



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Roz Babener started the Community Warehouse, a local resource of donated household amenities for families down on their luck.

Warehouse follows the King's Dream

Helping the poor get by through hard economic times

BY JAKE THOMAS
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Martin Luther King Jr. was inclusive, and wanted to raise the standard of living for all people, regardless of background. The aim of Portland's Community Warehouse is similar, as it seeks to provide basic necessities to people needing a leg up.

Located on North Interstate Avenue, the facility sees a steady stream of trucks and cars trickles in as workers

haul in chairs, tables, mattresses and a number of other goods.

Although the scene looks like it could be any commercial storage facility, it isn't. The Community Warehouse provides household amenities so basic that they can easily be taken for granted by most. But for many families and individual it can make a house a home.

Community Warehouse serves about 65 households every week by providing requested household items like furniture, sheets, and silverware, and other basic household goods according to Roz Babener, a volunteer and founder of the organization.

Many of these households

are families down on their luck and trying to recover. Some are households headed by a woman fleeing an abusive relationship. Others are mentally ill or homeless people getting a place of their own.

Getting people who've taken hard stumbles back on their feet requires serious efforts in the way of jobs, housing, and counseling, but sometimes the smaller details can be big stumbling blocks.

"Without something like the warehouse they'd be eating and sleeping on the floor for months," said Babener.

She explained that stability and familiarity are essential for the recovery of mentally ill people who've been on the

streets. Having a furnished apartment can help provide that and keep them stable.

Babener recalls one story she heard from a client of a young boy who seemed distracted and struggled in school. He made a sudden turnaround after his family acquired a simple item: a lamp. The boy couldn't study at home because of a basic lack of light.

Community Warehouse, which has been in existence for about seven years, relies on people to donate furniture and other household goods. Sometimes hotels will donate a bonanza of items when they decide to renovate and need to something with the old items.

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I just want to do God's will. And he's allowed me to go to the mountain. And I've looked over, and I've seen the promised land! I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land.

-- Martin Luther King Jr.



Singer James Brown (left) walks with his agent, the Rev. Al Sharpton, from the White House in Washington on Jan. 15, 1982. They met with U.S. President Ronald Reagan to advocate making Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday a national holiday.

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