Dear Friends,

This past spring thousands of our neighbors here in Nebraska and across the border in Iowa and South Dakota experienced the catastrophic effects of historic flooding. The impact of the disaster ultimately resulted in more than $3 billion in losses across the three-state region.

Yet even in the midst of crushing loss, hope flourished.

• Hope was present in the hundreds of volunteers who donated thousands of hours of time and energy—serving meals, stocking Disaster Resource Centers, distributing supplies and loading and unloading trucks, vans and cars.

• Hope was present in the more than 350 corporations that made financial gifts or donated material resources and in the more than $2.8 million that was donated overall, 100% of which is supporting flood survivors.

• Hope was present in neighbors helping neighbors and in neighbors helping strangers.

• Hope was present in the nearly 100 Salvation Army officers and staff members who traveled from eight states to offer their help.

The destruction was unprecedented, but hope refused to be extinguished, reminding us that when we pass through the waters, God is with us (Isaiah 43:2). We are encouraged and humbled by the outpouring of generosity and compassion from the greater Omaha metro and beyond. The truth is, we simply could not have executed our wide-scale relief and recovery efforts without you. You made our work possible, and for that, we are grateful.

Turning to a more personal note—all of us at Divisional Headquarters mourn the loss of Director of Public and Media Relations Susan Eustice, who passed away in May after a brief illness. Susan’s passion for the mission of The Salvation Army was unwavering, and we are grateful for all the ways she touched innumerable lives in her long and fruitful tenure over the last 21 years.

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven,” wrote King Solomon in the Book of Ecclesiastes. Though we walk through seasons of sorrow and difficulty, always we have hope, giving thanks to God for His everlasting goodness and His daily presence through every season of our lives.

May God bless you richly today!
Flood survivors stopped by the Sarpy-Cass Disaster Resource Center to pick up cleaning supplies and pantry items for weeks after the initial flooding.

“I just couldn’t hardly get my head around what was happening,” said Sandy Condrey, recalling the day she and her two children were evacuated from their Paradise Lakes home. She grabbed her prescription medications, important paperwork and enough clothes for two days.

When the Condreys returned to their home a few days later, everything was caked with mud, and mold had already crept up most of the walls. “We’d had six feet of water inside the house,” Condrey said. Mementos were destroyed, including family photos and treasured handicrafts made by her mother.

“The Salvation Army is invested in this effort.”

“I don’t know what we would have done without this place,” Condrey said about The Salvation Army’s Sarpy-Cass Disaster Resource Center (DRC), which opened April 4 to provide supplies and relief to people affected by the flooding. Condrey and her children visited the DRC for cleaning supplies, laundry detergent, food and personal hygiene items every week since being evacuated from their home. “It’s been a lifesaver,” she said.

In addition to the smiling volunteers ready to offer a helping hand, students at Beadle Middle School wrote letters to flood survivors and tucked them into plastic laundry baskets filled with donated detergent, dryer sheets and hangers. “I hope you know you have an entire school supporting you as you go through this,” wrote one student, who decorated her note with hand-drawn pink tulips and bright yellow suns. Even in the face of hardship, hope and encouragement were ever-present at the Sarpy-Cass DRC.

Shada said 497 houses in the area were condemned, with another 1,000 homes significantly damaged. “There were 146 kids affected by the flooding from one Bellevue elementary school alone,” she said.

“Long-term recovery may take up to a year in some of the hardest-hit areas,” acknowledged Divisional Commander Maj. Greg Thompson. “But The Salvation Army is invested in this effort. One hundred percent of the more than $2.8 million raised for flood relief is going back into helping these communities.”

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Paula and Chuck Rose, who’d been in Texas when the town flooded, lost everything. “When we opened the front door, we knew it was gone,” said Paula, her eyes filling with tears. The Roses temporarily lived in a trailer on the edge of town until they could figure out what was next. They and most of their neighbors met for lunch and dinner at the American Legion building.

