



Society of St. Vincent de Paul – Des Moines • 2011 Capital Campaign

**We invite you** to join us in building together as we raise the roof to replace the retail space we lost, and as we vision and fulfill the community's need for a digital education center.

## Who was Vincent de Paul?



Vincent de Paul had no idea that his name would resonate through our culture for centuries. He began his exceptional life in 1605 on his way to Marseilles, France, to accept an inheritance when he was captured by pirates and sold into slavery in Tunisia, Africa.

While captured, Vincent converted his oppressor to God and they both escaped their fate. By 1607 Vincent returned to France, and later returned to Africa to bring the word of God to slaves in Northern Africa. He paid ransoms to help free them from the cruelties of slavery.

In 1617 Vincent was in France and realized the living conditions of the very poor and needy. His goal became to connect with his fellow countrymen and enlist the aid of others because it was the right thing to do. He felt that was part of God's calling, and it remained a guiding light throughout his life. He helped in providing shelter and work for over 4,000 women and children through his Daughters of Charity chapters in and around Paris. It was through his example that ultimately the "Vincentians" were born.

Seventy-seven years after his death in 1660 he was canonized by Pope Clement XII, and his name became synonymous with an unencumbered helping hand to those less fortunate. He became, in death, St. Vincent de Paul.

But, he lives on. His work continues as his chapters in America, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul reach out to what Jesus referred to as "the least of us." The Des Moines chapter has for decades assisted in trying to improve lives and uplift our fellow man with clothing, furniture and even Christmas gifts for needy children.

## Virginia Klemm



Virginia Klemm is the Vice President of St. Vincent de Paul, Des Moines Executive Board. Virginia was owner, CEO and President of H.V. Cassaday Refrigeration Co. Inc. Under her leadership, Cassaday Refrigeration grew into one of Des Moines' finest commercial heating and air conditioning businesses. She also owned and operated the Dairy Sweet Corp. which was franchised through out the United States. In 1981 she sold the businesses and devoted herself to a greater calling; the less fortunate of Des Moines.

Now, Virginia presses on in service to the poor and less fortunate as the Store Manager of St. Vincent de Paul. The profit that she now seeks is the profit of helped and saved souls. Her amazing commitment and vision finds the local Society in a growth trend, and Virginia and her staff are planning for the future...and planning with big dreams. Virginia is a fitting successor in Iowa for St. Vincent De Paul himself. She could live a life of luxury, but has chosen to reach out and serve those less fortunate. God has indeed blessed Des Moines and the local chapter with Virginia Klemm.



## The Mission of St. Vincent de Paul in Des Moines

Inspired by Gospel values, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a Catholic lay organization, leads women and men to join together to grow spiritually by offering person-to-person service to those who are needy and suffering in the tradition of its founder, Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, and patron, St. Vincent de Paul.

As a reflection of the whole family of God, members, who are known as Vincentians, are drawn from every ethnic and cultural background, age group, and economic level.



Organized locally, Vincentians witness God's love by embracing all works of charity and justice. The Society collaborates with other people of good will in relieving need and addressing its causes, making no distinction in those served because, in them, Vincentians see the face of Christ.

The Des Moines chapter of St. Vincent was established in 1929. Since that fateful year, St. Vincent de Paul has extended unquestioning assistance to those less fortunate in our community. The needs have grown, but so has The Society. Once located in a small building at Sixth and Forest avenues, St. Vincent has chosen to stay in the River Bend neighborhood even after outgrowing the Forest Avenue building.

Their current building on Sixth Avenue became home for them in 1970. Since that time, thousands of area families and individuals have found help and encouragement in the St. Vincent building.

In early 2010, the severe winter weather crushed a portion of their building. A part of St. Vincent de Paul literally collapsed under the weight of the winter snow. The spirit of St. Vincent de Paul, however, was not crushed. Nothing within the hearts of the people

We seek to be a sign of Hope ... a place of safety, affirmation and challenge. Our goal is to help others by helping themselves and succeeding in their dreams.

committed to St. Vincent collapsed at all. In fact, they look to bigger challenges and reaching out in better ways as they rebuild ... all in River Bend.

"We're so important to our area residents," says Vice President Virginia Klemm, "we would never move away from them." Like those Israelites enslaved centuries ago described in Nehemiah 2, who yearned to rebuild their beloved Jerusalem when it, too, lay in ruins.

*"Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire. Let us rebuild this wall of Jerusalem and end this disgrace. Then I told them about how the gracious hand of God had been on me."* Nehemiah 2

Others scoffed at the efforts of Israelites. Nehemiah replied,

*"The God of Heaven will help us succeed. We, his servants, will begin rebuilding."*

Our modern day Nehemiah, Virginia Klemm and her colleagues have made the same vow. They have, with faith, begun their rebuilding.



