

White House honors Bethlehem Inn with "Champion in Compassion"™ award

by Bend Weekly News Sources

The Bethlehem Inn received an award from the White House in mid January at a conference sponsored by the White House Department on Faith-based and Community-based Initiatives. The award recognizes the Inn as a "Champion in Compassion." Two organizations in the state of Oregon were recognized at the conference and the Bethlehem Inn is honored to be a recipient. "This award belongs to our clients. We help clients set goals but they do the really hard work," said Liz Hitt, Executive Director. The number of homeless people in Central Oregon is increasing rapidly. Recent data indicates we have over 1,300 homeless people on any given night with 44% under the age of eighteen. This is a 43.5% increase in the homeless population since the last survey was conducted in 2002. The need for emergency shelter is daunting as Central Oregon grows from a sleepy town to a thriving metropolis. The challenge is to meet this growing demand for emergency housing and meals. The shelter has been full every night this winter, with 90 men, women and children. The Inn tries to provide emergency shelter for all the families resulting in multiple families sleeping on the floor in our family room when the family housing units are full. The Inn provides the only emergency shelter available to homeless individuals and families in the region. The result is that a great number of individuals and families are forced to camp, secure night to night shelter in cheap motel rooms, live in cars or abandoned buildings, etc. The mission of the Bethlehem Inn is to break the cycle of homelessness in Central Oregon through the provision of beds, meals, drug testing, case management, transportation, accountability-based programming, educational opportunity and employment assistance. Our organization provides emergency, instant access to housing and focused case management for its clients. The Inn offers two types of emergency housing. The Next Steps program focuses on operating a main shelter facility with two dorms (52 beds) for single men and one dorm (20) beds for single women. The Families First Program focuses on services for homeless families and offers separate housing, through six apartments, for the children and their families. Last year, the Inn provided housing for up to 72 individuals per night, served 78,480 meals and had the assistance of 3,700 volunteers. As a largely volunteer-driven organization with a small professional staff, the Inn relies on its solid base of local volunteers and donors to help us with meals and operational support. The community is invited to make a difference this holiday season. Organize a food or donation drive, sign up to volunteer at the Inn, or make a donation. Following is the organization's winter wish list: * Hardy paper plates * Napkins * Toilet paper * Plastic utensils * Laundry Soap * Sponsors to donate \$135 per week to provide 30 gallons of milk for the clients at the Inn. Call 322-8768 or visit www.bethleheminn.org for more information or to make a donation.

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