“We truly can’t thank The Salvation Army enough. I really don’t know what this town would have done without them.”

“I will never pass another red kettle without remembering The Salvation Army and their support during this experience,” said Paula. “The Salvation Army has been here with us non-stop from the beginning.”

“We can’t thank the volunteers enough,” said longtime Hornick resident Loretta Prichard. “The meals The Salvation Army volunteers are cooking for us are better than you’d get at any restaurant in Sioux City," added her husband, former Hornick councilman Jake Prichard. “We are so grateful.”

Hornick hasn’t experienced this kind of flooding since 1960. When they first arrived, Capts. Chris and April

Flood 2019 Small Town Spotlight: Hornick, Iowa

When Paula Thoele saw images of the flooding in Nebraska, Iowa and South Dakota on the news from her home in Savanna, Illinois, she knew she wanted to help.

“I can’t afford to give a lot of money,” she said, as she wiped tables at the American Legion in Hornick, Iowa, where The Salvation Army had established a makeshift flood-relief headquarters. “But I can give my time and my energy.”

Hornick flooded March 18 when a levee was breached on the West Fork of the Little Sioux River, a tributary of the Missouri River. All 250 of the town’s residents were forced to evacuate. When they returned four days later, most discovered their homes had suffered extensive damage. Many houses had up to seven feet of water inside. Furnaces, water heaters and appliances were destroyed; furniture and clothing was ruined. The power was out and plumbing wasn’t functioning.

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D.J.’s Hero Awards Luncheon Raises Record-Setting $610,000 to Support Youth in Omaha Metro

Event honors 11 outstanding Nebraska high school seniors

Gizela Kwihangana of Omaha believes “the world needs people to care for the weak, the hurting and the hopeless,” and she is determined to do her part. Kwihangana, who was one of 11 D.J.’s Hero Award recipients, was born in Tanzania, Africa, where she experienced poverty, trauma, homelessness and violence. Today she advocates for women of color and aspires to work as a licensed trauma counselor.

More than 1,200 community leaders gathered May 7 at CHI Health Center Omaha to celebrate the D.J.’s Hero Award recipients, each of whom received a $10,000 scholarship. Peggy and David Sokol established the awards in memory and honor of their son, D.J., in 1999.

The 2019 D.J.'s Hero Awards Luncheon was chaired by Terri and Jack Diesing Jr., with Dr. Ken and Annie Bird serving as vice chairs and Gov. Pete Ricketts as honorary chair. Each year the program recognizes a group of talented, community service-oriented Nebraska students who have demonstrated resilience, courage and perseverance in the face of daunting challenges. As of 2019 a total of 142 scholarships have been awarded.

Also new this year, The Salvation Army debuted a partnership with TeamMates Mentoring and Avenue Scholars to match award recipients with leaders in the community who will offer encouragement and guidance throughout the students’ college years and beyond.

“We are so grateful for the outpouring of generosity.”

Keeping with the event’s focus on young people with promise, keynote speakers Leigh Anne and Sean Tuohy, whose story has inspired millions since it was first depicted in the 2009 record-breaking film “The Blind Side,” urged the audience to support youth who are living in poverty or facing other daunting challenges. The couple spoke passionately about their experience of first meeting Michael Oher, the young man who would ultimately become their adopted son and later, after graduating from high school and college, go on to become a first-round NFL draft pick in 2009. “Our job is to find the ones who are going to fall through the cracks,” said Sean.

The Salvation Army North Corps is an oasis for hundreds of kids living in the area – a safe, life-giving space where they can play sports, learn computer skills, benefit from positive mentors, get homework help and tutoring, enjoy nutritious meals and snacks and socialize with their peers. Kids are thriving at North Corps, but there is still ample opportunity to expand and improve the youth programming. Guests at this year’s D.J. ’s Hero Awards Luncheon were asked to support youth programming at North Corps, and they answered with enthusiasm and generosity, contributing nearly $80,000 via a raise-the-paddle auction and red kettle and swipe-as-you-go donations. Of the $80,000, $10,000 will fund a North Corps scholarship supported by the 2019 D.J.’s Hero Award Chairs, Terri and Jack Diesing Jr.

