized clothes in the warehouse, which will be sent to the Thrift Stores. Additionally, several mechanical and electrical repairs were completed throughout the facility.

Kinetico/Selecto Commercial Water Systems provided the volunteers with bottle-quality water that was made on site with a reverse osmosis system. More than 100 gallons of tap water passed through several carbon filters, the reverse osmosis system, one final filter and a chiller. Volunteers were given reusable water bottles and accessed the water from taps on the side of a solar-powered trailer.

"In previous years, a company would supply bottled water, but we wanted to provide a more sustainable approach," said Jason Johnson, National Sales Manager at Kinetico/Selecto Commercial Water Systems. "This year, we provided 500 reusable water bottles, diverting approximately 2,000 water bottles from trash to reduce the impact on the environment."

Throughout the day, beneficiaries approached the volunteers to shake their hands and thank them for their work.

"The RFMA Gives volunteers were involved with something that's precious to us, and it became precious to them," said Major Dennis Earnhart, Administrator for Business at the Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Centers, USA Western Territory. "You can give money to an organization and feel good about that, but there's nothing like watching the faces of people who worked with their hands to help others."

At the end of the day, Huskey, who was participating in his first RFMA Gives project, stayed behind to reflect on the work with Earnhart and his wife.

"I told them how touched I was by the guys who came up to talk to me, and how the experience had changed me," Huskey said. "That night, I told my wife I wanted to be more involved with our community."

Lasting Impact

After Volunteer Day, RFMA Gives members spent the next seven months working on the kitchen, bedrooms, community restroom, and the recreation and movie rooms. Each project manager oversaw a specific task: Dyer was charged with HVAC, Huskey was in charge of the community restroom and VanAcker, CRFP, handled the kitchen.

The recreation and movie rooms and hallways received new carpet from Red Lobster and were installed by Progressive Flooring. Paint, fans and a drop ceiling were paid for by Legacy Air.

The bedrooms didn't have air conditioning. The beneficiaries were running fans to try to cool the rooms. "The AC units were so old, even the manufacturer didn't know how to fix or get parts for them," Dyer said.

The 33 bedrooms received ceiling fans, window shades from Roll-A-Shade to block the heat, and the 40-year-old AC coils were replaced by Legacy Air and Andrew's Refrigeration.

The new AC units are more efficient, have more capacity and if repairs are needed, parts are easily found.

The community bathroom was in dire need of a major overhaul. More than half of the showers didn't work, and the majority of the sinks were cracked or shut off because of leaks. The exhaust fans weren't working either, which resulted in condensation buildup that caused severe leaks.

Over several months, the shower stalls on the east side were completely rebuilt and the plumbing issues were fixed. The center section received new sinks, mirrors, lights, plumbing fixtures and soap dispensers. One of Huskey's general contractors, KDC Construction, who at the time was not yet a RFMA member, gave him a monetary donation and sent four employees to help replace the restroom shower partitions, the ceiling drywall and the drop ceilings. Additional construction was completed by CGP Construction, TD Industries, Ferguson Plumbing, Creative Materials Corp., Galaxy Builders, Panda Restaurant Group and Starbucks Coffee Co.

Water softeners were provided by Kinetico/Selecto Commercial Water Systems to improve the water quality and protect the new equipment from Phoenix's notoriously hard water. New water heaters were supplied and installed by Tommy Guerra with The Water Heater Man.

"I initially thought remodeling the restroom was beyond what RFMA could provide but, once again, I was humbled to find out there were vendor and restaurant members who came together to share donations to get this project done," Dover said. "Now the residents can go from a cool bedroom with new shades and ceiling fans to a nice bathroom, it helps with restoring dignity."

All the fluorescent ceiling light fixtures were upgraded to LED, thanks to Vixxo Sign and Lighting and Legacy Air. This upgrade saves the facility valuable utility and replacement bulb dollars.

In the kitchen, walls and ceilings were repaired and FRP was installed by KDC Construction. The exhaust fan and hoods were repaired. The deteriorated ductwork was replaced. A new concrete floor was poured in the old walk-in cooler/freezer by Andrew's Refrigeration so the area can be used as storage. A kitchen exterior door from Vortex industries and a multi-camera CCTV system from Tyco integrated Security were installed to increase security.

"Some of the kitchen equipment didn't operate and others were never turned off because they would stop working if they were," Dyer said.

in response, the SAARC received a flat-top griddle, a six-burner gas stove and several five-compartment warming wells.

"Almost everything was paid for by our membership," said VanAcker, now Construction Project Manager at Kilwins Chocolate Franchise inc. "That's pretty special. There are not too many organizations that would do that."

A major contributor to this RFMA Gives project was Legacy Air. Jay Parker, President of Legacy Air, has a special place in his heart for recovery and second-chance projects.

"I'm the product of a second chance. I've been sober for 20 years," he said. "SAARC speaks to us as an organization; it fits our culture, who we are and who we try to be in life. Service is our core principle, and it's not just service to our customers or to each other but also to our community. There was no way we weren't going to be involved, and we wanted to be a big part of this one."

Fourteen years ago, Parker started a recovery meeting at the SAARC, and it is still going strong. He spends a lot of time in the building, being sponsored and sponsoring others. He employs more than 200 people—some are second-chance hires.

"While it's cool the building is being transformed, it's so much cooler to see people transform," he said. "I get emotional when a group of people gathers to help someone. On Volunteer Day, that was emotional. Every Tuesday night when people gather to change their lives, that's emotional. I'm really glad we were able to help."

Earnhart who had gone through the program himself, along with his wife, said the SAARC will continue the good work RFMA has completed. The beneficiaries have painted more rooms, using the Sherwin Williams' discount, and he hopes to incorporate the women's program on site soon.

"Due to RFMA's involvement, the Salvation Army is currently in the process of increasing its room capacity to serve even more people needing its services," Dover said. "It was directly due to saving valuable capital dollars that could be reinvested into its operations rather than repairing its facility."

"Many of the people who come through our program have lost everything," Earnhart said. "They have no hope and often feel abandoned by family, friends and their community. This great experience has shown them that people really do care. I can't thank the project managers and the RFMA Gives members enough. They didn't just come in to work; I felt like I made friends. They were more than volunteers. They became our family."

The renovation goes far beyond its enhancements. The project left Phoenix a little better than before RFMA members found it. It allows the SAARC to better serve those seeking a life of recovery. And most importantly, it has benefitted the beneficiaries and all who were involved with the project.

"If I can do something to make it easier for the beneficiaries to get through the program and get them back on their feet, I'm all in," Huskey said. "Before, I really didn't know what RFMA Gives was about. I knew about it, I've seen the videos, but I didn't appreciate its impact. I'm so blessed and privileged to have had the opportunity to be involved. It was a labor of love."

Throughout the project, RFMA Gives members never lost sight of SAARC's important mission.

"The Salvation Army returns mothers to their children, sons to their fathers, people to their families. How amazing is that?" Parker said. "To be part of that—even if it's painting a wall—there is no higher calling."

Sherleen Mahoney is a staff writer for Facilitator magazine.