



# Families Helping Families

Young Supporters Key to New Salvation Army Initiatives

By Vickie Mitchell



MONICA BELL PHOTOS

Georgia Bell is one of 1,221 children who sold lemonade this past summer to help the Salvation Army's LemonAiD initiative.

**M**ake no mistake: Georgia Bell, brown eyed, middle class, and soon to turn 4, knows exactly why she sweated beneath a sunny yellow umbrella and sold cups of lemonade and slices of chilled watermelon on several hot July days last summer. "For kids (who) didn't have any house," she shyly explained.

Georgia is one of the Salvation Army of Central Kentucky's newest and youngest supporters. She's among 1,221 chil-

dren who manned 221 lemonade stands July 4-23 to raise money and awareness for the Salvation Army during LemonAiD Days, a new annual fundraiser in Lexington that the Salvation Army will likely adopt in other cities.

It is fitting that children such as Georgia are the newest soldiers in the Salvation Army's campaign to help the needy and homeless. Families with children are the fastest-growing segment of the homeless population in this country; the

average age of a homeless person in the United States is 9.

In Lexington, the Salvation Army's shelter at West Main and Newtown Pike is devoted to this growing portion of the homeless population.

"We are the only emergency family shelter in the area," said Maj. Debra Ashcraft, Central Kentucky area services coordinator.

The Salvation Army that Ashcraft encountered as a summer intern here 20

## THE SALVATION ARMY

years ago is far different from the one she found when she returned to Lexington in 2004 to lead the organization.

In 1986 homeless men “pulled their mattresses down and slept on the gym-



nasium floor, and there were two homeless families in the Way House,” she remembered.

Today, the Hope Center serves homeless men, and the Salvation Army’s 132-bed emergency shelter is overwhelmed, operating over capacity.

In 2006, it provided 32,534 nights of lodging for those with nowhere else to go — 9,631 more nights than in 2001. About 70 percent of the shelter’s residents call Lexington home. And those who are seeking shelter “are staying longer,” said Carol Stevenson, community liaison.

“We’ve never actually turned any person away, but we might not have been able to provide the accommodations that we would like,” Ashcraft said.

The growing demand weighs heavily on Ashcraft and other Salvation Army officials. Unlike most Salvation Army units, the Central Kentucky area has no money in reserves.

“It is all we can do to keep the place operating,” she said. “Normally, the Salvation Army tries to put back a little money

each year for equipment replacement or to make repairs, and we haven’t had the money to do that.”

Grants from foundations, 5 percent of the Lexington Salvation Army’s budget,

have helped with some capital expenditures. Annual funding from the Keeneland Foundation, for example, has helped buy equipment such as a much-needed photocopier. City and federal grants pro-



Maj. Debra Ashcraft: “We’ve never actually turned any person away.”

SARAH L. PETERS PHOTOS



vide a combined 5 percent of the budget, and 9 percent comes from the United Way of the Bluegrass.

But for most of its funding, the Salvation Army turns to the community. Community support, including in-kind gifts, made up 63 percent of its \$4.3 million annual budget in 2005-06.

That’s why LemonAiD was such a perfect answer to Ashcraft’s prayers. In three weeks it raised \$38,437 from the community, including \$20,000 from four corporate sponsors. The monies will be used to benefit homeless children in the emergency shelter.

The fundraiser also raised awareness of the Salvation Army and its needs among those who could best relate to the shelter and its importance — families and children.

Brothers Wes and Donovan Gregory, ages 13 and 8, respectively, raised \$220 with their lemonade stand. “It showed them that there are people who need our help, and we should do so if we are in the position to help,” said their mother, Robin Gregory.

Lemonade stand participants were encouraged to tour the Salvation Army,

and those who did saw an amazing number of services run from a modest facility with a full- and part-time staff of 78.

In addition to furnishing 17 family rooms and barracks-style housing in its emergency shelter, the Salvation Army serves three meals a day, provides two professional case managers, offers

job and life-skills training, and provides medical care for those without health insurance through an on-site clinic operated with the University of Kentucky’s College of Medicine.

But most important for families that are trying to get back on their feet are the child-care options offered on site. The Early Learning Center provides care for children 6 weeks to 5 years of age; the



Layton White (left) and Jason Ellis learn computer skills at the Boys and Girls Club of the Bluegrass after-school program.



Scott Van Fossen, executive director of the after-school program, helps Nytasia McCann in the computer room.

Boys and Girls Club of the Bluegrass is an after-school program and summer day camp where kids can get help with homework, play basketball and other sports, and spend time in a computer lab. "Homeless families really like the services we offer here," said Ashcraft. "If you are homeless and a single mom, they feel the Salvation Army is well equipped to help them on site with the children."

Ashcraft says that LemonAiD may become a national means of helping homeless families, and as it catches on in other cities, may perhaps become as comparable in stature as the Red Kettle Fund Drive at Christmas that everyone identifies with the Salvation Army.