This funding will allow North Corps to offer an array of new programming, including the opportunity to teach practical skills such as interview best practices and money management, offer workshops that will introduce kids to trade jobs like screen printing and create a safe place to talk with kids and teens about the challenges they are facing in their everyday lives.

“We are thrilled by the outpouring of support for North Corps,” said Capt. Samantha “Sam” Nolan Jones, who serves as North Corps’ officer alongside her husband, Lt. Kenneth Jones. “Ken and I greatly benefitted from The Salvation Army’s impact on our lives as kids, so we know firsthand how transformational youth programming can be. It’s an amazing blessing to get to do this work that we are called to do.”

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And thank you, as well, to our many additional sponsors who helped make this event possible.


Lt. Kenneth Jones and Capt. Samantha “Sam” Nolan Jones (center) enjoy shooting hoops after school with neighborhood kids at “The Sal.”
Kids Stretch Their Bodies and Their Brains at
North Corps Summer Day Camp

According to Capt. Samantha “Sam” Nolan Jones, corps officer at North Corps, a third of households in north Omaha are single-parent homes. “We strive to provide a safe, educational and fun summer program for the kids in our area who may not have parental supervision or activities to engage in at home,” she said.

Sixth-grader Ray Shaun is grateful for the opportunity to spend time with his friends, explaining that “sometimes friends are easier to talk to than parents.” He’s also glad to be enjoying a variety of fun activities. “If I were at home, I’d be doing chores,” he said.

Sixth-grader Nevaeh agreed. “I’d be totally bored, probably watching TV,” she said.

Research shows that kids are spending more and more time on their phones and other electronic devices, even at summer camp, but that’s not happening on Cherilyn Loftin’s watch. Loftin directs the SAL Summer Day Camp at The Salvation Army North Corps in north Omaha, an eight-week program for kids ages 7-12. “We take their phones when they come in the door in the morning, and I keep them out of the computer room,” she said. “We’re teaching the kids how to socialize and use their own creativity. I also like to keep them moving. My goal is to stretch their bodies and their brains.”

Loftin and her day camp staff keep as many as 17 to 20 kids busy five days a week with fun, stimulating activities. They go bowling and fishing; swim at the Kroc Center; enjoy story time, prayers and devotions; visit the public library; do science activities; plant flowers; participate in a variety of physical activities such as hula hooping and basketball; and go on field trips to the Omaha Zoo; museums and the Lincoln Planetarium. “We incorporate education, physical activity and nutritious food so that the kids are benefitting holistically,” said Capt. Nolan Jones. “But most of all we just want the kids to learn, build character and have fun.”

Sixth-grader Nevaeh agreed. “I’d be totally bored, probably watching TV,” she said.

Seven-year-old Chrisette’s favorite day camp activity is hula hooping in the gym, while seventh-grader J.B. loves to play basketball. On a recent field trip to West Lanes, Ricky, who attends the SAL summer day camp every year, discovered he’s good at bowling, while Shkalla looks forward to playing at the water park.

“We incorporate education, physical activity and nutritious food so that the kids are benefitting holistically,” said Capt. Nolan Jones. “But most of all we just want the kids to learn, build character and have fun.”

Amid the fun, Loftin also helps the kids address some of the challenges they are facing. “I try to help them figure out what they’re feeling and how to deal with their emotions in different ways, like using anger management and conflict resolution,” she said.

Chrisette has perfected her hula hooping skills during her time at summer camp.

The Omaha Salvation Army is pleased to announce the appointments of Mark Nelson and Jim Smith to its Omaha advisory board, which supports the work of The Salvation Army in the Omaha metro by providing mission-based leadership and strategic guidance.

