

Charleston Daily Mail

Charleston, West Virginia
www.dailymail.com

Thursday, June 16, 2005

50 cents ★



CRAIG CUNNINGHAM/DAILY MAIL

Dondale employee Ray Gonzalez, 21, of Charleston volunteered to help unload a pallet from a truck for the Believe in West Virginia Leadership Foundation. The organization is storing goods to help in the needy in donated warehouse space in back of the Cross Lanes furniture store.

Group striving to help needy people

By CHARLOTTE FERRELL SMITH
DAILY MAIL STAFF

Items to help the needy, from school supplies and new clothes to food and building materials, are being collected in a storehouse by the Believe in West Virginia Leadership Foundation.

The interdenominational Christian group was organized three years ago as an economic networking effort to help West Virginians find jobs. It has since continued to grow and branch out into other areas, said the Rev. Jack Henry, the organization's founder.

Foundation members from throughout southern West Virginia are pastors and business leaders who share the vision of improving the quality of life for people in the Mountain State, said Henry, a coal operator turned pastor.

The organization has been moving goods into 5,000-square-foot of donated warehouse space behind Dondale Design & Fine Home Furnishings in Cross Lanes.

To fill the warehouse, Believe in West Virginia has partnered with World Vision, an international humanitarian organization, and Christian Appalachian Project, a Kentucky based outreach ministry.

Items in the warehouse are often goods that can't be sold for some reason, said John deBlecourt, executive director of Believe in West Virginia. For example, clothing may be out of style or food packaging may have been changed.

"Rather than discard it, they can get a tax credit for that donation," deBlecourt said. "The



Pastor Jack Henry says the warehouse means goods such as windows can be stored until needed by a church or nonprofit organization. Other items to be collected for the needy range from new clothes and school supplies to food and building materials.

donation has to go to a nonprofit to help the needy, elderly or infirmed. Goods can't be sold or traded."

Minimal fees may be charged to cover expenses. A recent shipment included 236 windows of various sizes ranging in value from \$200 to \$5,000. Costs for these windows range from \$25 to \$200.

Some have already gone to church groups building new facilities.

School supplies will be given to churches that offer not-for-profit, after-school programs while food will help stock pantries, Henry said.

"If we can supply a few things, they can spend money on other things," Henry said. "Some churches feed people. We need to see who can use goods

most effectively. We are a storehouse."

Plans call for working with pastors and nonprofit organizations to distribute wares. Contact deBlecourt at 552-7601.

"I think having a place where churches can find resources to help people in the community is tremendous," said the Rev. David McVey, pastor of King's Way Christian Church in Nitro.

Aside from the storehouse, Believe in West Virginia is also working in a wide range of other areas.

In an effort to fight teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, a local chapter of the Silver Ring Thing is being organized. The international program encourages teens to make a commitment to abstain from sex until marriage. The

theatrical production includes high-tech sound and lighting, special effects and comedy performances about dating, love, second chances and choices. Teens who make a pledge for sexual abstinence place a silver ring on their finger.

"We want to train people and have equipment here to do skits and humor," Henry said.

Other programs in the works range from working with West Virginia University on coal research to helping people released from jail obtain jobs and become productive, he said.

Believe in West Virginia Leadership Foundation will branch out into any area that may help the state, Henry said.

"We don't want to draw attention to ourselves," he said. "All honor should go to the Lord who inspired it and is making it possible. As long as we keep our motives and focus right, this will continue to grow. We have to maintain the highest integrity."

Ed Gaunch of Charleston is president of the foundation.

"It started out almost entirely as economic development to create jobs and save jobs," Gaunch said. "We got distracted in finding other needs existed and saw opportunities to solve some of those needs. Silver Ring Thing and the storehouse are examples. We are patterned after the Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation. We have made several trips there for mentoring and to get ideas."

For more information, visit the Web site www.believeinwv.org.

Contact writer Charlotte Ferrell Smith at charlotte@dailymail.com or 348-1246.