



The Chairman's Corner

by

Matt B. Murell

Matt.Murell@ColumbiacountyNY.com

WARMING CENTER

This Thursday, October 17, at 12 noon, the First Reformed Church and the Columbia County Department of Social Services welcome everyone to the grand opening of the Blanche Hotaling Memorial Mission at 52 Green Street, Hudson. A light fare will be served by the Columbia County Recovery Kitchen and the Salvation Army of Hudson Service Center.

How did the Blanche Hotaling Memorial Mission come about?

"We house people under what's called Code Blue – New York State makes funds available to house people in cold weather," explained Columbia County Commissioner of Social Services Bob Gibson.

"However," he added, "all we have in Columbia County are hotels, so you're not able to get people more involved with things. When you're housing people under Code Blue, they're not measured for eligibility, and because of that they aren't required to undertake a lot of the services that would otherwise be required if you were receiving other benefits. If we're going to bring them in to hotels because of weather, all you're going to do is isolate them somewhere out there."

With that in mind, said Commissioner Gibson, in the warming center model, "which would look more like a mission and that we would have staffed, where you'll be eating good, nutritious food, and where we could point out resources that are available to you, there would be a lot less isolation going on."

He added that those making use of the warming center tend to socialize among themselves, and through that networks begin to be developed among those clients that give them a chance to help them help themselves.

"The clients will start to solve problems on their own, with the aid of people they know as they share experiences and begin to build off that. You're really talking about people down on their luck who have to build trust in their community again. What better way than to create a small community in which they can do that?" said Commissioner Gibson.

On the heels of renovating bathrooms and adding showers facilities as well as a washer and dryer, the Hotaling Mission underwent a successful soft opening last year. A number of recovery groups, such as Columbia Re-Entry, meet at the location.

Commissioner Gibson wished to thank the Rev. Dan Herrick and Blanche Hotaling, who was part of the planning process for the mission prior to her passing, as well as the county Board of Supervisors, Greater Hudson Promise Neighborhood, and the Mental Health Associations of Columbia-Greene Counties for their roles in helping make the center happen.

"We're trying to use this program as a way to help people," said Commissioner Gibson.