

**A History of St. Vincent de Paul  
St. Matthew Conference  
Hillsboro, Oregon  
Stan Miller and Greg Clemmons, April, 2019**

**Early Years**

Ray Hertel, after retiring from a 35-year career in farming, saw a need in the community and acted on it. It was 1968 and Ray began collecting donated furniture and food and delivered it to the needy in the area. Traveling in just his private pickup truck, Ray, along with friends from the parish, logged over 20,000 miles a year in the service of the needy. This was the beginning of St. Vincent de Paul at St. Matthew Church in Hillsboro.



Ray and Agnes Hertel  
1972

Washington County's population in 1968 was just 155,000 and Hillsboro had a population of approximately 14,000. The economy of Washington County, with Hillsboro as the County seat, was based largely on agriculture. Tektronix, formed in 1946 in Beaverton, drew employees from Hillsboro, but it was just the precursor to what Hillsboro and Washington County are today.

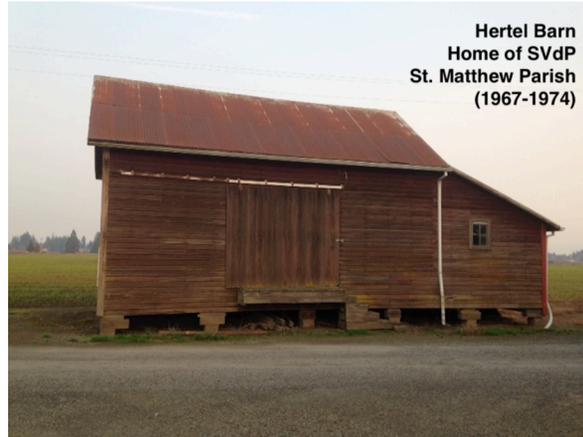
The population of Washington County today is over 500,000 and Hillsboro is now more than 100,000. Agriculture is still a player in the county's economic engine but high tech is definitely the main driver. The Intel Corporation employs over 17,000 people and its support industries employ many more. Today, construction cranes dominate the skyline over the Intel campus, road and bridge improvement projects are everywhere and new housing developments are commonplace. Washington County and Hillsboro are examples of development, local government policies and funding mechanisms that are emulated across the country.

Even with the present day affluence of the County and the City, there still exists significant low income and homeless concerns. The problems identified and addressed by Ray Hertel, his wife Agnes, and the parishioners of St. Matthew Parish who formed the original core of St. Vincent de Paul, still plague the community. Today, the Council has over 30,000 visits in a single year. More than 100 volunteers

staff the Hertel Center, picking up food, stocking shelves, distributing rent and utility assistance, walking clients through the food pantry, picking up donated furniture and delivering it, and just helping out wherever needed. This is the story of St. Vincent de Paul in Hillsboro.

### **Furniture Program**

It's interesting to note that in the early years of or conference, the furniture program was the primary focus. The earliest records we have indicate that in 1973-74 the conference responded to 335 requests for furniture and 150 requests for emergency food. At some point in the early years of the furniture program Ray Hertel was contacted by one or more pastors from parishes in the western part of the county, and it was decided that the program would attempt to serve families in virtually all of Western Washington County. So it is still fairly common for furniture deliveries to include not only Forest Grove, but Banks, Roy, Verboort and North Plains.



Ray's furniture priorities were to put the highest priority on first a place for folks to sleep, and secondly, furniture for family meals. "We average about one bed delivery for every day in the month," the furniture crew was fond of reporting. Consequently, the priority was on beds and bedding, and secondly on tables and chairs.

Couches and overstuffed living room furniture were also often requested; appliances were often available but were less of a priority. The crew was able to salvage enough surplus 2X4 scraps to fashion bed legs that were mounted with wood screws, and attached to the innerspring mattress. For years most of the furniture requests came through the Emergency Services office housed in the Hillsboro St. Vincent de Paul Store (Jan Kellam); the furniture itself was stored in the Hadley Barn west of Hillsboro. Most of the furniture was donated and picked up by the crew, and often repaired onsite. Deliveries typically averaged 300 to 500 per year. We also loan hospital equipment, including special beds and wheel chairs, to the ill and injured. The Hertel family donated Ray's pickup from which all deliveries were made until the conference's first truck was purchased in the late 90's.



The Hadley Barn, 2019.

## **The Hertel Center**

In approximately 1996 our conference began serious discussion regarding the need for a new Conference facility. At that time we were operating out of an 18' X 60' wood frame building located across from St. Matthew Church which had been utilized initially as a private residence, and later converted to an upholstery shop. It had been purchased by the parish in 1978 for \$60,000, and ultimately named The Hertel Center after Ray & Agnes Hertel who were instrumental in starting the St. Matthew Conference of St. Vincent de Paul in the late 60's, with the support of Fr. Robert Cieslinski.



The Original Hertel Center  
(approximately 1994)

Conference operations prior to 1978 had been located in several privately owned locations, primarily the Hertel farm site, and the purchase of the building across from the church made possible the beginning of an emergency food program to serve needy Hillsboro families. The building was sorely lacking in needed support. It was not plumbed, so there was neither water nor a sewage system, and it had been seriously damaged by fire. Refrigeration was provided with a series of donated residential size refrigerators and freezers. Those in need of emergency food called either the Emergency Services Office at the Hillsboro St. Vincent de Paul Store, or the St. Matthew Parish Office. Food supplies were shelved, food boxes prepared by volunteers each day, and delivered by a volunteer driver.

