

**Volunteers  
of America®**  
MICHIGAN  
AUTUMN 2015 NEWSLETTER

# Hope

“Summer ends, and Autumn comes, and he who would have it otherwise would have high tide always and a full moon every night; and thus he would never know the rhythms that are at the heart of life.” — Hal Borland

## Blue skies on Gray Street



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VETERANS  
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EXPAND to Flint,  
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# Start the season of giving with Holidays of Hope

**W**e help people. We change lives. We do this together you.

As part of the Volunteers of America Michigan family, you help us give poor seniors a safe and stable place to call home. You help us work with homeless veterans, working to get them permanently housed and fully employed. You provide resources and case management for

chronically homeless families.

*Holidays of Hope* celebrates that life-changing work being done in Southeast Michigan and across the state. The event also helps fund these great services.

It also happens to be a fun night with dinner, live music and good times. This year we have a masquerade theme. Join us – for a night, for a life.

## Holidays of Hope 2014

raised enough funds to provide 4,650 children with warm winter clothing and a toy, PLUS nearly a month of housing, hot meals and case management for 35 homeless veterans, PLUS warm clothes, a fruit basket and poinsettia for 462 frail seniors ...

**PLUS**  
a complete holiday experience (a meal, warm clothes and gifts) for 307 families of four.



## JOIN US 5:30 p.m. Dec. 5, 2015

AT THE HENRY HOTEL IN DEARBORN

**SPONSORSHIPS AND TICKETS: [bit.ly/HOH15](http://bit.ly/HOH15)**

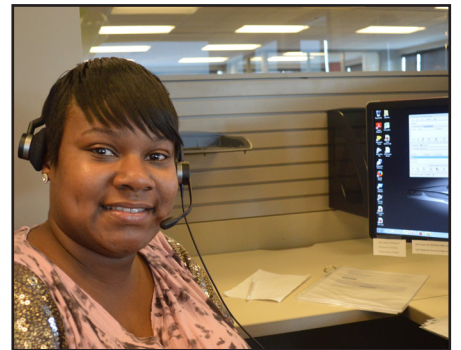
Contact Erin Ledy with with questions: (517) 899-2964 or [eledy@voami.org](mailto:eledy@voami.org)

## Question: Why did you get involved with Adopt A Family?

The comments below are from applicants hoping to be selected for Adopt A Family this year. Since 1993, this holiday giving program has been connecting people in need with people who can help.

“The problem with this time of year is I’m on disability for epilepsy and I only get a certain amount. It’s crazy and stressful to think that my two boys might not get anything at all after all the payments. Julian is 10 and Adam is 6 and I’ll be so blessed just to get a little bit of help and have a peace of mind that a kind stranger lent a helping hand.”

“I needed assistance for my children. I was treated very nicely, with respect. My family and I were cared for, not like we were just nobody. I was so grateful and thankful that VOA was able to help me. It made my children very happy, just to know there is a program and people out there who are willing to help those who don’t have much.”



**Giving back:** Erika and her infant son were once helped by Adopt A Family. This year she is one of 120 Delta Dental of Michigan employees contributing time at a call center to handle Adopt A Family calls. Thank you, Erika and Delta Dental!

### How can YOU get involved?

Go to [adoptafamilymichigan.org](http://adoptafamilymichigan.org) or call 248-353-4862

# Volunteers + Operation Backpack = Good start to school



*A new record: Delta Dental of Michigan employees broke the record they set last year, contributing more than 800 fully loaded backpacks. Above, the “Put On A Smile” team loads boxes full of backpacks into a truck for distribution. The backpacks filled a conference room, below, at Delta’s Okemos office.*



Thousands of children started off the school year right with backpacks and supplies from great community partners. Delta Dental almost doubled the number of backpacks they donated from the previous year, and generous Kroger customers provided a staggering amount of school kits.

Faithful partners like Meadowbrook Insurance and Zeal Credit Union pitched in again, and we also loved seeing lots of new faces this year: J R Automation and AXA Advisors, as well as Life Church Canton stepped up to help out. Many more than we can thank here, but know we are grateful, and so are the students.