Mark Nelson is vice president of the Direct Marketing Group for Physicians Mutual Insurance Company. He has been employed with Physicians Mutual in a variety of positions, including vice president of life products, actuary and actuarial associate, since 1990. Nelson earned his Bachelor of Science in Mathematics from the University of Nebraska at Omaha and is a fellow with the Society of Actuaries. He is also an elected board member with Sarpy County Sanitary Improvement District #79.

Jim Smith is executive director of Blueprint Nebraska, a privately funded organization composed of business leaders working to develop a plan for Nebraska’s economic growth, competitiveness and prosperity. Previously he served as a senator with the Nebraska Legislature from 2010 to 2018, where he was chairman of the Transportation and Telecommunications Committee and the Revenue Committee. Smith earned a Master of Business Administration from Creighton University and a Bachelor of Science in Accounting from the University of West Florida and has volunteered for a number of non-profit organizations, including the Offutt Air Force Base Advisory Council, Wings over the Heartland and Make-A-Wish Foundation.

“The Salvation Army continues to add experienced business and community leaders to our board who believe strongly in our mission of serving human needs without discrimination,” said Advisory Board Chair Dave Bishop. “We welcome Mark and Jim, and we look forward to working with them.”

The Omaha Salvation Army Advisory Board has been reconstituted with the addition of executive directors Mark Nelson and Jim Smith, who are shown in the photo on the left. The board is comprised of 22 business and community leaders who provide mission-based leadership and guidance to the Salvation Army in the Omaha metro area.

The new advisory board includes: Brad von Gillern (Vice Chair), Dr. Viv Ewing (Chair), Dr. Jon Benjamin-Alvarado (Executive Committee), Steve Seline (Secretary), Ryan Horn (Treasurer), Fred Hunzeker (Vice Chair), James Ryan (Chair), Tim Harrison (Treasurer), Bradon Gambatte (Secretary), Joleen David (Executive Committee), Lisa Rutter, Steve Seline, Dr. Viv Ewing, Ryan Horn, Fred Hunzeker, Nevaeh’s favorite day camp activity is hula hooping in the gym, while sixth-grader J.B. loves to play basketball. On a recent field trip to West Lanes, Ricky, who attends the SAL summer day camp every year, discovered he’s good at bowling, while Shkalla looks forward to playing at the water park.

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Divisional Social Services Director

As divisional social services director, Dr. Monalisa McGee-Baratta oversees all social services operations in Nebraska, South Dakota and western Iowa, including all programs and services offered at The Salvation Army’s Renaissance Village location in midtown Omaha. Dr. McGee-Baratta most recently served The Salvation Army as regional coordinator for Pathway of Hope, a program focused on breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty. As a licensed mental health professional, certified professional counselor, national certified counselor and a master addiction counselor, she brings a long list of credentials to her new position.

Dr. McGee-Baratta succeeds Dr. Linda Burkle, who retired from her position as divisional social services director in December 2018.

Omaha Social Services Director

As Omaha social services director, Sharetene Mengel is responsible for managing and supporting all Omaha social services programs, including training, consultation and performance quality improvement; securing additional funding sources and preparing grant applications; and collaborating with community partners and agencies.

A longtime employee of The Salvation Army, Mengel directed its Early Head Start program for the last 17 years. Previously, she worked as the director of two Salvation Army group homes for adolescents in North Platte. Before joining The Salvation Army in 1998, Mengel was employed as a mental health therapist in private practice and for the Richard Young Behavioral Health Center in Kearney.

Longtime Divisional Director of Public and Media Relations Susan Eustice passed away in Omaha May 11 following a brief illness. A celebration of life service for friends and family was held in her honor in June. Susan is survived by her husband, Bill, and three grown children.

Susan was best known as the “Voice of The Salvation Army” in the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro, having been the division’s spokeswoman for the entirety of her 21 years of service. But the depth and breadth of her work reached far beyond that particular role.