## Serving the Community

### Don Lamberti

A truck rumbles south from the affluent suburb of Ankeny twice a week with clothing, furniture and other items for St. Vincent de Paul on Sixth Avenue in Des Moines. Invariably, it is a full truck, and the driver says that the dock workers at St. Vincent are so anxious for the contents they have it unloaded in less than 20 minutes. “That’s pretty good,” he says.

Lamberti recalls the words of Mother Theresa; “we’re all called to do small things with great love.”

Some would look at the contents as other people’s junk. Cast offs. It’s not. It’s more.

The people in Ankeny who donate the clothing and furniture to St. Vincent de Paul think about what they’re “donating.” “It’s a donation, not a throw away,” says the driver, “there’s a difference.” The belongings that he brings south from Ankeny are nice, he says. Nobody uses it as a junk trailer.

The driver knows something about quality, too. He’s Don Lamberti. Don’s the former CEO of Casey’s, a huge Iowa corporation he built from the ground up that now employs 19,000 people. He is a member of the Iowa Business Hall of Fame and one of the most respected businessmen of his generation. He is also a proud truck driver, two times a week taking good-quality items from his hometown of Ankeny to St. Vincent de Paul.

“It’s an honor,” says the member of the Iowa Business Hall of Fame, “to be able to get into that truck and provide nice things for people at a low price ... or even given to them, if they need it. It’s an honor for me.”

Don Lamberti could clearly be doing something else with his time. He can afford to live anywhere, do anything. He’s been associated with St. Vincent de Paul for 45 years. “I can’t abandon them now,” he quips.

“I don’t want to be on boards and push a lot of paper and attend a bunch of meetings. I’ve done all that, I just want to drive a truck.” A soft smile spreads across his face as he talks about his work.

Twice a week, he chooses to drive a truck to help the less fortunate in the metro area. He doesn’t do it grudgingly; he doesn’t drag himself into the cab of



Don Lamberti, honorary Chair  
Together Let’s Build Campaign

the truck, count the minutes until he can go home and stare at a television. He does it with a purpose. He looks forward to the road between Ankeny and Des Moines humming under the tires of the truck that’s full of other people’s generosity.

“There are days when I don’t feel like taking the truck down there to Des Moines,” Lamberti says, “then I think, you know, it’s an honor to say ‘yes’ to the Lord. What am I complaining about?” he concludes with a laugh that causes his smile to touch everyone around him.

To Don, it’s not very complicated. “It’s an honor to serve the Lord” is all the motivation this remarkable man needs to do his work. Lamberti recalls the words of Mother Theresa, “We’re all called to do small things with great love.”

“You know, I try to do that.” he says, “When we start thinking of the ‘me’ instead of the ‘we,’ that’s when we get into trouble.”

## Carmen Winters

“It’s a lot more than clothes – it’s so much more.” So says Carmen Winters a social worker with Mid-Iowa Family Therapy Clinics. Many people think that.

St. Vincent is where you go to get affordable clothes, but the Des Moines chapter has done so much more.

Families that have suffered economic setbacks and struggle to get to the next paycheck can turn to many places, according to Carmen. But, she says, “most of my clients need what St. Vincent de Paul provides. St. Vincent has clothes, but also utility assistance, housing assistance and furniture.

Most of my clients need those things, especially the furniture.”

The area where St. Vincent de Paul is located is not a part of any gated community or along the fairways of a nice golf course. It’s located in an urban setting and serves thousands, but many of them are located within blocks, says Winters.

There are other places that have clothing. Some have furniture and even the county government can help with housing assistance. Carmen says, “St. Vincent de Paul serves this urban area. These people



I work with don’t have anything. That’s the urgency of it. They can come to St. Vincent de Paul and get served right away.

“A great church may have assistance, but if it’s miles away, it’s so much more difficult. People in the urban area can walk to St. Vincent de Paul. That’s meaningful, here.”

Educational resources are a good role for St. Vincent, according to Carmen. “Other places have educational opportunities, too,” she said, “but you can never have too many of those places. And, the local people can get to St. Vincent de Paul.”

**“The people I work with don’t have anything ... that’s the urgency of it”**

St. Vincent de Paul has been a leader and is making a great impact on the community from Carmen Winter’s perspective. “They have nice things, for one. I am not afraid at all to purchase things there; so I am happy to advise my clients to do the same. They have great resources.”

More importantly, though, Carmen observes, “St. Vincent de Paul serves the entire community with a giving spirit. And, they’re culturally sensitive to the needs of that community. Education, too? That’s a great role for them.”

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## Phyllis believes in “paying it forward.”

I helped with the fundraising that got women out of the YWCA and into Unity Place says Phyllis, but “St. Vincent de Paul saved me from being homeless in the first place.”

Phyllis came to Des Moines with a teenage son and had nowhere to live. The people at St. Vincent de Paul helped her into a safe place in the Des Moines YWCA. She had to share the room with others, but it was clean and warm. “If not for those people at St. Vincent de Paul,” Phyllis says with intensity, “we would’ve been homeless. They didn’t know me and my child, but they helped me anyway.