*Backpack to school: A young student tries on a brand-new backpack loaded with supplies during a Volunteers of America open house event.*

## OPERATION BACKPACK 2015 BY THE NUMBERS

**1,123** filled backpacks

**327** empty backpacks

**347** boxes/bags of supplies

**7,000-plus** school kits from Kroger shoppers

**\$1,348.94** in donations



*Pallets of help: Kroger stores throughout Michigan offered affordable school supply kits for shoppers to contribute. And they did so by the truckload, with distribution help from our partners at Operation Kid Equip.*



*Bus stops here: Operation Backpack gets a boost every year from “Stuff a Bus” events with partners at WDVD and Fox 2.*

**DO GOOD, FEEL GOOD: FIND OUT ABOUT VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES!**

Feed the hungry, sort clothing, paint walls, landscape grounds, deliver meals to veterans, visit with seniors — many opportunities! Go to [www.voami.org/volunteer](http://www.voami.org/volunteer) or contact Vicky Mollitor, (517) 489-5307 or [vmollitor@voami.org](mailto:vmollitor@voami.org)

# Tribute honors service as soldier and civilian

There was a lot of talk about heroes at the fourth *Veteran Tribute* held by Volunteers of America Michigan on Oct. 1 in Lansing. The honoree said he does not consider himself among them.

“I’m not a hero. I’m here representing a lot of heroes, and I want you to know that,” said Jim Dunn Jr., after receiving the *John E. Demmer Award*, an annual honor the VOA gives to a veteran who demonstrates continued service as a civilian.

Dunn, a highly decorated veteran of the Vietnam War who today is Deputy Director of the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency, told the more than 225 in attendance at Michigan State University’s Demmer Center about heroic acts he saw others perform during his service.

“I saw more examples



of heroism than you could possibly imagine,” he said.

The event also is a fundraiser for Volunteers of America Michigan, the state’s largest provider of veteran services.

Key sponsors of the event include Nancy Pas-

sanante, Dean Transportation, Demmer Corporation, Foster Swift, the Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatommi Indians, Meijer, Joy Ann Sanchez, Mary Ellen Sheets and Tom Amiss, and Brig and Fran Sorber.



**Saluting service:** At upper left, from left, Maj. Gen. Gregory Vadnais, the adjutant general for the state of Michigan, talks about the service of Jim Dunn, center. To the right of Dunn is his longtime friend Dennis Muchmore, chief of staff for Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder. At left, the audience of well-wishers gives Dunn a standing ovation. Above, D.K. Sprague, chairman of the Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatommi Indians, leads the color guard before the ceremony. Sprague presented Dunn with an eagle feather, an honor reserved only for Ogitch-E-Daa — warriors.

## VOA expands employment services for homeless veterans

Volunteers of America Michigan, already the largest non-governmental provider of veteran services in the state, is expanding its employment programs to homeless veterans in Shiawassee, Genesee, Saginaw and Bay counties.

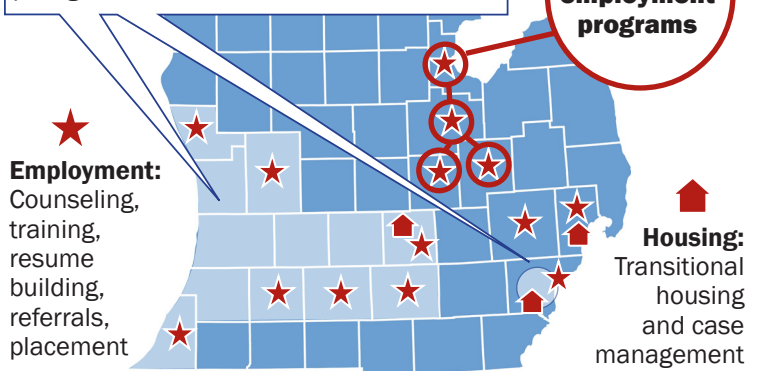
The expansion was made possible through a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, bringing the total

number of counties served by Volunteers of America veterans employment programs to 14. The expansion follows years of success the agency has demonstrated in other parts of Michigan.

The expanded employment services are projected to enroll 110 homeless veterans the first year, placing 72 of them into employment.

### Supportive Services for Veteran Families

Help for very low-income families in 12 counties from Ingham County westward, plus greater Detroit



# From welfare to health care with the VOA

*A quiet neighborhood in the midst of a downtrodden Detroit industrial area is home to 24 families who are finding their way to independence.*

## Road to new lives starts on Gray St.

When Sheree moved to Gray Street two years ago, she was homeless with a toddler and twins on the way. Due to paperwork mistakes from a previous property manager, she suddenly found herself with a \$750 deposit to pay and the threat of eviction.

She remembered what it was like to be on the street, and decided she would do anything to keep from returning there.

