



the ROCKFORD RESCUE MISSION
rescuer

Bringing the Mission to YOU

Among the many challenges experienced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Rockford Rescue Mission was forced to forego the vital services of our dedicated volunteers. To continue providing three meals a day to our guests and community, our Life Recovery residents heroically rose to the occasion.

This issue of The Rescuer brings you their stories, along with reflections from our staff. We pray you'll be inspired by their heartwarming testimonies, which begin on Page 3.



See inside – and tune in to our Evening for Hope telethon on January 28 – to learn how your gifts and prayers are bringing new hope to our residents and guests during this challenging time.



Join Us for an Evening for Hope

Reflections FROM THE CEO

As you read this, we'll be making final preparations for our 24th annual *Evening for Hope* telethon – always one of the highlights of the year here at Rockford Rescue Mission.

The first *Evening for Hope* happened in January 1998 – just about a year before we moved to our present location. My late husband, Perry, who then was Rockford Rescue Mission's executive director, came up with the idea as a way to push us across the finish line in funding the new building. Perry co-hosted it at WIFR-TV, along with Jackie Goetsch, one of their news anchors. Some of the people appearing with us included Rockford Mayor Charles Box, Congressman Don Manzullo and State Sen. Dave Syverson.

And then the next year, 1999, the telethon was held live at the new building just a few weeks before it opened. I remember our development director at the time, Randa Noble, taking viewers on a video tour of the place. Most of the rooms were still empty!

The telethon aired on WIFR the first seven years, before we moved to WTVO in 2006. The 2021 telethon will be our 16th with WTVO. It definitely takes a lot of time and help to pull off an event like this. There's scripting, videos, setting up and staffing a phone bank and much more. Thanks in advance to everyone helping us this year.

We have enjoyed these local partnerships and the freedom we have had over the years with both TV stations to speak openly about our ministry and the gospel behind it. No one has ever told us to temper our faith message in any way. We appreciate being able to boldly proclaim over the airwaves that life transformation is possible because of a relationship with Jesus.

Sherry Pitney, CEO,
interviewing Rockford
Rescue Mission Co-Founder
G.O. Pitney during the 2002
Evening For Hope telethon.



Obviously, the telethon's focus is very much on raising funds for Rockford Rescue Mission. Over the years these evenings have netted more than \$2 million for our ministry. But what I really love about the telethon is this: There are people out there watching who are being helped by the stories we are telling, both live and on videos. Someone may be struggling with substance abuse or domestic violence, and thinking there is no place they can turn to for help. Well, help is right there on their TV screen. So it's an encouragement for them to get through another day and to check us out.

We also always see a fair number of gifts that evening given in memory of loved ones who have died because of substance abuse. This can be a healing thing for families and friends, to know that they are helping someone else get the help they need.

I hope you will tune in on Thursday evening, Jan. 28, for an *Evening for Hope*.

Partners in Hope,

Sherry Pitney

Sherry Pitney
CEO



The Other Side of Hope Soon to be released!

Rockford Rescue Mission is putting the finishing touches on *The Other Side of Hope*, a book featuring the incredible stories of seven women with close ties to our ministry. All have experienced deep suffering. Through it all, though, they chose to walk into their true identities as children of God.

Tune in to our *Evening for Hope* telethon to learn more!



Conquering the Challenges of

Rockford Rescue Mission Recovery Program residents and staff share how they joined hearts and hands to keep our programs and services running, encourage one another and embrace God's blessings.



Bobbie
Women's Life
Recovery Resident

We have a group of eight women residents who have been here together since before COVID started. And now we have added a few more. So that has been a blessing. We have drawn near to each other. Everything we've been doing, we do together. No one is by themselves unless they are talking to their sponsor or mentor or something like that. We are our sisters' keepers now – literally.

We have not had a bad day that we couldn't talk about and pray about and get past it. Prayer is our No. 1 discussion. In the morning, we start our day with prayer. We have a devotion every morning where we can talk about stuff. If we've got something on our minds, we can get it off. Most of all, we pray at night. We don't let anybody go to bed with something heavy on their mind.

The Men's and Women's Recovery residents have been doing all the serving for breakfast, lunch and dinner. And if something else outside of that comes up, we do that, too. I know that has brought us closer together.

