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Major pantry faces deadline, needs some help

Losing its house, not its hope

By **Amelia Buragas**
 August 19, 2004

When its lease runs out in a little less than a month, House of Hope will be without a home. This jeopardizes a vital food source for the 1,500 people the church and food pantry serves each month.

Brenda Click, co-pastor of House of Hope along with her husband Stuart, said their current building at 1017 Applegate Road was sold in July. They are scrambling to find a new location before their lease expires in mid-September.


Click hopes to move into a building down the block on Index Drive. The biggest obstacle to signing the new lease is getting the money together. Click said that although they survive on a modest budget - about \$5,000 per month for rent and utilities - it is a struggle.

"Basically we're always just running a little short just to get the rent paid," Click said. "If we can get the finances, this could happen very quickly."


The potential location is a warehouse, Click says. "Not anything fancy, but it's pretty nice for a warehouse."

It would also allow the organization to remain centrally located in the South Madison area between Allied Drive and South Park Street.

House of Hope distributes 100,000 pounds of food each month to Madison's low-income and homeless population. Click said the church is thankful to have an abundance of everything but cash. They keep the food bank stocked from a variety of sources, including the Second Harvest Foodbank of Southern Wisconsin, and have a number of dedicated volunteers.

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Stuart and Brenda Click of the House of Hope. (Photo by David Sandell)

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Robert Mohelnitzky, executive director of Second Harvest, said House of Hope is one of his organization's "major partners."

"We provide food to over 300 agencies in 16 counties," Mohelnitzky said. "This last month, House of Hope was our number one provider with over 15,000 pounds."

House of Hope runs a weekly food bank, something Click said fills a need not met by other organizations that only provide emergency relief or that have a monthly rather than weekly allotment.

"For people that are really living in poverty, that doesn't do a whole lot," Click said. "We have people who come in here once a week."

The food bank is also unique in that it allows people to choose 20 pounds worth of canned foods and sundry items like feminine products. Click said it is the norm for food banks to hand out prepackaged boxes. Also, when supplies allow, clients can take as much bread and produce as they need without limit.

In addition to the food pantry, House of Hope runs mobile food trucks in collaboration with Second Harvest. The trucks stop at Northport Drive, Lincoln Elementary School and Allied Drive. Mohelnitzky said House of Hope is the only organization he is aware of that runs a hybrid of services to extend its



reach beyond a single community.

"They're very dedicated people. We rely on them as very close partners," Mohelnitzky said. "They're excellent to work with. They are as close to being like staff as almost any agency that we work with, because we work so closely with them."

If the church cannot find a new location before the end of the lease, Click said they will keep as many services running as possible. The weekly food pantry will most likely close, but they will continue the food trucks, which serve over 350 families each week.

The forced move, while sooner than expected, does fit into the Clicks' larger plans for the church. If they secure the new location, there is an option to enlarge it by 5,000 square feet so that the House of Hope can grow and offer more services, like piano and guitar lessons for children, and develop more partnerships with local organizations.

Their ultimate plan is to emulate the Dream Center in Los Angeles, which houses more than 200 outreach ministries under one roof.

"They house people, feed people, take in runaway kids - any need that's out there in the community," Click said. "If we could all come together in one big facility, we could all save that monthly budget and people would only have to go to one place.

"This city has so many services, which is great, but when people are in poverty they have to go all over town."

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