With no income, no family to help, no driver's license, she was desperate. She left her children at a neighbor's house and went to the casino with a few dollars to try to win enough money to cover the deposit.

She didn't win anything. In fact, while driving home, she was pulled over and spent a couple of nights in jail for driving without a license. The neighbor's evening of babysitting turned into unexpected days of child-care. Child Protective



*Sunny side of the street: Children play in front of the apartments and townhouses of the Gray Street neighborhood during a recent Volunteers of America Michigan open house.*



*New outlook: Sheree, shown with a daughter, says "I'm learning not to be afraid to ask for help."*

Services got involved.

The beginning of Sheree's story is shared by many others housed on Gray Street: homelessness and desperation. But also like Sheree, they have found new hope.

All 24 families now housed at Gray Street have stayed in shelters or with family and friends. Some lived out of their

cars. Some residents also struggle with mental illness. Knowing the difficulties their residents face, property owners Nova LLC asked Volunteers of America to take on case management for the property because they had heard of the agency's reputation for effective, quality program services.

**See GRAY, next page**

The growing medical industry needs qualified employees. Impoverished families running out of welfare need good paying jobs.

Volunteers of America Michigan has been chosen to lead an initiative to help both of these groups, by providing education, training and job placement in health care occupations for hundreds of impoverished people in Detroit.

The project amounts to a \$10.3 million investment in the region's health care industry.

"This is a natural fit to the work we are doing with the most vulnerable in the region," said Alex Brodrick, President and CEO of Volunteers of America Michigan. "Plus, everybody wins. The most vulnerable people who need jobs get jobs. And employers who need to fill jobs get qualified, trained and educated candidates."

The project will target enrollees in the public assistance system for the needy, which in Michigan is called the Family Independence Program (FIP). The goals include 250 enrollments and 150 job placements a year, at an average hourly wage of \$13.62.

Funded through a five-year, \$10.3 million federal Health Profession Opportunity Grant (HPOG), the project provides education

**See HPOG, next page**

**SAVE THE DATE: 1 p.m. December 9** We are excited to be planning a ribbon-cutting ceremony for our newest senior community, Heritage Park Senior Village in Taylor. Watch our website at [voami.org](http://voami.org) or our Facebook page, [facebook.com/voami](https://www.facebook.com/voami), for more details about the opening of this beautiful 77-unit senior housing community.



## GRAY

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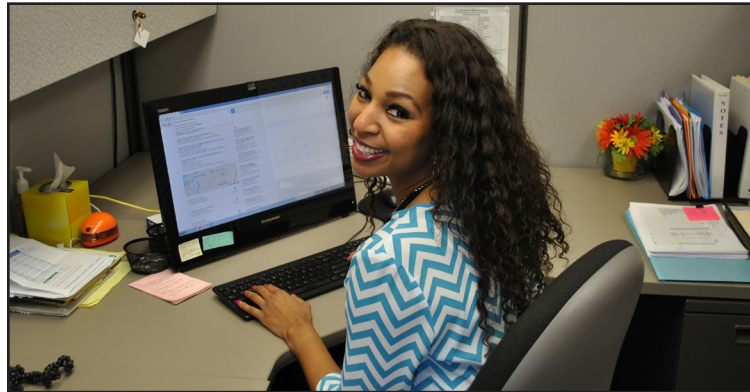
Volunteers of America Michigan came in, working with KMG Prestige, the new property management company.

The 24 units of 2- and 3-bedroom townhomes and apartments are safe and well-kept in the midst of a downtrodden industrial area. While these families can now proudly call Gray Street their home, the struggle is not over.

Even with stabilized and permanent housing, expenses come up that many residents find impossible to pay. One-third of the households face water shut-offs. Many don't have beds or tables because they have no money to buy them. There's no money for clothes to fit their growing children or purchase uniforms to meet school dress codes. Some residents will barter with food stamps or with babysitting to get these needed items from others. Others just go without.

Many residents, eligible for Volunteers of America's Adopt A Family holiday giving program, are asking for coats and pans for Christmas — not toys or gifts.

This is where our story takes a positive turn.



*Here to help:* Geniene Mott is the new case manager on-site and is working with all 24 families at Gray Street.

When Volunteers of America took over case management, Sheree says, for the first time she was asked, "What do you need so that you're not overwhelmed?"

Geniene Mott is the new case manager on-site and is working with all 24 families. With Geniene advocating for Sheree and connecting her with resources, she resolved her Child Protective Services case and her deposit is now paid.