The YWCA closed in early 2010, and several women were about to be sent onto the streets. A collaboration of local people, governments, businesses and non-profits worked together to place all the displaced women. A nice apartment complex was found with the help of Mainstream Living on Des Moines’ south side. Money, as always, was the issue.

“Someone helped me, then I got the chance to help somebody else. The Y and St. Vincent de Paul asked

for volunteers to help with the fundraising by being on the radio. I felt like I should pay it forward, so my hand went up first.

**“St. Vincent helped me, and then I got the chance to help someone else. I couldn’t wait to do it.”**

I helped with the fundraising,” she says proudly waving her arm toward the buildings of Unity Place in which she now lives.

“St. Vincent helped me and then I got the chance to help someone else. I couldn’t wait to do it.”

Things are looking up for Phyllis. She’s moving out of Unity Place and into a nice new two bedroom apartment near the Des Moines Zoo. “It’s just great,” she says. “My boss at my job is giving me time to get moved. My child and I are going to have a home. Every child has to have a home, right?”



## The Need for Digital Literacy

“It is not like I’m computer illiterate,” says Janet Witte of Des Moines, “but, the help I received at the Central Library was really valuable.” Janet found herself looking for employment opportunities recently and went to the Central Library to use their computers.

“If you’re digitally ‘illiterate,’ I cannot image how you’d cope with employment issues.”

Janet is a professional woman with a good employment background, but she didn’t know her way around some computer programs. Volunteers at the Library assisted her. “They helped me beef up my resume and make it look a lot better. They are very committed to helping the community,” Janet says.

### St. Vincent de Paul is trusted in the community

“Digital Literacy” is fast becoming another human resources buzz word. The concept behind it is dead serious. More and more employers are requiring online applications and resumes. Traditional paper applications and personal appearances are disappearing faster than a block of ice over an open fire. “If you’re digitally ‘illiterate,’ I cannot image how you’d cope with employment issues,” comments Janet Witte.

“St. Vincent de Paul is trusted in the community,” she continued, “if they’re going to help people with online apps and obtaining an email address and things like that, I think it will really help a lot.”

St. Vincent de Paul plans on a presence at their



There are thousands of people – neighbors of St. Vincent de Paul – who have no digital connectivity, which puts them at a distinct disadvantage.

Sixth Avenue facility to provide ongoing instruction in basic computer skills and assistance in job searches on the internet. This is something that many people either take for granted or they are simply unaware of it.

Digital Literacy, as a popular term, may go the way of the One Minute Manager and PDAs someday. But, the need for help by St. Vincent de Paul is urgent. “I’m glad they’re doing it,” says Janet Witte, “it will really help people.”

## EDUCATION CENTER MISSION STATEMENT

The Center’s mission is to strengthen self-esteem and confidence, to stimulate wholesome self discipline and promote solid work ethic and moral values.

Deeply convinced that every person is a beloved child of God, the staff of St. Vincent de Paul Education Center strives to continue the saving mission of our faith by offering education and life skills to our families.

St. Vincent de Paul himself now asks us to do more. He asks us to help our unemployed brothers and sisters attain more education. Education that will free them, too. It will free them from the slavery of underemployment and poverty. The Des Moines Society, named after this great man, asks for your help with this and for our fellow man.



## The Need and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul

A depressed economy, foreclosures and high unemployment rates are all signs of instability and insecurity. Families and people who just a few years ago felt confident about their future are now, at the very least, anxious.

- The Iowa Department of Human Services says that nearly 35,000 of the 450,000 Polk County residents have received assistance for food, formerly known as Food Stamps.
- 31% of all the students in Polk County are eligible for free and reduced lunch.
- It's estimated that one child in 29 does not know where he or she will get their next meal.

The state unemployment rate remains at over 9%, which is high for Iowa. Better and more technical qualifications are required for the jobs that do exist. Qualifications that many of St. Vincent's clients do not have at this time.

Depression and hopelessness can find fertile ground in times like these. Into that environment steps St. Vincent de Paul.

*"for I have chosen you and I will not throw you away. Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand."* Isaiah 41.

**In that spirit, St. Vincent de Paul is making a difference.** In the past fiscal year, St. Vincent has served

- 72,414 people in the thrift clothing store.
- Given 625 free Thanksgiving baskets to families.
- Given 275 free Christmas baskets to families.
- Allocated 9,000 free toys to more than 1,800 needy children.
- Helped 471 people with vocational rehabilitation.
- Monthly sent 3,500 pounds of clothing and shoes to third world countries.
- Helped 477 local clients financially with assistance such as rent or utilities.



The Society of St. Vincent de Paul can't do everything, but without them thousands of our fellow men and women would be even poorer financially and spiritually. It's a tough situation, but St. Vincent de Paul is making a difference!

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