

The City Paper

Published on *Nashville City Paper* (<http://nashvillecitypaper.com>)

A lot more Room In The Inn

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Created 08/29/2010 - 10:45pm

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What Father Charles Strobel likes to say started with a peanut butter and jelly sandwich in the early '80s has grown into the nonprofit Room In The Inn's Campus for Human Development, a massive initiative to help homeless in Nashville.

Its most recent achievement?

The five-story Comprehensive Center, the crown jewel of a \$13 million expansion that looks to focus on programs for the homeless as well as provide them an attractive, sober environment off the streets.

The shiny new center adds 38 affordable housing apartments and a 13-classroom learning center with space open to the community at large. Not to mention shower and laundry facilities, a courtyard with a patio-sized chessboard, Internet access and expanded medical care.

"We want this to be a place of hope, to rebuild people's self-esteem and to reignite a dream again," Strobel said.

With a soft launch on July 1 and the grand opening set for Sept. 9, a key aspect of the center lies on its top three floors, where 500-square-foot apartments are available from \$200 to \$550, based on income. For those who live there, the units are a safe alternative to other affordable housing options that may be surrounded by temptations such as drugs.

For those who can't yet afford their own apartment, the units can serve as a goal.

You could almost say homeless advocacy has been building up to this for more than 25 years.

It all started in 1983 as simple peanut butter sandwiches evolved into the Loaves & Fishes Soup Kitchen, a place where the homeless could grab a meal.

In 1991, the Guest House formed, giving homeless arrested for public intoxication an alternative to the traditional drunk tank and treating the problem as a medical-social issue rather than a

criminal one.

Roll in FOCUS (Faith Organizations in Covenant for Understanding and Service), various other programs for the homeless, the support of hundreds of congregations as well as the leadership of Strobel and others, and you have a the current homeless support system.

“All of us need to be able to have hope and dreams,” Strobel said. “Not to have that is to not be alive. We want this to be a place that helps people to come back to life.”

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