

## Providing Hope through Charity

by Susan Palmquist

A tractor-trailer backs up to a 20,000-square-foot warehouse in St. Louis Park, Minn. (pop. 44,126). The dock door opens and workers carefully unload the truck filled with potatoes, apples and bread. In previous days, trucks delivered clothes, medical supplies and even items such as makeup. The deliveries—all overstocked items donated by businesses—soon will be dispersed to area nonprofit organizations to help thousands of families and individuals in need.

Helping others is exactly what Dennis and Megan Doyle had in mind in the summer of 2000 when they invested their time and \$30,000 of their own money to create a nonprofit charity, Hope for the City.

The idea began when the couple heard about a California organization that was collecting overstocked products from businesses and giving them to the needy. Dennis, the CEO of a commercial real estate firm, had numerous business connections and believed he and his wife could make the concept work in the Minneapolis area.

"We thought it would work because we knew of unused warehouse space, corporations that would donate, plus organizations that were serving the poor," Megan says. The Doyles started with one paid employee, a rented Hertz truck and countless hours on the phone soliciting corporate donations and coordinating with nonprofit organizations to distribute the items. Soon clothes and food were rolling in.

"Corporations in the Twin Cities are so giving," Dennis says. "If they see a need and a program that's working they never hesitate to get involved."

Today, Hope for the City is headquartered in Edina, Minn. (pop. 47,425), and since its inception has distributed goods with a wholesale value of more than \$360 million. The Doyles have increased the staff to eight employees, who are aided by 30 volunteers, including themselves.

While the operation has grown significantly over the years, the process

of getting items to the needy hasn't changed much. Donated items are divided and placed in smaller bundles. Staff members send e-mails to charities describing what's going to be distributed each week. If the charities are interested, they respond and pick up the items.

Hope for the City presently aids around 80 organizations, including the St. Paul City Church, St. Louis Park Emergency Program and Keystone Community Services, which helps thousands of residents in the St. Paul area.

"Working with the staff of Hope for the City is just wonderful for nonprofit community members," says Christine Pulver, director of Keystone's Basic Needs Program. "Clients love the eggs, love the frozen meat, and through some of Hope for the City's corporate donors there are donations of higher-end, gourmet foods that add a lot of variety and treats for our clients."

Donations to the Doyles' charity include everything from lint rollers to personal care products. Aveda, a hair and skin-care company headquartered in Blaine, Minn., often donates shampoos and makeup, among other items.

"We're always looking for charitable partners and decided to team with Hope for the City because it seemed to be working and reaching lots of people in need," says Katie Galloway, Aveda's Earth Fund manager. "It's a system that's growing quickly and that's inspiring."

It's not just companies that are impressed with Hope for the City. Retiree Mike Pokorny has been volunteering to sweep floors and unload trucks for the organization for more than a year, and usually puts in about 45 hours a week. "I do this because it's a good idea, it's a good organization, and I know it's going to help more people in need," Pokorny says. The Doyles say their main goal is to keep their charity growing and help as many people as possible because, they believe, it's their calling.

"And everyone's a winner," Megan says. "The surplus goods stay out of the landfill, corporations get a tax break, people in need get food and clothing."

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