We had a meeting when COVID first started, and we said, "Look, we can do this. We've got to do this." No one was going to cower and run off. COVID was still going to be there. So we decided that God put us in this place together and that we would serve and honor God by doing it.

For the most part, we are doing very well. It's nothing on our own. This is through Jesus Christ that people are glued together like this. If we wanted our own way, we would probably all leave and go home to be with our families. But this showed us that we all came here to find a new way of life. We want to be clean. We want to be free from bondage. So that's the part that makes us stick together. We all decided that we want this recovery program.

**"We can do this.
We've got to do this."**

When I got sick with COVID-19 last spring, it kind of alarmed the Women's Life Recovery residents at first. I did a couple of Zoom calls with them so that they could see that I was doing OK. And then they also prayed for me, instead of me always being the one praying for them. They lifted me up in prayer.

Also during COVID, we started doing more praise and worship. It's something I always wanted to implement into the program but just never had a chance. The classes taught by volunteers got dropped from the schedule, so that opened up free time two or three times a week for praise and worship sessions online. I think it brought some unity and increased faith.

For us to keep functioning through COVID, we needed all residents on deck to help us out with meal times. We couldn't have done it without their help. It has been amazing to see the positive results – to hear from a resident saying, "I can actually work alongside so-and-so; I see him as a brother," or "I see her as a sister."

And they've even taken it further. The men and women have done combined birthday parties some evenings in the Great Room. They pray for each other, as a group.

Pam Tomita
Life Recovery Services Director



"They lifted me up in prayer."



Mike Hedrick
Homeless Services Director

It was tough at the beginning of this pandemic. Classes stopped and staff was limited. The staff members that were still working were putting in 12- and 13-hour shifts. There were times on the men's side when tensions were high. But most of us pushed through. The men and women of Recovery stepped up and took care of things needed to continue our recovery process. We did AA meetings on Zoom, and started our own Bible studies. We showed the staff that we could work together when times got tough. I'm glad I stayed.

When we finally got a break in the COVID cases and the State started opening things back up, the men and women of Recovery were blessed by God and Rockford Rescue Mission to go for a day in the park. I think, as people struggling with addictions, we've been holding our breath in life. But that day in the park was our chance to exhale. I climbed a hill and sketched a picture of the park below. At that moment, I felt free of any and all worry. So I called the sketch, "Recovery in the Park."

Unfortunately, this pandemic is far from over, so I know we here at Rockford Rescue Mission will do what we have to do to continue to fight for our recovery. My journey is still long. But if I continue to use what I'm taught here, I think I will survive in life the way God intended me to. What I've learned through this whole COVID thing is that I can actually come through adversity and hard times without turning to drugs and alcohol.

**"How can we help?
What can we do?"**

I really believe that our men and women are able to stand up to anything. That's one thing about our homeless guests and neighbors who are addicted. They are used to adversity. And they are very good at standing up to it. What I noticed was, when we were facing these challenging times, more often than not we were hearing from our residents, "How can we help? What can we do?" They were really taking a sense of pride at being able to serve the guests and other residents.

These are some of the same individuals who were on the streets three months earlier, just looking out for themselves, and here they were selflessly doing whatever they could to make somebody else's day brighter.

They planned and served a cookout in our parking lot for the Crisis guests, at the time Women's Crisis was quarantined and couldn't take any new guests. They wanted to serve individuals in need and show them they were still cared about.

It speaks to the life transformation that happens here at Rockford Rescue Mission. Those men and women just stepped up to the plate. They were going through the same kind of changes as everyone else, but they weren't able to go home to their families every night. It was really inspiring to see guests who had absolutely nothing but were willing to give away everything.



Charles
Men's Life
Recovery Resident

**"We showed the
staff that we could
work together."**

Bringing the Mission to You

Mark your calendar for our Evening for Hope



Thursday, January 28 • 7 p.m. • WTVO Channel 17

Since its inception over two decades ago, our annual *Evening for Hope* telethon has become a highly anticipated and beloved event, not only because of the funding it provides, but also for the awareness it brings to our life-changing outreach and the joy, inspiration and gratitude it offers those who seek our help and support our work.

Much of the telethon's success is due to time-honored partnerships with the original producer, local television station WIFR, and with station WTVO, which has hosted the event since 2006. According to WTVO Creative Services Director Shawn Anderson, the relationship has been a great way for both the station and Rockford Rescue Mission to connect with a large portion of the community. "Like us, Rockford Rescue Mission is a long-standing and trusted part of the Stateline," he says. "Being associated with one of the city's greatest assets is fantastic."

