

# Open Door Center offers more than shelter

By **Bristow Marchant**  
Staff Writer 11-28-04

*(Twelfth in a series about United Way-funded agencies in Laurens County.)*

When people fall on hard times in Laurens County, and might need some place to go, the Open Door Christian Center is there to comfort and heal the afflicted. The outreach ministry located at 209 East Main Street has been open since 2001, serving as both a homeless shelter, a church, a rehabilitation center, and so much more.

"We do a three month Christian-based rehab program," said Rev. Charles Brewington, the center's director. "And we've just started a widows and orphans program this year. The



men from the shelter will go to people's houses and do carpentry, yard-work, whatever it is that they can't afford, we'll do free of charge if they can provide the materials."

Brewington believes in not only helping the men who pass through his doors, but also in giving back to the community as a whole.

"We help the community by recycling cardboard and offering our services to businesses," he said. "We're also starting an internship/leadership program for the men in the shelter. To do that they have to take a six-month rehab program and then another six month internship with us. We

help guys from start to finish. Our first intern is about to graduate from that in January."

Despite everything he does at the Open Door Center, there's even more Brewington wishes he could do. "We're also looking for a building for a female shelter," he said. "That's a need in this county but we can only take men here. We still hear about women who are homeless for whatever reason from the State Home or United Ministries or United Way, and they usually have children with them as well."

Last year, Brewington received \$7,500 from the United Way of Laurens County. Most of Open Door's other funding comes from private donations either from individuals or other groups and foundations.

"Getting funding from United Way has sealed us as an

organization you can count on," Brewington said. "When you work with United Way that tells people you've got your ducks in a row and that our finances have been checked. We have to be very accountable to them. I think that kind of reputation means more than even the money."

United Way Executive Director Caroline Thomas said she was proud that the United Way of Laurens County could work with an organization like the Brewington's.

"The Open Door Center provides more than just a shelter," Thomas said. "They provide a solution to those who are struggling with addiction. They are a proactive program that helps them to overcome their addictions and then also mainstreams them back into society."

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and we'll probably need to hold a food drive. But our biggest need is probably preparing for our next ministry, which will be the female shelter, so we need to find a place for that."

The United Way has been an invaluable tool for meeting the ministry's needs. "They helped us when we needed a communal oven," Brewington said. "We have 22 beds, and they've been full for the last year, and a half, so we needed that to cook and store more food. Then our truck broke down, so we had to use their

money to buy a new truck and pay some other bills."

Having transportation is necessary for Open Door's various missions around the community and beyond.

"We help transients who are passing through the county," Brewington said. "I have a young man from Florence here right now who came to do some construction work, but then things changed and he doesn't have the money to get back, so we're either going to buy him a bus ticket or drive him back in our own vehicles."

But despite the hardships, Brewington is thankful for all the help and understanding he has received while he tries to do the same for others.

"We were doing this before we had any funds, but it was tight. This past year our two main funds have been United Way and United Ministries. They've been like the hand of God pulling us through. Since we started in 2001, we have not lacked. When we lose one source another one slides right in."

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The fact that Open Door also serves as a chapel for its clients is, in Thomas's estimation, one of the main keys to the shelter's success.

"The most important thing they do is they give spiritual guidance to people at a time in their lives when they really need it, when many of them are at the end of their rope," she said.

"They give them a roof over their heads and provides a warm meal for them to eat. It's a real privilege for the United Way to be associated with an organization like them."

Brewington appreciates all the help he can get. "We stopped getting food from the USDA. We did for a while, but then they stopped six months ago because we aren't a food bank," he said. "So for the last six months we've been running out of food,



Open doors: A mural at the Open Door Christian Center, a homeless and emergency shelter that also houses an alcohol and drug rehabilitation program. — Photo by Bristow Marchant