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## Building hope in Richmond: A community movement to ensure safe shelter for all | Guest column

JACQUELIN AND SCOTT ARONSON

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**A** safe place to lay one's head at night should be a reality for every woman, man and child. Yet, this most basic need for shelter is not being met for hundreds of our neighbors across greater Richmond.

Despite decades of good intentions, plans and efforts to meet the urgent needs of people displaced from their homes, homelessness has been on the rise since the pandemic, and a long-term solution has remained out of reach.

Now, however, a new path forward is emerging for our community.



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The advertisement features the GMC logo and a photograph of several GMC vehicles parked in a row against a scenic mountain background.



This rendering shows the updated lobby area at the planned Center of Hope shelter in Richmond. Greater Richmond is rallying to finish the Center of Hope, a transformative shelter and support hub that will ensure every neighbor has a safe place to sleep and a dignified path toward stability, write Jacquelin and Scott Aronson.

The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army Central Virginia Area Command purchased a building at 1900 Chamberlayne Avenue with a vision to offer a **Center of Hope**, a place for life transformation. Here, individuals and families experiencing homelessness will receive shelter for up to 90 days along with respite, a sense of belonging and services to help them move from survival mode onto a pathway of stability and sustainability for a better life.

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A \$15.5 million capital campaign is underway to support the renovation of the property and establish a permanent Center of Hope. In the meantime, after making minimal updates to the building, which has had multiple uses and upgrades over many decades, The Salvation Army opened a 50-bed men's emergency shelter and an inclement weather shelter (66 beds for men and 40 for women). With financial and other support from the city of Richmond and Henrico County, both operations have been up and running for the past three years as a temporary solution.

Once the Center of Hope opens, the upgraded footprint will include a men's shelter, a family shelter, an inclement weather shelter for men and women, a commercial kitchen, dining rooms for each of the individual shelters, case management offices, and an area for city services, providing easy access for the men and women who are getting back on their feet. The number of shelter beds for men will double from 50 to 100, and the inclement weather shelter will become a permanent fixture. Beyond these rooms and services, people will feel seen, known, valued and loved, as dignity is restored and beauty is reflected at the Center of Hope.



Women gathered outside of The Salvation Army Emergency Shelter at 1900 Chamberlayne Ave. on March 25th for the launch of RVA Women Lifting Up HOPE, a grassroots movement inviting all women in Greater RVA to help unlock the city's \$7 million matching grant for the Center of Hope which will be built at this site.

Provided

From the start of the campaign, many have caught the vision and responded with compassion and generosity. The city of Richmond has pledged a \$7 million matching grant. The county of Henrico has announced a \$900,000 investment. \$6.6 million has been generously given by other community members, including foundations, businesses, churches, families and individuals.

The finish line is in sight! With \$1.9 million remaining to be raised, what an amazing moment for city and county residents to unite and bring this hope to Greater RVA.

Neighbors, this isn't about building a new facility or raising money. This is about the heart of who we are as a community.

This is about affirming that every life matters and ensuring everyone's basic needs are met.

This is about thousands of us giving a little, so added together our gifts become a clear, bold, undeniable statement that we care for one another in greater Richmond.

This past winter, as women toured the current shelter, they discussed how important it is to unlock the city's \$7 million match. Sharing the belief that women get things done, they agreed that raising the remaining funds is doable if each gives what she can and invites women she knows to do the same.



Scott and Jacquelin Aronson, right, hosted conversations about The Salvation Army's Center of Hope for groups of women, along with Maj. Samuel and Christine Kim, area commanders of The Salvation Army Central Virginia, staff and advisory board members, on Dec. 11, 2025. These conversations helped spark the formation and launch of RVA Women Lifting Up HOPE.

Provided

This can-do attitude inspired RVA Women Lifting Up HOPE, a faith-based, grassroots women's movement, which launched on March 25th, inviting every woman in greater Richmond to "Give \$100 and Invite 10 Women." ([bit.ly/RVAWomen](https://bit.ly/RVAWomen)) Our sincere desire is that 10,000 women will join and help swiftly secure the remaining funds for the Center of Hope by one woman inviting one woman at a time. To date, a circle of 77 women has contributed \$22,900.

As parents and as neighbors, we humbly extend the invitation to support the Center of Hope to our entire community, including women and men across all generations and seasons of life.



Jacquelin Aronson



Scott Aronson

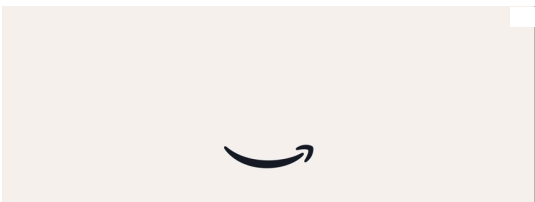
If you feel led, we invite you to pray, consider giving financially, share this vision within your circles, and/or call for a tour of the current shelter.

Our weary and struggling neighbors are counting on us to step up.

By adding each of our small steps together, greater Richmond will become a community where every person, without exception, has a safe place to lay their head at night and a pathway to safety, dignity and hope.

Scott and Jacquelin Aronson have been married for 23 years and have five children. Their family resides in the city, a mile from the shelter. Scott has served on The Salvation Army Advisory Board for 20 years and is the immediate past chair. Jacquelin served as the 2023 Richmond Christmas Mother and helped launch RVA Women Lifting Up HOPE in 2026. They can be reached at [RVAWomenLiftingUpHope@gmail.com](mailto:RVAWomenLiftingUpHope@gmail.com).

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