

## St. Matthew Students Donate to F.D.L. Homeless Shelter

*The St. Katherine Drexel Shelter in the City of Fond du Lac will open this spring*

MITCHELL BRADLEY KELLER

ACTING EDITOR

“This is all about partnerships and supporting one another,” said Solutions Center Director Amy Loof inside the nearly-open St. Katherine Drexel Shelter – the first purpose-built homeless shelter in the history of Fond du Lac County – on Monday, April 4, as folks in florescent-colored T-shirts scurried around her.

While the exterior of the building, which is located on N. Peters Ave. in the city, looks largely finished, the interior of the brand new shelter facility is still under construction.

And those folks in florescent T-shirts? They were not construction workers, but students, faculty and volunteers from St. Matthew Catholic School in Campbellsport.

The sixth through eighth graders at St. Matt’s, after a visit from Solutions Center Board President Kristina Meilahn earlier this school year, were inspired by the first-of-its-kind shelter, which was made possible in large part due to a substantial donation from Drexel Building Supply, and the junior-high students started collecting donations for the shelter.

The students put in the effort through their Community Service Volunteer Ministry (CSVm). Educator Julie Dotzler said helping the shelter was exactly the type of mission CSVm is geared toward.

“It was worth the time knowing that we were helping people who are not able to help themselves right now,” she said.

Fast-forward to Monday, and one full semitrailer, another quarter-size trailer and several more car loads arrived outside the shelter with the St. Matt’s students ready to offload all the goodwill they curated over the weeks and months.

“None of us is doing this alone,” said Loof, speaking both broadly about life and about the incredible volunteer efforts that have helped the Solutions Center and Salvation Army of Fond Du Lac cooperative in the nearly two years since St. Katherine Drexel Shelter was announced to *See DONATION page 4*

---

## DONATION

*from page 1* be built. “Our partnerships and our collaborations and volunteers and staff; this doesn’t come full circle without all of those things. This group of kids here from St. Matt’s today; this is amazing.”

The St. Matt’s group provided plastic bed frames and dressers for the living quarters in addition to other vital items.

The beds, while they appeared lightweight, were quite the haul for even the eighth graders, but the students showed gumption, teamwork and patience in delivering their items to the shelter.

“Now we’re moving!” shouted one student giddily as a bed frame rolled away to its destination on a fourwheeled cart.

Dotzler gave credit to her students, whose Herculean effort were not just for show.

“Without us, it may have taken days to unload and [place] the furniture,” she said. “What seemed like an impossible task was made easier once we got organized and developed a system.”

For both Loof and Meilahn (who is also a detective with the Fond du Lac [FDL] Police Department and a former school resource officer at FDL High School), reaching the younger generation about the importance of volunteerism is as important as the donations being made.

“They’re our next generation of volunteers,” said Loof. “If we can reach them, and they find doing stuff like this feels good, then, we have a whole generation coming in that’s serving this population of people, so they don’t get lost.”

“They think they’re not learning today, too,” said Meilahn, referring to the kids’ excitement to be out of the classroom. “But, today, we’ve talked about geometry, we’ve talked about history. You can learn a lot when you help out.”

The Solutions Center presently operates a single residence for homeless families on 2nd Street in the city. A warming shelter is available at the Salvation Army’s facilities in the winter months, but both entities are looking forward to combining all of the tools and resources into one location. In addition to providing a safe place to sleep, the shelter will also provide job resources, medical resources and personalized guidance as residents navigate their housing crisis.

The building is located in the same lot as the St. Vincent de Paul thrift store of Fond du Lac on N. Peters Ave. Loof said this was by design, and is a great example of the positive relationship with “St. Vinny’s.”

While there is still plenty of work to be done, Loof, Meilahn and everyone at the shelter are starting to see the fruits of their labor. Just a few short years ago, these homeless population advocates were wondering *if* positive change would

*See*

## DONATION

*page 6*



Fond du Lac Police Department Detective Kristina Meilahn, gesturing in front, gives St. Matt’s students, faculty and volunteers a tour of the St. Katherine Drexel Shelter. Meilahn is the Solutions Center Board of Directors President, and was instrumental in preparing the shelter’s transition from its 2nd Street location to its future locale off Johnson Street. **MITCHELL B. KELLER PHOTOS**



A large storage facility at the shelter. There is still plenty of room for donations. More information on how and what to give can be found at [skdsfdl.org/campaign-donations](http://skdsfdl.org/campaign-donations).

---

## DONATION

*from page 4* come. Now, they are just waiting in anticipation for *when*.

“There’s something to be said about Fond du Lac, our city and our county, the people have really pitched in to help and donated,” said Loof in closing, making sure to thank everyone who gave – like the St. Matt’s students – even the smallest amount of money or time, over the years. “Everybody plays a part. Our donors helped us build this. Everyone should be excited.”

A series of open houses are not yet scheduled, but are planned to run in the coming weeks or months.

For Dotzler, she walked away impressed with her students, and she can’t wait to return to see the results of their hard work.

“I was really impressed with the students in that they didn’t complain or ask if they were almost done,” she said. “They worked together as a team and got the job done. They lived out our school mission statement, which is: ‘St. Matthew Catholic School strives to educate the whole child through respect, responsibility and service, in living the Gospel message.’ We are very excited to return for the open house and see what their efforts contributed to creating.”



St. Matt’s junior high students Jackson Kieler, Jack Marchello and Carson Heisdorf sit with Fond du Lac Police Detective and Solutions Center Board President Kristina Meilahn. In addition to the sleeping areas, the new Fond du Lac homeless shelter will have community rooms, work spaces and computer rooms. In all, the shelter will be able to home more than 50 people (including individuals and families).

**MITCHELL B. KELLER PHOTO**