## **Planning and Construction**

Our initial efforts to obtain Grant funding were not successful. In 1998 our Conference participated in a Needs Assessment/Strategic Planning Process conducted on behalf of Washington County by the Office of Community Development. With this effort, we were able to make a persuasive case for a centralized Emergency Food Center based on the number of Hillsboro citizens living at or below the national poverty level. That need was supported by several local "food pantries," by Washington County Community Action and by the Oregon Food Bank. Archdiocesan approval of our proposed building was secured in 1999. Our proposed facility of approximately 2160 sq. ft., designed by Ron Kunkel with conference input and was approved by Community Development in 2000. We advertised for construction bids in the spring of 2000. Cliff Waibel, a parishioner and local contractor was the successful bidder. In August of 2000, we moved, on a temporary basis, into the old Sizzler Restaurant building, which had been purchased by the Parish. Demolition and site preparation for the new Hertel Center commenced soon after. Construction was completed in the spring of 2001. We held

an Open House after each Mass on March 3 & 4 of 2001; the building was re-dedicated to Ray & Agnes Hertel and blessed by Fr. Jose.

### **Funding**

Early on, our conference members made a pledge that none of the funds donated to provide services for the poor would be used to meet our facilities needs. Our “core” Grant from Community Development was \$62,000. Grants were also provided by the Metropolitan Service District, Dal L. Baker Charitable Lead Annuity, and the Jackson Foundation.

The balance of our cash needs came from parishioners and they were specifically earmarked to help with the project. Christensen Electric, through the efforts of Matt Walther, a parishioner, with donations by Platt and North Coast Electric, essentially donated the electrical work. Paul Nowak, a K of C member, donated the foundation work. Approximately ten other subcontractors either billed for costs only, or provided significant discounts on their services. Over 600 hours of donated time were received. Many of the donors were parishioners; others were construction people who wanted to support the work of St. Vincent de Paul. Some donated time, money or materials to help honor the memory of Ray & Agnes Hertel.

### **Hertel Center Addition**

In 2004, we received a generous bequest from Grace Engeldinger, a St. Matthew parishioner and long-time St. Vincent de Paul supporter, making possible an addition of approximately 800 sq. ft. to the Hertel Center. The addition created significant additional storage space, and more recently was utilized to add additional walk-in cold storage. As part of the addition, with Cliff Waibel again serving as Contractor, the condensers that operate our cold storage were relocated to the top of the Center creating additional adjacent space.

The addition project, at a cost of approximately \$55,000, has been instrumental in making it possible for the program to increase its food supply inventory, accept larger bulk food donations from our grocery donors, and to thereby better serve the ever-increasing number of shoppers we’ve needed to accommodate.

### **Emergency Food Program**

The conference began accepting requests for emergency food in the early 70’s. Records indicate that 150 families were served in 1973-74. The numbers quickly expanded with the purchase of the original Hertel Center building in the late 70’s. Over 1300 families were being served by 1980-81, and that number quickly expanded to over 2500 by 1983.

Hillsboro residents needing emergency food contacted either the Emergency Services Office in the Hillsboro St. Vincent de Paul Store, or the St. Matthew Parish Office. Food supplies were shelved in the Hertel Center, food boxes were prepared by volunteers each weekday, and delivered by volunteer drivers. Cold storage was

provided with donated freezers and refrigerators. Deliveries surpassed 4000 by 2001, reached 8000 in 2011, and surpassed 10,000 in 2015.

### **Food Supplies**

We, as a conference, have been very fortunate to have a variety of sources of donated and/or low cost food available to keep our conference shelves well stocked. The majority of our food supply comes from Oregon Food Bank, but is significantly supplemented by donations from local grocers.

We are also fortunate to participate in food drives, such as the annual Boy Scout drive which provides us with hundreds of pounds of food which is collected door-to-door and delivered to the Hertel Center. In addition, parishioners and other supporters provide thousands of pounds of food through personal donations. In many cases, gardeners and orchard owners share the bounty of their personal hobby or livelihood with us. Others simply buy the things that we need, and share them with us when circumstances permit.

Our basic supplies include canned goods, such as fruit, vegetables, tomato products, soup and fish. We also provide packaged food such as ramen, macaroni & cheese, cereal, and snack items. Our frozen offerings always include frozen meat, fish, and vegetables. Additional items include fresh vegetables and fruit, pastry, dairy products, peanut butter, and bread. We have some toiletry items available, and almost always, fresh eggs. We have discovered that shoppers leave the Hertel Center with at least 100 lbs. of groceries, which means a ton of food for every 20 shoppers. Our data show that on a typical day we dispense about 3000 lbs. of food.

### **Shopping Style**

When we designed and built the current Hertel Center 20 years ago, we converted to what is called a "shopping style" method of serving those who visit our Center. Shoppers come at their leisure, are provided with a shopping cart and paired with a volunteer who assists them. Portions are determined based on family size, and shoppers take only what they will use. This has proven to be not only a more economical approach as it eliminates the waste of items not consumed, but also we continue to discover it to be a more dignified way of meeting the food needs of those we serve.

### **The Future**

We all hope and pray that someday we will close the Hertel Center and cease operations at the St. Vincent de Paul Conference because there would be no need. Poverty and homelessness will have been eliminated in Hillsboro.

Until it does we will continue to seek funding opportunities, continue to donate thousands of hours of time at the Hertel Center, donate our money and our goods, all for the betterment of our less fortunate brothers and sisters in the Hillsboro area. The dream first initiated by Ray and Agnes Hertel will continue to live in the lives and hearts of the Vincentians and volunteers at the Center.



The Hertel Center, January 2016