From a makeshift control room in a Mission closet to a mobile production truck, technology has grown with the popularity of the event. And like any detailed production, the telethon hasn't been without its challenges – such as quickly adopting plan B when the phones failed to work, or competing with national breaking news.

The latest technology and the ability to take obstacles in stride have prepared the telethon team to rise to what may be our greatest challenge ever – the impact of COVID-19. "Things will look a little different this year," says Rockford Rescue Mission CEO Sherry Pitney. "The phone bank will still be live, but with allowances for social distancing. And there will be no live interviews; everything will be pre-recorded."

Yet even with the changes, 2021 could be the telethon's most important year ever. "The pandemic has caused us to discontinue volunteer activities, tours and other events we typically used to share our message and show our appreciation to our friends and donors," Pitney says. "Because you can't come to us, the telethon allows us to bring Rockford Rescue Mission to you."

Ways to Consider Giving

Cash gifts aren't the only way to support us through our telethon. If obligated by age to make a required minimum distribution (RMD) in 2021 from your IRA or 401(k), consider a donation to Rockford Rescue Mission. Or if you've created a Donor Advised Fund, recommend a contribution to our ministry. Be sure to contact your tax advisor for the most current details.



Did You Know?

- Since 1998, the *Evening for Hope* telethon has netted more than \$2 million to support Rockford Rescue Mission's programs and services.
- Nearly 10,000 gifts have been received, 35% from first-time donors.
- Over the years, over 125 individuals have shared their stories of life restoration.
- Mayors, state senators, U.S. congressmen and other dignitaries, celebrities and sports figures have taken part to champion Rockford Rescue Mission's work.

Grants Help Us Cope with COVID-19

Rockford Rescue Mission received three Emerging Needs Fund grants last year from the Community Foundation of Northern Illinois and United Way of Rock River Valley. Each grant helped protect guests, residents, staff and the community from COVID-19. Rockford Rescue Mission received:

- \$9,950 for 61 germ-resistant mattresses in our Men's Crisis Center. These are much easier to clean and sanitize than the older mattresses they replaced.
- \$2,400 for eight sanitation stations, permanent COVID-19 signage and support costs for our staff nurse. The sanitation stations are located in our Men's and Women's Crisis Centers, the community meal entrance, the kitchen, our main lobbies, Thrift Store and Nettie's Mercantile. The stations contain tissues, hand sanitizer, disposable masks and gloves.
- \$5,000 for single-use trays, disposable cups, bowls, utensils and take-out containers. These have allowed us to continue serving meals to our guests and residents, while keeping our kitchen and facilities staff safer.

"Each of these grants helped us meet an urgent safety need," said Mission CEO Sherry Pitney. "In a season where no one knew what was coming next, we appreciate both the Community Foundation and United Way for coordinating such a helpful response."



City Installs Washing Stations at Rockford Rescue Mission



We're grateful to the city of Rockford for the handwashing stations that were installed outside our Crisis Center entrances for guests to use before entering the building. We thank city leaders for thinking of Rockford Rescue Mission at the start of the pandemic and providing the equipment at a moment's notice.

Don't Leave the Future to Chance

Sometimes our best laid plans fall apart. But there's one plan everyone should take extra care to create – their estate plan. Proverbs 14:8 says, "The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways..."

When you create a will or estate plan that provides for loved ones and reflects your values, you have an opportunity to make an uncertain future certain. An up-to-date will also allows you to:

1. **Protect your family.** You're the best person to make tough decisions about your care or personal estate. Preparing ahead means you'll remove the possible burden from loved ones and allows you to name a guardian for any minors.
2. **Reduce your tax load.** Numerous tax reduction strategies exist to help keep more money in your estate. The key is to plan sooner rather than later.
3. **Support your favorite cause or ministry.** Just because estate planning is considered a legal transaction doesn't mean you can't plan with your heart. Consider leaving a gift in your will for Rockford Rescue Mission to impact lives for years to come.

For the full version of this article, request a FREE copy of "How You Can Create a More Certain Future" by contacting Ted Tomita at **815-965-5332** or tedtomita@rockfordrescuemission.org – or bless your family today with a God-honoring will at christianwill.org/rrm.

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