

William Camorata was named "Volunteer of the Year" by the New Mexican Coalition to End Homelessness in a ceremony Oct. 24 where he was presented with a "Housing For All" award at the organization's headquarters in Santa Fe. The award was bestowed upon Camorata by NMCEH Executive Director Hank Hughes.

"We are very pleased to nominate William Camorata for this distinction," Hughes said. "Many people in the Gallup area literally owe the roof over their head to his tireless efforts. Volunteers like William literally make the world a better place."

"I am honored and pleased to receive the recognition," Camorata said. "But it is not just about me. It is about the kind people of the community who donate food, clothing, household items, cash and much more. I am privileged to work with so many fantastic volunteers." Camorata and about 10 volunteers from Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services hold a breakfast outreach every Saturday morning at 8:45 am at the Nizonhi Laundromat parking lot located at 1733 S. Second St. in Gallup.

IMMEDIATE ACTION GROUP

Camorata is president of the Immediate Action Group and Director of Behavioral Special Projects at RMCHCS. He also serves on the Board of Directors of Gallup's Community Food Pantry and is a core leader in pastoral mentoring at the Lighthouse International Ministries

Church in Gallup and the DUI Planning Council for McKinley County. He is a thought leader on the topic of homelessness, having appeared in various New Mexico media outlets and healthcare publications.

RMCHCS' "Healing Hands" Art Studio Director Katie Schultz nominated Camorata several weeks ago. "Bill Camarota is the perfect candidate for Volunteer of the Year, helping to end homelessness in the Gallup, New Mexico area," Schultz said.

She described how she began working with Camarota as a volunteer when they formed the IAG more than five years ago. After months of public providers meetings which she described as "achieving little" and winter approaching, they decided the people on the street needed something to help immediately. Camarota was elected president because of his sincere, unmovable dedication, conviction, and ability to always find a solution to help the homeless.

"He was known as the guy who can get stuff done," Schultz said. "Camarota has kept this commitment long after any of the other founders. He still coordinates donations and stores supplies in his house, managing or trucking all transports himself."

"Bill is a shining example of the type of community support you can find in Gallup," RMCHCS CEO David Conejo said. "The hospital is proud to have an employee like Bill who began IAG on a shoe-string budget, but wealthy in his determination."

The NMCEH assists communities in creating solutions to homelessness from prevention through permanent housing by using action, advocacy and awareness. It was founded in 2000 by a group of nonprofit agencies and the New Mexico Mortgage Finance Authority. It was born out of the need for a statewide coalition to coordinate the efforts of the member agencies to end homelessness.

IAG AND RMCHCS UNITE

Last year IAG partnered with RMCHCS to aid the homeless in Gallup. The agreement formalized an ongoing affiliation between the groups to best serve the homeless. The effort is also designed to help those in need of recovery and rehabilitation from drug and alcohol abuse. Both are 501c3 non-profit organizations.

The IAG and RMCHCS integrate their services to aid a variety of Gallup residents and others from nearby communities needing food, clothing, and other forms of assistance. RMCHCS provides medical services and aids those in need by checking for symptoms of diabetes and offering similar triage services. The hospital also offers enrollment in its WellSpring Recovery Center for those willing to give up their addiction.

The homeless people obtaining assistance are veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, members of the Navajo Nation, migrants, students, and people from all walks of life. Many are families that have split up for economic reasons whose children are staying with relatives, parents suffering from illness and elderly unable to provide for themselves. Some are even struggling to hang onto their pets.

Residents and others provide most of the donations which are distributed by the coalition. Donations from various organizations across the U.S. are delivered quarterly on a semi-trailer truck. Contributions include discontinued products and items from educational institutions, government offices, abandoned storage units, civic and religious organizations, philanthropic organizations and others.

IAG was born a few years ago as an informal outreach program begun by its founder and president Camorata, working with the Lighthouse Church in Gallup. The outreach attracted more constituents and Camorata took over a warehouse donation distribution center operating out of a nearby airport hangar. The organization stores donations in a 3,000-foot warehouse leased from the City of Gallup.

KEEPING WARM UNDER OUTDOOR VENTS

IAG transports the donated goods from the warehouse in Gallup to the laundromat where they

are distributed to the homeless and those in need of food, clothing and household goods. The organizations serve anywhere from several dozen to over a hundred every Saturday in rain and snow. The location for the distribution was founded by Camorata, who noticed homeless people huddling for warmth under the laundry building's heat vents.

FROM MAKE-UP TO DOG FOOD

"We never know what we are going to be able to provide to people," Camorata said. "We've had donations of cases of toothpaste, coffee, coats, jackets, socks, hand lotions, produce, used shoes, dog food, beddings and all types of things. We had make-up which we donated to a cheer-leading squad." He also mentioned donations of food and clothing from Clayton Homes, items from Goodwill and even housing vouchers from veteran's organizations.

He cites the organization's need for outdoor heaters and tarps for triage treatment. For people willing to volunteer or make donations he urges them to contact him at bcamarota@rmchcs.org or (505) 726-6944.

"I've been in their place, throughout my lifetime. I've found myself homeless more times than I care to count, I know how hard it can be and so that's why I do this," Camorata, a reformed addict, said. "It starts with a conversation and encouragement. We're not out here lecturing these guys, that's not what this is about. These people know that that's not what we are doing. We let them know that we are here to help and to keep them alive, until they make that decision to change their lives by entering treatment. I'm out here because I'm not OK with people dying, and I want these guys out here to know that we care, and we want them to live."

"They are tired of being sick and tired, and that's when we begin encouraging, and it snowballs after that. We help them get to that next step. It's an opportunity for them and for us to help them turn their life around," Camorata said.

FROM HOMELESS TO HOME DWELLERS

What differentiates this rehab program from many others is that those who enter for treatment are given jobs by RMCHCS. During their treatment they are employed as cooks, groundskeepers, and maintenance people. Additionally, they hold other positions. The hospital's 90-day rehab program was so successful it launched the Community Work Service Program which helps Gallup maintain public buildings and even partners with the police department to prevent crime, by doing things such as participating in the recent clearing of debris in the Mossman area to help prevent break-ins.

The program is comprised of former addicts who serve on their way to landing new jobs and returning to Gallup as model citizens who have kicked the habit. Some of them have even won awards in community competitions. In one case one of these new model citizens was selected for a top 20 art award.

By William Madaras
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