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Positive Profiles: Chosen 300 Provide A Meal

By: Ken Kilpatrick , The Bulletin

The sweet taste of benevolence: Founded in 1996 by the Rev. Brian Jenkins and his wife Shandai, the Chosen 300 Ministries has since distributed over 400,000 meals to Philadelphia's homeless.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness reports there are 744,000 people who are homeless throughout America. Project H.O.M.E.'s Web site indicates that on any given day, there are approximately 4,000 persons who are homeless in Philadelphia.

America is the wealthiest nation, and Philadelphia is said to become the "next greatest city." So how can all these people be left out in the cold?

Often, people are forced into homelessness because they have become destitute in a society that looks the other way. Fortunately, there are some who cannot look the other way and are drawn toward helping people they do not know. Those with such a passion may be called the chosen few. But here in Philadelphia, they are known as the Chosen 300.

Founded in 1996 by the Rev. Brian Jenkins and his wife Shandai, the Chosen 300 Ministries has since distributed over 400,000 meals to Philadelphia's homeless. Twenty-nine area churches contribute volunteers, food and funds each month, enabling the organization to feed its homeless guests five days each week.

In November 2001, Rev. Jenkins got a call from a suburban man asking how he and his family could volunteer over the Thanksgiving holiday.

"The call was not unusual as many people offer to help during the holidays," said Jenkins. "We were glad to welcome him and his family."

Scott Rankin of Dresher, who placed the call, didn't feel anything unusual either. He thought feeding the homeless would not only be a kind thing to do, it would also give his children an opportunity to see that some other people are far less fortunate than they were. But after the Rankins finished an evening of serving the homeless, his children instead saw their father broken, unable to hide his tears as they drove away.

Rankin's upbringing was typical. He grew up in Ambler, hanging out with his friends and working on cars. Like many teens, he enjoyed going to school for the social aspect it offered.

"I was in the half of my graduating class that allowed the top half to exist," he jokes.

Growing up, Rankin kept various jobs to include working at his church, and sweeping the floors at his father's spring manufacturing factory, which was then located on Main Street in Ambler.

After high school, Rankin enrolled at Temple University, where he earned a degree in business and marketing. Upon graduation, he moved to Germany to work for Porsche. The company ultimately commissioned Rankin as part of the team that set up Porsche Cars North America.

Rankin's father eventually convinced his son to come home to work at Vulcan Spring. For the first few years, he split his days working in the factory to fill the gaps the rapidly growing company was experiencing, and in the office where he served in a marketing and sales capacity. Within five years, he developed a new product line and helped grow the company well beyond his father's expectations. Rankin has since purchased Vulcan Spring from his father, which is now located in Telford, Bucks County.

Over the years, Rankin and his father provided well-paying jobs to scores of employees, rewarding productive workers with generous raises and bonuses. A number of workers hired at the entry-level have worked their way into management positions.

Although Rankin learned important lessons about providing for family and employees, charitable giving was not a part of his "schooling."

"We were never taught to give to the poor or contribute to organizations that did," said Rankin.

Rankin's lesson in giving began during a missionary conference his church sponsored. After the event, he thought about getting involved in some missionary work, but wasn't quite ready to take up residence in a tent in Mongolia.

"That night I asked God to use me in some way - as long as it was within 45 minutes from home," he said with a chuckle.

When Thanksgiving 2001 approached, Rankin began to call charities looking for opportunities for his family to help the homeless. Most of the organizations he called said they didn't need help, but would appreciate a financial contribution and his ongoing support. Eventually, he dialed the Chosen 300 Ministries and spoke with Rev. Jenkins, who said he would gladly welcome the Rankins help to serve food to the organization's homeless guests.

Before hanging up, Rankin asked Jenkins how far the Chosen 300's location was from Dresher.

"About 40 minutes," said Jenkins.

"God not only answers prayer," said Rankin. "He has a sense of humor!"

For the past six years, Rankin has been a weekly volunteer at the Chosen 300, reporting every Monday to its location at 1116 Spring Garden St. in Philadelphia. He now serves on the board of directors, but still keeps busy feeding the homeless and performing operational tasks such as sweeping the floor and changing light bulbs.

Volunteering at the Chosen 300 Ministries has opened Rankin's heart to other opportunities. He and his wife Sharon have since become involved with the Hebron Children's Home in India, where they funded an orphanage, and with the Pocket Testament League, an organization that distributes bibles worldwide.

"There is a lot of opportunity to help those in need," said Rankin. "My best advice is to just try something. Everyone has a role they can play. The Chosen 300 is a great place to serve. If you have a passion to contribute, come to Chosen 300 and help us serve the people of Philadelphia. We have opportunities for everyone."

We all can be thankful that the Scott Rankins of this world refuse to look the other way knowing 4,000 homeless Philadelphians might not have dinner tonight. But Scott Rankin, Rev. Jenkins and everyone at Chosen 300 Ministries cannot do it alone. Take a moment to think how you might be able to help. To learn more about Chosen 300 Ministries or to join them in the 5-Mile Walk Against Homeless on April 21, visit their Web site at www.chosen300.org or call 215-765-9806.

Do you know a corporate, civic or community individual who is making a positive impact on the tri-state area? If so, send your tips to profiles@thebulletin.us or call Ken Kilpatrick at 610-547-3713.

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