"I'm learning not to be afraid to ask for help," Sheree said, adding it's amazing to have someone like Geniene who cares and who will help her. "It just takes the stress off you so you can focus on the next task in moving forward."

Sheree is moving forward, working toward a degree in social work, saying because she's been through these struggles, she wants

to help others and let them know it's going to be OK.

Other residents are having similarly successful experiences: four have found jobs, six are attending community college, four others are working toward their GEDs. Several residents have been connected with childcare so they can work or pursue schooling.

With Geniene's advocacy, 2 families have regained full custody of their children and another has resolved an arrest warrant.

One of Geniene's favorite question to ask each resident is "What do you need help with?" so residents are directing what they would like to change and are held accountable to their goals.

"This is changing lives and moving people into self-sufficiency," Geniene said. "Why isn't there more supportive housing like this?"

## HPOG

*Continued from Page 5*

and training to welfare recipients for healthcare occupations that pay well and are in high demand.

The program is operated through the Administration for Children and Families within the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, and was created as part of the Affordable Care Act.

This is the first HPOG initiative in Michigan, and the need is severe in Detroit, where roughly 40 percent of the city's population lives below poverty level.

At the same time, employers have identified a need to fill jobs in the expanding health sector. Double-digit growth is expected over the next five years for medical occupations such as certified nursing assistants, dental assistants and hygienists, licensed practical nurses, respiratory therapists and others.

The program will emphasize finding participants who are nearing the end of Michigan's 48-month limit to receiving Family Independence Program benefits.

A special focus will be put on enrolling single mothers with young children, with an additional focus on veterans.



**What have we here?** Participants in the second Chefs Charity Challenge, from left, Justin Blastic of The Soup Spoon Cafe, Mike Ghunaim of Zaytoon Lansing and Dan Konopnicki of The Cosmos. The contents: boneless, skinless chicken breasts; redskin potatoes; rice noodles; and horseradish peppercorn sauce.



**Live audience:** Volunteers of America Michigan board member Jerry Jennings, left, master of ceremonies, keeps the guests up to date on the action in the kitchen.



**What's cooking:** At left, Chef Mike Ghunaim of Zaytoon Lansing works on his dessert in the second competition. Above, cooks in the first competition are busy at their stations. At right, judges sample the presentations at the first competition. The judges are, from left, Pat Merz, president of the Lansing Cooks and Chefs Association; Joe Wald, executive director at the Greater Lansing Food Bank; and James Cummings from Michigan State University.

## Chefs Charity Challenge: meals for 36 cents

Our Community Kitchen in Lansing serves up small miracles 365 days a year. With donated food and what can be supplemented at about 36 cents a meal, the agency served 131,921 meals last year.

To raise awareness of this challenge (and have a little fun) Volunteers of America invited three chefs to share this challenge: Using mystery ingredients from our pantry, create a main course and dessert, within a time limit of about 30 minutes per course.

Winning recipes were replicated to serve the homeless and hungry who rely on the kitchen.

With volunteer judges and live audiences, these are popular events. A third event and a tournament of champions are planned. There also are plans to replicate the competition at the Detroit Veterans Housing Project kitchen.



## Top 10 reasons to donate to Volunteers of America Thrift Stores:

**10** Your George Foreman grills keep cloning themselves.

**9** Who couldn't use another tax deduction? Instant receipts.

**8** Your son's new school jeans have already turned into high-waters.

**7** Mother Nature will give you a gold star.

**6** Someone will have a real need for that toaster cover you've been hanging on to.

**5** We make it so easy, with numerous drop-off sites (see voami.org

for closest one) or we can even come pick up your donation. Call us at **1(866) 333-8281**.

**4** Your children have no idea how to use your dusty CD/DVD collection.

**3** Avoid the guilt of re-gifting those pajamas and picture frames.

**2** Feel good about getting rid of those Ugg's and replacing them with that pair you've been eyeing.

**1** Do you really need a reason to help people?

We appreciate your donations and put them to good use. All donations are taken to our 4 local thrift stores where they are sold or given away to support our Michigan programs.



**Give here:** Watch for these new indoor donation centers as you visit your favorite business. Donations are also accepted at all Thrift Stores and outdoor donation sites throughout mid-Michigan.

**REMEMBER YOUR DONATIONS ON WHEELS:** Skip the hassle of trade-in or resale. We make it easy to donate your vehicle. One phone call, and we can schedule a pickup. You get a tax break and knowledge you are helping someone. Call **877-721-4862** or go online to **carshelpingpeople.org**