

MLK Day volunteers help chip away at 'bedlessness' problem

BY ERIC CRUMP
ecrump@hfchronicle.com

Residents of Homewood and Flossmoor volunteer in different ways to help overcome poverty, homelessness or food insecurity. On Sunday, Jan. 16, volunteers tackled a less visible problem: bedlessness.

"Bedlessness is not a real word but it is a real problem," said Dave King, president of the Oak Forest chapter of Sleep in Heavenly Peace (SHP), a nonprofit organization dedicated to building and delivering beds to children who have none.

The project struck a chord with Flossmoor Community Relations Commission member Jackie Riffice, who knew right away a bed building event would be perfect for the commission to sponsor on Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service.

"The light bulb went off because I was really unaware that people in our Southland community have kids that don't have beds," she said. "I think it was the right fit for what we wanted to do, but it also was an awakening that there are so many who need so much."

Each bed costs \$250. The money was raised by the Flossmoor Volunteer Fire Department Corporation with help from the Sunnycrest Fire Protection District, Riffice said.



Eric Crump/H-F Chronicle

Volunteers worked in crews to help build beds for needy children. More than 60 people gave their time on a Sunday morning for the build project.

"This is very dear to me and a lot of first responders," said Flossmoor Fire Chief Bob Kopec. "We go into some of these homes and really see. Though we think every child has a nice warm bed, the reality is sometimes they don't. We truly understand the need and support the mission."

King, who owns a dog daycare service, said he got involved in SHP three years ago when he encountered bedlessness first hand. He learned that an employee of his company did not have his own bed.

"We helped him get a bed of his own," he said. "A week later I was buying beds for dogs, and I felt guilty buying beds for dogs knowing there were children sleeping on the floor."

King and other SHP volunteers brought all the materials and tools to set up an assembly line in the Flossmoor Public Works garage. Ruffice said organizers had hoped 30 workers would sign up; 61 showed up to sand, drill, stain and assemble 10 beds. Local organizers also posted a wish list on

Amazon.com for bed sheets, blankets, pillows and comforters for the beds.

"We got 22 of each," she said. "So, through the goodness of the local community, the wish list was filled above and beyond."

According to the SHP website, 2% to 3% of children in the U.S. do not have their own beds. Chronic poor sleep can affect physical growth, contribute to anxiety and depression, increase frequency of sickness and emotional instability.

"I think the impact a bed can have is so significant it almost can't be measured," King said. "The overall benefits to health, well-being, outlook on life will change. We're delivering more than a bed. This gives them the ability to dream."

The impact a bed can have is seen in the faces of children who receive one, King said. Parents will occasionally send the organization photos of kids with their new beds.

King said the Oak Forest chapter has delivered 300 beds the past three years. The organization's motto is "No kid sleeps on the floor in our town," and King would like to see that come true in every community in the South Suburbs.

He may have a new ally in that quest. Riffice said the CRC hopes to sponsor a build-a-bed event every year.



 **the CONSERVATORY**
vintage & vinyl

Midcentury Modern Furniture & Vinyl Records

WINTER HOURS
SUNDAY 12-5P | WED-THU 11A-5P | FRI-SAT 11A-6P

• eGift Cards sold online and in store
• Private Event Space Available! • We Buy Records Too!

conservatoryvintageandvinyl.com • phone 708.960.0231 • text 708.568.0075
1042 Sterling Ave, Flossmoor, IL

CUPID IS AS CUPID DOES!

Give Your Valentine A
Jonathan Kane Salon & Spa
Gift Card Any Time of Year.

Jonathan KANE
salon • spa

18065 Harwood Avenue Homewood, IL
jonathankanesalonspa.com
708.206.3336