First, she was widely regarded by the Omaha-area PR community as one of the very best in the field. A tireless promoter of all things Salvation Army, her efforts resulted in countless news stories about the organization’s people, programs, events and awards in local and national media over the years.

Susan was also a pioneer, founding or co-founding several of The Salvation Army’s longest-running charitable drives and special social services campaigns in the metro area. Among these are: the D.J.’s Hero Awards Luncheon, which celebrated its 21st year in May and raises hundreds of thousands of dollars annually for local Salvation Army youth programs; The Salvation Army - Seven Can Help Kids Back to School Backpack Drive, which, in two decades of operation, has resulted in more than 200,000 backpacks distributed to families in need; and the Adopt-a-Family Radiothon, which marked its 19th year last winter, helping approximately 2,100 area families with Christmas gifts. In addition, Susan oversaw large-scale community relations efforts with deep connections to the division’s history – from those tied to disaster-relief work in rural areas to the move of The Salvation Army’s Western Divisional Headquarters from midtown to west Omaha.

Most of all, Susan represented the heart of The Salvation Army. She constantly worked to uphold the motto of “Doing the Most Good” by always looking out for the welfare of others and working diligently to improve the community in which she lived. She left people better than she found them. Susan was a beloved figure at our headquarters building, where she was a confidant to many and a friend to – and supporter of – everyone. She also represented The Salvation Army on numerous boards, committees and other groups in and around Omaha and led several PR/communications professional associations as well.

The value of Susan’s work to our organization was immeasurable. It would be impossible to count the number of people she helped both directly and indirectly during her two-plus decades of dedicated service. Now, her legacy lives on, extending far beyond the three-state area (Nebraska, South Dakota and western Iowa) that our division serves.

As Susan’s colleagues, we consider ourselves immensely blessed to have worked alongside her – and even more so to have known her as a friend.

May we all honor Susan by carrying forth her spirit of service as we strive to continue “Doing the Most Good.”
One Family’s Passion for The Salvation Army Has Been Passed Down from Generation to Generation

Helen (Raber) Stasiak always had a special place in her heart for The Salvation Army. “She was utterly devoted, so much so that we called her ‘the patron saint of The Salvation Army,’” said her daughter, Dr. Katherine Hankins of Omaha.

Dr. Hankins grew up hearing stories about how both her mother and father had struggled with poverty and homelessness in their youth. “My parents each knew what it was like to survive without a roof over their heads and money for necessities,” she said.

Helen Raber and Raymond Stasiak met while working in a chemical plant during World War II. Later, when Raymond shipped out to serve overseas, the couple saw how The Salvation Army showed up to support the soldiers and their families. “They noticed that other organizations charged for their services, but The Salvation Army handed out free food. That was my parents’ first introduction to how The Salvation Army serves people in need,” said Dr. Hankins.

Dr. Hankins is following in her mother’s footsteps as a loyal supporter of The Salvation Army. She and her husband, Dr. Jordan Hankins, are longtime members of the Red Kettle Club, an exclusive group of donors in the Omaha area.

“I appreciate that The Salvation Army welcomes everyone,” she noted. “It offers an open-hearted acceptance that transcends all boundaries. And the Army hasn’t forgotten its core mission, which is Christ. The Salvation Army truly meets the physical and spiritual needs of people.”

Helen’s commitment to The Salvation Army has been passed down not only to her daughter but to her granddaughter, Dr. Nancy Stewart, as well, who in turn is introducing the tradition of support to her own young daughter and son. “We’ll be looking to start bell ringing next year in honor of my grandmother, who thought the world of The Salvation Army,” Dr. Stewart said. In the meantime, she and her husband, Jeremy, recently donated a set of exercise equipment to the North Corps Community Center, which has enabled the corps to create a weight room open to anyone in the community, particularly those who don’t have the financial means to join a gym.

“The patron saint of The Salvation Army” would be pleased to know her legacy lives on in the three generations following in her footsteps.