

APRIL 2010

People Blessing People

**Lehigh Valley
Outreach Depot**

The First Year

Lehigh Valley  Outreach Depot
A mission of Wesley United Methodist Church, Bethlehem, PA
www.lvoutreachdepot.org

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OVERVIEW

Reflecting on the past year we can hardly believe how God has been there to inspire this ministry and led us to connect generous people with needy people in the Lehigh Valley and around the world.

THE VISION

To be “the hands and feet of God,” whose sole purpose is to receive, store and provide useful goods to those who need help reestablishing their lives or business.

This vision was born out of experience gained while volunteering at Mission Central in Mechanicsburg, PA. The vision was explained to our Church Council in the fall of 2009. The Church Council was asked to support, in principal, the idea of setting up a disaster relief warehouse in the Lehigh Valley. Following endorsement by the council, letters were sent to owners of warehouses in the Lehigh Valley. The letter outlined the vision and asked for free warehouse space for a period of one year to try out this idea!

The owners of one warehouse (REI Holdings – Rustic Exteriors) responded with an offer to let us use 5,000 square feet of below-grade space for a year – at no cost (other than utilities). The facility had some issues (drainage problems, no heat, etc.) but we felt these could be overcome.

After some negotiations, coordination and a lot of hard work - by dozens of willing volunteers from Wesley Church and others – the space was scrubbed clean, painted, repaired and made ready to launch our minis-

try. Our one (free) year's lease started March 1st, 2010 but we weren't ready to open our doors for business until April 24th.

Wow! What a ride! Early on a kind soul anonymously put up \$5,000 as seed capital to get the ministry started. Other donors also stepped up to the plate. With significant working capital we were able to install a new sump pump, clean the drains and seal the walls against moisture. Another generous donor replaced a deteriorated garage door with a new insulated door. And finally, just before cold weather set in, Hanaberry HVAC ("the company that cares") gave us an 80,000 BTU propane furnace! We only paid for a fraction of the cost of installation and the cost of setting up and filling propane tanks.

OUR VOLUNTEERS

Volunteer hours recorded – 3,612

Average number of volunteers each day – 5³/₄.

Total number of volunteers – 138 (average 26 hours/volunteer)

Groups of organized volunteers – Cedar Crest College, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Wesley Church Young Inquirers and the Muslim Association of the Lehigh Valley.

Types of work performed by volunteers:

Picking up & transporting donated items to the "LVOD"

Tagging large items with inventory markers (for tracking the number and the value of items)

Arranging and rearranging items in designated areas and maintaining them in a neat & orderly fashion.

Guest mentoring (finding out the guest's needs and helping with the selection of needed items).

Loading guests' vehicles or trucks with selected items.

Sorting, assembling, verifying and counting Disaster Relief Kits & supplies.

Sewing school kit bags and knitting infant sweaters.

Repairing damaged furniture and reupholstering chair seats.

Delivering verified Disaster Relief Kits and used computers to Mechanicsburg.

Data Entry of guest information, items taken.

Scheduling of Guest appointments and pick-ups.

Scheduling the donated Items pick-up & scheduling volunteers.
OUR "GUESTS"

REFERRALS

(Agencies with multiple referrals)

<u>Agency</u>	<u>No.</u>
Salvation Army	46
New Bethany Ministries	29
Valley Youth House	21
Turning Point	15
Catholic Charities	13
Project of Easton	13
Community Solutions	10
Bethlehem Area School District	9
Pennsylvania Mentor	9
Fowler Family Center	7
Marvine Family Center	7
Hispanic Council	6
Lehigh County Children & Youth	5
Lehigh County Conference of Churches	5
Lehigh Valley Intake Unit	5
Salisbury Behavioral Health	5
Signature Family Services	5
Lehigh Valley Assertive Community	4
Wesley United Methodist Church	4

RESULTS

WHAT'S BEEN RECEIVED BY OUR GUESTS? (OTHER THAN OUR PRAYERS)

Respect (dignified treatment	13 Tables
Choices (very important)	99 Small Appliances
270 Chairs	77 Sofas
139 Beds	39 Desks
130 TV's	31 Large Appliances
117 Dressers	Miscellaneous Items

Total value: \$100,324 (derived by applying mid-range donation values in the "Value Guide for Salvation Army Donations")

DISASTER RELIEF KITS

In addition to distributing household goods, volunteers assemble, sort, verify and pack selected disaster relief kits for distribution to victims of natural and other disasters both in the United States and worldwide. Components of these kits were donated by individuals or churches or bought in bulk with donated funds. Some were assembled by other church groups and delivered to the Depot for verification and shipment to Mission Central. Below is a consolidated list of disaster relief kits processed by our ministry:

<u>No.</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Value*</u>
3,165	Health Kits	\$37,980
949	Birthing Kits	\$7,592
28	Cleaning Buckets	\$1,540
128	School Kits	\$1,408
<u>28</u>	Layette Kits	<u>\$980</u>
Total: 4,298		\$49,500

Additionally, the Disaster Relief Kit team uses non-compliant donated items to support local ministries needing cleaning and health supplies. They also bag “Cleaning Supplies” to be given to guests referred to the depot. These bags include laundry detergent, dishwashing soap, paper towels, toilet paper, trash bags, sponges, tissues and bleach.

*Values specified by UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief)

BENEFACTORS

Wesley United Methodist Church – prayers, spiritual guidance and backing by the pastor, the congregation and the staff. \$5,417 in donations (Easter & Christmas offerings, cookbook sales & golf outing proceeds).

REI Holdings (Rustic Exteriors) – Free use of 5,000 square feet of warehouse space for one year plus an unexpected willingness to partner with us in this endeavor.

Mission Central – Spiritual leadership both by their experience, example and willing support.

