



Housing Rural Oregon



PHOTOS BY AMANDA WALDROUPE

Steve Sampels plays the piano every Wednesday at the Back Door Café.

ONE WAY OR ANOTHER

Stacey Witte dispenses knowledge, compassion and spare change at the Back Door Café, Central Oregon's de facto homeless day center

BY AMANDA WALDROUPE
STAFF WRITER

You're going to cry? Give me a hug instead of crying."

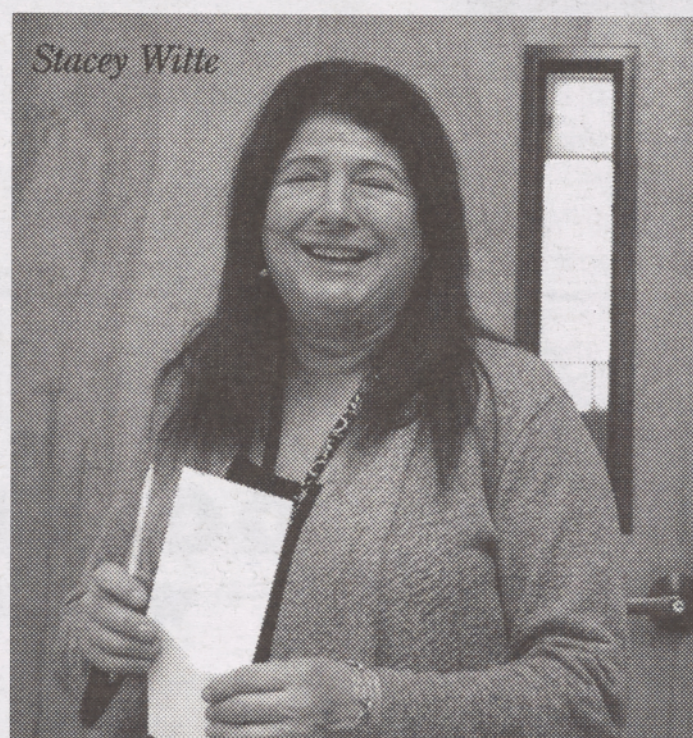
Stacey Witte embraces a homeless woman who has come to the Back Door Café seeking help.

The Back Door Café, which is located in the basement of Bend Church, a Methodist denomination, serves breakfast each Wednesday morning to between 120 and 170 homeless people who come as far as Redmond and Sisters to be there.

The breakfast – scrambles, bacon, sausage, oatmeal, cottage cheese and fruit, juice and coffee – is made on site, in a commercial kitchen in the far corner. People eat breakfast in twos or threes or fours at large round tables in a large, well-lit basement space. The diner's conversation is mixed with piano music. Steve Sampels, 64, plays the piano every Wednesday. His range is eclectic – after playing Brahms, he'll play Scott Joplin, then Chopin, maybe, then the Beatles.

He's played the piano since he was 7 years old. He made a living playing on cruise ships and for other businesses. Now he plays in retirement homes and churches – whoever will have him. "I love doing it," he said.

He most enjoys playing at the Back Door



Café. "I'd rather play for *people* people, who appreciate it more," said Sampels, who is homeless. "Richer people don't really appreciate it all the time."

The café is much more than a breakfast spot: People can receive a wide array of services there, making it Central Oregon's de facto day center. Witte, who operates the café, is Bend Church's director of homeless outreach, and is one of the fiercest advocates for homeless people in Central Oregon. She approaches her work in much the same way she greeted the homeless woman: with warmth, compassion, and determination to help them improve their

lives.

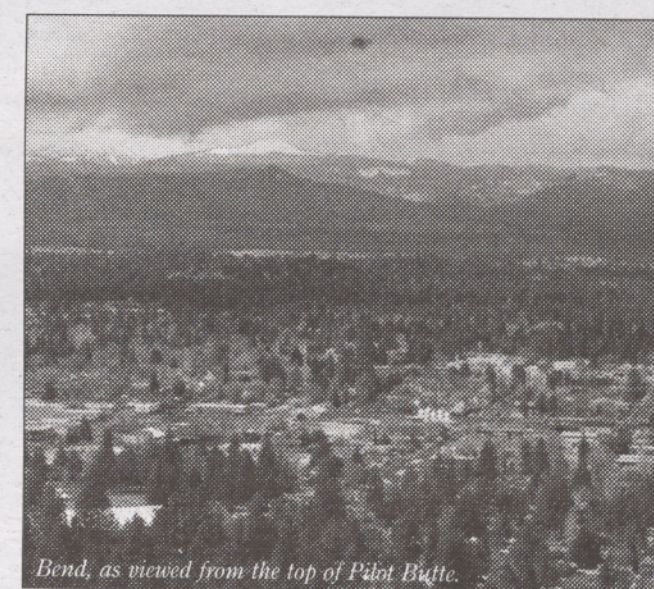
People also come for all manner of services: they can sign up for same-day medical appointments at a medical van operated by Mosaic Medical, the federally qualified health center in Central Oregon, which is parked outside the church. They can also get hair cuts, charge their cell phones at a charging station, get their clothes mended by a seamstress who sometimes comes, take showers in another part of the church, nap at two small respite stations cordoned off by a partition wall, choose clothes from two small racks.

Nearly 120 homeless people also receive their mail there. The mail is sorted into cubby holes for each letter of the alphabet in Witte's office, just off the café's entrance.

Witte's office also serves as a storage space for supplies people experiencing homelessness might need: luggage bags, car seats, sleeping bags, tents, cans of propane, hats, gloves, 1,500 pairs of socks a business recently donated, travel-sized shampoo and conditioner, sanitary napkins, condoms, toothbrushes, toothpastes, baby and adult diapers, reading glasses. "Anything you can think of," Witte said.

The Back Door Café, and the help Witte offers, is regarded, among homeless people

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Bend, as viewed from the top of Pilot Butte.

Poverty – with a view

Part 4 Back Door Café

Once a rural timber and agricultural region, Central Oregon is now beset with a housing shortage and an increase in homelessness. How will the region respond as it continues to grow?