"I think it may go national," said Ashcraft. "We've already had calls from New York and California. The kettle started in San Francisco; maybe it will be the lemonade stand in Lexington."

"The Salvation Army is geared toward Christmas, and people are used to putting money in the kettle," said Stevenson. "But, boy, those services are needed as much in the summer as in the winter."

And, already, families are planning for July when they'll once again sell lemonade and tell the Salvation Army's story.

As Ashcraft had hoped, the fundraiser also benefited those who participated and ignited a new generation of volunteers and supporters. "We wanted to empower kids to make a positive change in the community," she said.

Georgia Bell is a good example. Already, she and her mother, Monica, who played a significant role in helping her daughter raise \$230, are looking forward to July.

"I want my children to be givers and feel a responsibility as human beings," said Monica Bell. "I think we should be taking care of each other." 🐾

## THE WAY HOUSE



SARAH L. PETERS PHOTOS

**M**oving into the Salvation Army's The Way House has put Linda one step closer to self-sufficiency.

She's one of 20 women who will live in the new 20-bed transitional housing unit, just across the courtyard from the Salvation Army's 132-bed emergency shelter.

Linda came to the Salvation Army shelter in February. She'd fallen behind on rent at the apartment where she'd lived for three years. "I'm 55 years old; I'd never been evicted," said the former Michigan resident, who came to Lexington to get a new start.

In The Way House she'll have far more privacy than in the barracks-style shelter. She'll share a room with two other women, and she and the other 19 residents will share a living area and bathrooms.

Linda also will have more responsibility. She'll pay the Salvation Army 25 percent of her income from a 35-hour-a-week job at Kroger for rent. She'll be required to save money toward permanent

housing. She'll buy her own personal care items. Although she's still welcome to eat at the emergency shelter, Linda prefers to cook her own meals.

The Way House gives working homeless women such as Linda a chance to build some savings so they can live on their own again. "The objective is to help them save for their nest eggs and get them used to having bills," said Carol Stevenson, community liaison.

"Sometimes it can be too big of a step to go from the emergency shelter to being on their own," said the Salvation Army's Maj. Debra Ashcraft.

The Way House will free up 20 beds in the emergency shelter, allowing it to serve more homeless women and families.

A one-time \$120,000 grant from the United Way of the Bluegrass funded the conversion of existing space into The Way House. The challenge ahead is to raise the extra funds for day-to-day operations.

## HOLIDAY HAPPENINGS

**I**t all begins with the bells. When the red kettles and their accompanying volunteer bell ringers appear in early November, the Salvation Army's most visible season has begun. Because it has so many programs at the holidays, the Salvation Army has a great need for volunteers and donations.

### Kettle Drive



This Salvation Army signature program has suffered from a dearth of volunteer bell ringers, worrisome because it is the organization's major fundraiser.

"Last year we had a lot of stands go empty because we didn't have enough volunteers," said Maj. Debra Ashcraft, Central Kentucky area services coordinator. "We thought we could have had another \$40,000 easily if we had just had the help." The kettle drive is Nov. 9-Dec. 24.

### Mountain of Love



The Mountain of Love, Nov. 9-Dec. 12, supplies food baskets so needy families can have a special holiday meal. Because the drive comes on the heels of the God's Pantry Thanksgiving food drive, "it is a challenge to collect enough food and money," Ashcraft said. The Salvation Army must often supplement donations and last year spent thousands on potatoes and stuffing.

Donors can drop off food donations at WalMart locations and Fayette Mall, donate money, or donate grocery store gift cards that are placed in baskets so families can buy perishables. Volunteers also are needed to help collect and sort donations.

### The Angel Tree



Much of the Salvation Army's holiday focus is on children. "We plan to serve about 6,000 children; last year it was about 5,000," said Ashcraft. Through the Angel Tree, Nov. 16-Dec. 9 at Fayette Mall,

donors can choose names of needy children and shop for items on their Christmas wish list or donate money and have the Salvation Army do the shopping. This year the Salvation Army also will assist the U.S. Marine Corps' Toys for Tots program and will screen applicants. Volunteers are needed to work at the Angel Tree at Fayette Mall.

### Holiday Meals



SALVATION ARMY PHOTOS

On Thanksgiving and Christmas, the Salvation Army feeds those who otherwise wouldn't have a meal or who are alone. Last year, 700 meals were served. Volunteers are needed to help serve meals at the Salvation Army and to deliver meals to the homebound. Typically, fewer people volunteer to help out at Christmas than on Thanksgiving Day.

A new event on the Salvation Army's holiday calendar is Pickin' for Tots, a bluegrass music fundraiser on Nov. 24.

For more information, contact the Salvation Army at (859) 252-7796 or visit its Web site, [www.salvationarmy-lex.org](http://www.salvationarmy-lex.org).