

# Medicine Hat News

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## Labour of love, champions start

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A labour of love and dedication for one man - combined with the strength and support of the community - have all come together to address the issue of homelessness in Medicine Hat.

Wednesday afternoon was the grand opening of the **Champion** Centre, a permanent housing facility for low income men who may need some support coping with a mental illness, brain injury or developmental disability.

Twelve men will live independently in the upstairs of the facility, while the main floor's cafe will serve locals. Antique sales will also aid in revenues to keep the facility in operation.

"Klaas (Klooster) came here with a vision," Reverend Frank Kruliki, chair of the board told a crowd of 60 people. "The vision is not over."

Klooster, the executive director, started the first Centre in Ponoka before the success brought him here. Eventually he hopes to see more of these facilities in the community, including those for women.

"I hope other people pick up this concept of the **Champion** Centre," said Klooster. "I'm so glad to see this all come together."

Mayor Garth Vallely said Medicine Hat may not have a homelessness problem to the extent of larger communities, but community organizations and City Council have shown a commitment to address the problem. The area which still needs the most work is affordable housing, like the **Champion** Centre.

"In six years we have done amazing things to address homelessness in this community," said Vallely. "This is a great addition to what we've been doing."

The Medicine Hat Community Foundation was one of the first organizations to support the Centre with a \$40,000 grant.

"It's not obvious in Medicine Hat, but there are folks in this community that are finding housing very difficult," said Mike Christie, executive director of the Community Foundation.

Several other organizations saw affordable housing as a priority, he added, and stepped forward to

support the initiative by providing initial funding and furnishings as the facility came together.

Staff and volunteers will be running the kitchen and, starting in July, volunteers from the Salvation Army will help run the hot lunch program out of the Centre on weekdays.

"We had 50 people at the program today," said Major Brad Smith with the Salvation Army. "It's a different thing to try."

Volunteers will be able to serve and visit with those coming to the kitchen.

Klooster noted they are still in need of volunteers to help serve the hot lunches on the weekends.

Visitors were able to tour the Centre and enjoy some of the first food from the kitchen.

The Centre hopes to be fully operational in July.

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