Hanaberry HVAC – an 80,000 BTU furnace – they really are “the company that cares.”

ReMax (Shari Noctor) – Maintaining and offering free use of a 15 foot moving truck with power lift to pick up donations.

Brown-Daub – Provided several months use of a Parts Van to pick up donations.

Alderfer Auction & Appraisal – Both Furniture & Delivery of donated items.

Lehigh Valley Harmonizers – who donated the Outreach Depot Moving Trailer.

JHM Signs – Depot and Trailer Signs.

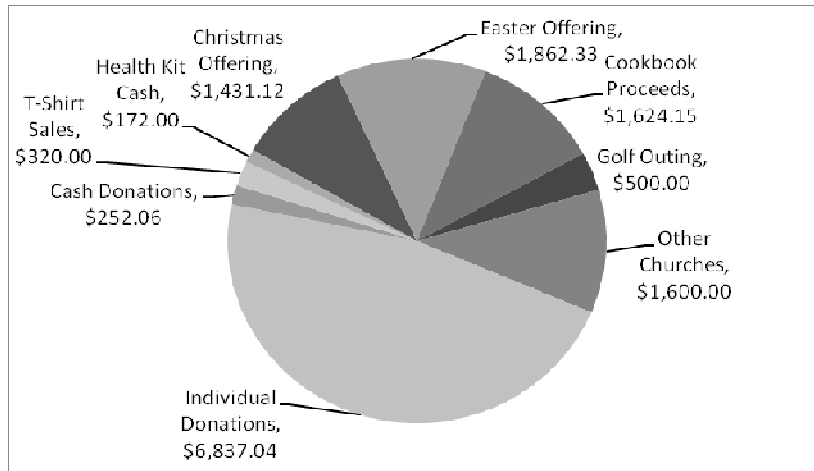
WeHaul Moving – Furniture and contacts with furniture suppliers.

The Fairfield Inn – 40 TV Sets donated when motel was remodeled.

The Bushkill Inn & Resort – 15 rooms of bedroom furniture.

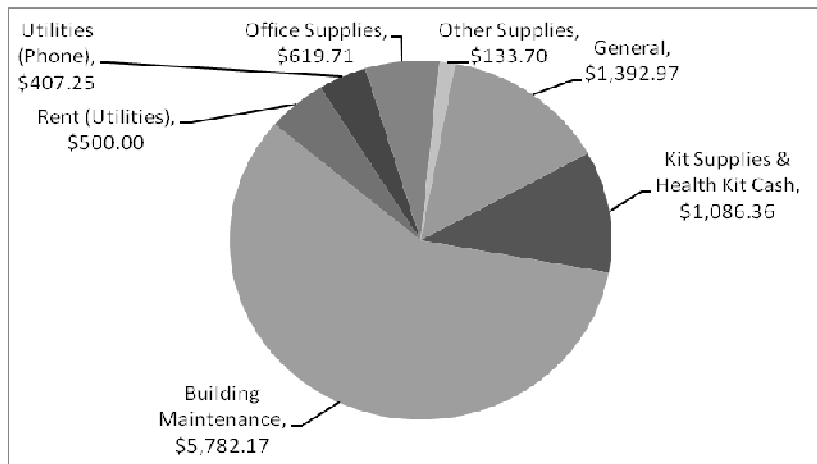
FINANCIALS (thru 12/31/010)

INCOME



TOTAL \$14,598.70

EXPENSES



TOTAL \$9,921.7

THE WEB SITE (www.lvoutreachdepot.org)

The web site was first published in February 2010. The site has evolved and changed to add or modify the content. Since it was first published there have been 3,921 visits by 1,579 visitors, generating 13,358 page views. The majority of these visitors were from Allentown (951), Easton (758) and Bethlehem (637). Many visitors were direct visitors - that is visitors who went directly to the web site without going through another site (1,445). A lesser number of visitors were referred by www.wesleychurch.com (705) and www.missioncentral.org (360).

LESSONS LEARNED

The decision to launch this ministry was definitely an act of faith. While others were doing similar work elsewhere, we faced a number of unique challenges and had to deal with each.

In the beginning we handled every visitor on a first come, first served basis. We soon found the volunteer staff overwhelmed by first time guests, donation deliveries, guests returning for a second visit to pick up selected items, and other visitors and guests. Eventually we decided to establish an appointment system. Guests are permitted 2 visits. They are given 30 minutes to look around the depot and make their selections. First time guests are scheduled on the hour; return visits are scheduled on the half hour. Donation deliveries are accepted at any time.

Communication has been a challenge. An answering machine is available to callers during times

when the depot is closed. We found many messages to be unintelligible because the caller spoke too quickly or were simply unable to express themselves clearly. If we couldn't interpret what was being said, we couldn't return the call. Eventually we modified our procedures for scheduling guest appointments and responding to those wanting to donate items but need to have their donations picked up.

Guest Appointments: We now ask that appointments be made on-line by caseworkers using an interactive form. This way we get accurate information - names, phone numbers, email addresses and appointment scheduling preferences. A "Referral and Liability Form" is downloaded from the web site and printed by the caseworker to refer guests to the depot. We had instances where guests would arrive without the form and/or at a time other than the scheduled appointment. Since we don't accept walk-ins, and since many caseworkers can't be contacted on weekends, we decided to ask caseworkers to include the appointment information on the guest's referral and liability form.

Donation pickup requests: We now ask donors to use an online form where they submit their name, address, phone number, a list of items to be picked up, and a preferred day (Tuesday or Saturday) and time (am or pm) for pickup. This information is used to plan routes of our volunteers pickup team. We also provide feedback telling the donor that pickup scheduling is subject to the availability of both volunteers and good weather and that volunteers use their own vehicles and/or rented vehicles. Donors are encouraged to contribute money to help offset those costs.