

## Three years of offering help to homeless

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Terry Smith speaks Thursday at the Community Homeless

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On Thursday, he praised the organizations that had helped him find his way. Those including the Water Street mission, Tabor Community Services, which partners with the mission to operate CHOC, and The Lodge, which provides supportive housing.

"It's been hard, but I had to do it. I wouldn't be here if I didn't," Smith said.

Also speaking at the reception was Phil Wenger, president and CEO of Isaac's Restaurants and Delis and co-chairman of the Lancaster County Coalition to End Homelessness. Wenger also praised the mission and Tabor for making CHOC possible.

Wenger spoke of the county effort to keep people from becoming homeless and, if they do become homeless, to quickly get them rehoused.

Homelessness fosters social ills, such as drug and alcohol abuse, crime and unemployment, he said.

"We want people who experience homelessness to have what people like me take for granted: a telephone, a bed, a shower and food in the refrigerator," said Wenger.

Ultimately, Wenger said he hoped to put CHOC out of business. It was a goal with which Rodriguez and Smith readily agreed.

Smith now lives in The Lodge's Lincoln House, on Lincoln Highway East.

"I have the biggest room in the house," he said. He has a bed, shower and his own television and computer.

"It feels good. I'd like for everybody to have that."

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Terry Smith remembers a winter night three years ago. He was huddled on the steps of a church, shivering as the snow fell.

"It's not fun being homeless," said Smith, 55.

That winter was a turning point for Smith, who had been homeless off and on for six years. It was the first time he walked into the Community Homeless Outreach Center, a daytime drop-in shelter that had opened a few months earlier at the Water Street Ministries.

Smith had been to the mission before, but he said it was at CHOC that he was steered toward service agencies that helped him get back on his feet.

"I got the spiritual, but it wasn't enough. I needed someone to show me what to do," said Smith.

That is what he trying to do now for others.

Smith, who has been living in his own apartment for two years, worked 900 hours last year as a volunteer at CHOC. In February, he became an employee of the center.

He spends his time talking with the chronically homeless people who come to the 218 S. Prince St. center. He makes coffee, sets out cookies and shuttles people to social services agency workers.

Speaking at a small reception Thursday to mark CHOC's third anniversary, center director Adrian Rodriguez held up Smith as the center's "poster child."

Smith embodies their efforts to help people access the services they need to stabilize their lives and get housing. CHOC often is the point of entry for people seeking help from the network of shelters and service agencies in the county.

For Smith, it had been a rough downhill slide. There were years of alcoholism. Two failed marriages led to more drinking. Then came cancer that left him unable to work.

He tried to end it all by swallowing his mother's heart medication, but the suicide attempt only put him in the hospital for 21 days.

Then, staying at the Water Street mission, he was moved by a preacher. The religious conversion put Jesus in his heart, he said, but he still wasn't "doing what he was supposed to be doing."