



Volunteers of America®

GREATER SACRAMENTO & NORTHERN NEVADA



# EVERYDAY GRACE

FALL 2009



University of Nevada, Reno, student Amy Smith checks Sierra Manor resident Charles Halvorson as part of the nursing school's outreach program.

## UNR students volunteer to aid seniors, homeless

"I was swamped," admits University of Nevada, Reno, junior Matt Polasko, recalling his first few frantic semesters as a chemical engineering student.

When Polasko eventually changed his major to biochemistry, he found his workload lighter, and became reacquainted with something he'd missed: free time.



Matt Polasko

But the 20-year-old Las Vegas native remained focused – shying away from togas and cafeteria food fights. Instead, he decided he wanted to, "branch out and give back."

*please see 'Volunteers,' page 4*



## Hope for families

Wenda Howard and children Jamil and Karim were among the first residents to find a safe, comfortable haven at Volunteers of America's new Family Shelter. The shelter offers as many as 90 days of shelter and supportive services for singles and couples with children.

## Keeping parents, kids together is top priority at new Volunteers of America Family Shelter

"Where will the moms and kids go? Where will the single dad with his little girl sleep?" The closure of the Winter Shelter earlier this year left many questions in our minds. While there are several emergency shelters for single men and women, safe comfortable havens for parents and their children have been hard to come by – which is why the Volunteers of America-operated Winter Shelter was such a blessing for so many (more than 2,000 people were cared for in 2008-09).

Thankfully, a window opened for the

opportunity to create a hopeful new program in this year of endings and finales. The Volunteers of America Family Shelter opened in mid-October with 62 beds and space for 12 families.

"It's unique in that we accept couples with children, as well as men with children," said program manager Norma Ward. "Right now, there's no where else for those people to go."

Currently being refurbished with the support of HomeAid Sacramento and Standard Pacific Homes, the shelter is

*please see 'Shelter,' page 3*

Holiday Giving Campaigns Now Under Way! See Page 3!



**‘M**y mother taught me how to be compassionate and caring for people in need,” says 70-year-old Emma, taking her seat in the colorful and well-kept backyard. She acknowledges our compliment about her recent salon visit with a half apology. “Thank you – even though it’s too short.”

Like her mother, who she describes as “a caregiver for anyone and everyone who needed help,” Emma grew up – in Oklahoma and Northern California – putting others’ needs and wants ahead of her own.

It was an upbringing she calls a “blessing,” but she often wonders aloud if her life in support of an alcoholic husband with severe post-traumatic stress syndrome came at too high a price – for herself and her four children.

She and her husband, a minister, traveled frequently. Devoted to spreading the Gospel, they would return home only long enough to earn money for more cross-country trips – kids in tow.

She wonders today if that was the right choice for her children, but she was committed to their mission and to her husband, which became increasingly difficult due to his violent night terrors, drinking and growing abusive behavior.

With few funds to sustain them beyond Social Security, a call from a daughter in financial need added further pressure on Emma and her husband, who came to live with them. But she found herself being treated as the child and threats of conservatism were frequently voiced.

“It was easier to go with the flow and not voice my opinions so much,” Emma said. “Aging is a hard thing to accept – for both seniors and their children. But I had a right to be who I was as an elderly



Brought up to put everyone else’s needs first, Emma tried to ignore years of emotional abuse. When she decided it was time to go, the Sacramento Senior Safe House was there for her.

person.”

When APS intervened, Emma considered living on the streets – she felt it was her only option in remaining independent.

When she learned of Volunteers of America’s Sacramento Senior Safe House she found the option she was hoping for.

“This place here, this safe house, was a

godsend to me,” Emma recalls. “I was scared to death, but had the assurance that I would be safe here. It’s been a blessing to me.”

*Within a month, Volunteers of America was able to place Emma at one of its affordable-living senior residences. To learn how you can help seniors like Emma, contact Kim at 916.442.3691 or kimc@voa-sac.org.*

## ***No wrapping required ...***

Love, hope and compassion are the kinds of gifts you don’t have to put in boxes or wrap with ribbon.

A legacy gift to Volunteers of America can help people in our community not only during the holidays, but for generations to come, and will also provide financial benefits for the rest of your life.

**To learn more, call us at 916.442.3691, or visit us at [volunteersofamerica-sac.org](http://volunteersofamerica-sac.org).**



# Be 'cool' this Christmas

**N**ineteen-year-old Tobias Lake saw the same holiday TV shows and commercials we all did while growing up – the smiling Santas, the close-knit families, the bounty of gifts and good will.

“I always wanted to be one of those kids who gets cool things for Christmas,” said Lake, a client of Volunteers of America’s transitional housing program for former foster youth, who spent his childhood holidays “in institutions and foster family homes.”

For Lake, who estimates his number of foster-home placements at more than 50, the holidays were never about the simple joys of being a kid at Christmas, but about disappointment, loneliness and uncertainty.

This year, we hope you will join us in helping to create fresh memories of a truly merry Christmas and provide for many happier new years to come by participating in one or more of our holiday campaigns.

