



Student's vision sparks ministry to feed Sedalia's hungry

By Vicki Brown, *Associate Editor*

SEDALIA — “Hey, how are you?” Rachael Finnell greeted a guest on a cold December afternoon.

“Doin’ okay,” the woman responded. “I know it’s early, but is it alright if we come in now? Sure is cold out today and we just need to warm up. Can I go ahead and put the coffee on?”

“Where are the tea pitchers?” a volunteer called as she opened cabinets. That afternoon, volunteers from Bethany Baptist Church, Sedalia, scurried around the kitchen in the building that houses the Community Café, heating ham and beans, baking cornbread and tossing salad. They planned to top the evening meal with ice cream sundaes.



A high school student's vision four years ago and the continued commitment of Smith-Cotton High's National Honor Society means 60 to 80 Sedalia residents enjoy a hot meal each evening, Monday-Friday.

As a high school sophomore, Kristen Allcorn served at Forest Avenue Family Shelter in Kansas City with the youth group from First Baptist Church, Sedalia. Sponsored by Forest Avenue

Baptist Church, the shelter is one of the oldest ministries of its type for women and children in the KC area.

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Then, she and other members were challenged at a National Honor Society meeting to volunteer for a few hours at an agency or ministry in town. “We really only had to volunteer but I wanted to start something more long-standing,” she said. “My dream was to have five meals a week and a homeless shelter,” she explained.

She talked to local churches and businesses to round up support for the project and formed a relationship with the Central Missouri Food Bank in Columbia. Under the National Honor Society’s umbrella and supervision, Allcorn developed a board of students and a board of directors composed of community supporters.

And she structured the ministry to allow students to continue it and to direct it. Allcorn and two friends operated the ministry through their sophomore and junior years. As seniors, they enlisted younger students to train to take over leadership positions when the older students graduated.



Members of the student board take turns overseeing each evening meal — setting up tables, readying plates and tableware, greeting guests (most of whom walk to the facility) and having them sign in.

Front: Kristen Allcorn (file photo). Above: Smith-Cotton high school students work along with area church volunteers (Kristen Allcorn photo).

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