## Adopt-a-Family

Wish lists from families, children and single adults are now available to those hoping to write a new chapter for a client’s Christmas story.

## WRAPPED GIFTS DUE BY 4 P.M. DEC. 11

## Hat, glove, scarf and sock drive

Sometimes the only “shelter” a homeless person has is what he or she can wear. In the hopes to both protect the body and uplift the spirit of the homeless.

## UNWRAPPED GIFTS DUE BY 4 P.M. DEC. 11

## Shelter

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hosting just a few families until appropriate renovations are completed.

“It’s sad, but we don’t have enough places for families to go, and we don’t want them out on the street,” said Ward. “The reasons why they need a shelter vary – they may have medical needs, they can’t afford to pay their mortgage anymore – they’ve lost their jobs. It’s not always a reason you might think of off the top of your head.”

With families that may range from newborns to young teens, a well-prepared shelter has a long list of needs that we’re asking the community to help us provide



## Turkey Drive

A simple goose made all the difference in the holiday celebration of Bob Cratchit and family. Remember the message of “A Christmas Carol” and make that difference in the lives of those in need.

## TURKEY DONATIONS DUE BY 6 P.M. NOV. 25

## Big Warm-up

The Big Warm-up coat drive – presented by Lands’ End and Sears – benefits Volunteers of America clients. Your donation of a used jacket earns you 20 percent off a new jacket.

## USED COAT DONATIONS DUE BY NOV. 30

*Learn more online at [volunteersofamerica.org](http://volunteersofamerica.org), or contact Kim Castaneda at 916.442.3691 or [kimc@voa-sac.org](mailto:kimc@voa-sac.org).*

for the care and safety of these young parents and their children.

A wish list for the Volunteers of America Family Shelter in downtown Sacramento is available online at [volunteersofamerica-sac.org](http://volunteersofamerica-sac.org). Cash contributions are also needed to sustain this essential program and may be made online via our Web site.

Volunteers, too, are on our wish list as we hope to see many of the regulars who served meals at our Winter Shelter once again wearing the familiar blue-and-white aprons as meal servers.

For more information on how you can donate or become a volunteer at the Family Shelter in Sacramento, please call Kim Castaneda at 916.442.3691 or e-mail her at [kimc@voa-sac.org](mailto:kimc@voa-sac.org).



**GREATER SACRAMENTO  
& NORTHERN NEVADA**

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# Volunteers

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A cafeteria would, however, become part of his extracurricular plans – just in a very different way.

As a student using the university's meal program, Polasko observed that the "swipe" cards the students received always had funds left over at the end of each plan period.

"It always bothered me that I couldn't do anything with the swipes I had left over," said Polasko.

His subsequent conversations with the UNR's dining hall administration and its food vendor, Chartwells, about possible alternatives for leftover funds on meal cards led to a new fundraising opportunity that would benefit Volunteers of America's Family, Men's and Women's shelters in Reno.

"Chartwells agreed that students could designate leftover swipes be donated to the Volunteers of America shelters, with \$2.51 set aside from each card donated per week.

Immediately, the program, which Polasko and fellow honor student volunteers promote each Wednesday evening in the university's Downunder Café, found favor.

"It was really surprising," said Polasko. "I thought a weekly maximum might be 100 swipes, but recently we had 181 – which raised \$454 in just one week. It's really surprising how much the students are willing to donate, it's a great turnout especially with how the economy is."

"When I toured the Family Shelter that really drove the message home," said Polasko, who had discovered Volunteers of America through a random online search of shelter programs earlier this summer. "It has motivated me to keep the program going."



*UNR honors student volunteer Emily Simon receives a campus meal plan "swipe" card from a Downunder Café patron. Using UNR student Matt Polasko's fundraising idea, unused meal-plan swipes are donated to our shelter programs in Reno. Some \$300 is being raised weekly.*



*Orvis School of Nursing senior Amber Daggitt talks to Sierra Manor resident Helen Davis about her medications.*

## Nursing students make house calls

It was one of those "win-win" situations. The University of Nevada, Reno's Orvis School of Nursing wanted to give its students real-world experience in assessing the emotional and physical needs of patients in their home environments. Volunteers of America Service Coordinator Kathy Dietel wanted to promote wellness among the senior residents at Volunteers of America's

Sierra Manor apartment complex.

Each semester since 2006, a group of 10 senior nursing students have made regular weekly visits to Sierra Manor residents, giving them insights on exercise, nutrition, medication management and home-safety.

The relationships between the nurses in training and the residents who request home visits also serve to prevent depression and social isolation, said Cathy Butler, an OSN assistant professor who has headed the community outreach program for five years.

"Our students, under supervision, offer wellness and physical assessments, paying attention to any spiritual, emotional and environmental needs," said Butler. "But we're invited in on their terms. It's not our agenda, it's theirs."

"I can't wait for them to come," said Charles Halvorson, a Minnesota native who moved to Sierra Manor 10 years ago. "I haven't smoked or drank for years, but I've got a little pot belly. They showed me how to do exercises in my chair. I can feel the difference – I've had to tighten my belt a notch." ▼



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