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NNB News : 2013 : 10 : 24 : New shelter on the horizon for local nonprofit

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October 24, 2013 [Midtown](#) [No comments](#)

NEW SHELTER ON THE HORIZON FOR LOCAL NONPROFIT

BY TRÉ LITTLEFIELD

NNB Student Reporter

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Lightning struck Tuesday outside Community Action Stops Abuse (CASA), as a storm passed over the Midtown area. Inside the nonprofit that serves survivors of domestic violence, another charge filled the air.

Linda Osmundson is the 64-year-old executive director for CASA and she is also a survivor of domestic violence. She has been at the helm of CASA for 24 years and is now taking the nonprofit into uncharted waters.

“We are in the silent part of a campaign but that does not mean I am not talking about it,” Osumundson said.

It is tough to be hush-hush about an opportunity that could be the solution for their greatest need.

“The biggest challenge we are facing today is that we are turning away approximately 1,400 people a year and that is not okay. It just isn’t,” Osmundson said.

Her estimates are based on about 700 women and an equal number of children who come to the center seeking shelter when it is already at maximum capacity. The CASA executive director said the current 30 bed shelter is simply not large enough to handle the needs of the community.

According to a press release by the Department of Children and Families, a settlement agreement with national mortgage lenders and the Attorney General’s Office for the state of Florida resulted in funding that provided a \$10 million grant for the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

The coalition is comprised of 42 nonprofits in Florida who provide services for victims of domestic violence. In a competitive bidding process CASA was awarded \$2.5 million to build a new shelter but the total cost to fully fund the project is approximately \$12 million according to the nonprofit’s estimation.

Osmundson said the award for CASA comes with strings attached. She called them tug ropes. The proposed 100 bed shelter must be built by July 15, 2015 and while the executive director is confident that they will meet their fundraising goals, it does make the campaign challenging.

Several components need to occur concurrently for the \$12 million fundraising goal to be reached. Osmundson said that typically a feasibility study would occur before the campaign started, but because of the limited amount of time the study is happening along with other important components for a successful campaign.

Stuart Berger, 51, director of development said, “The feasibility study gives development efforts an idea



Tré Littlefield | NNB
CASA employees Stuart Berger (left), Linda Osmundson (right) and Lynette Grimsley (background) gather around a piece of donated artwork.

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of how the community will back the project and where to focus fundraising efforts.”

Berger said that even in the early stages, before the official kickoff, there has been great feedback from the community.

CASA’s Peace Breakfast is the annual fundraiser for the organization and it draws approximately 600 supporters. The event will raise money for day-to-day operations, but it will also be an opportunity to share the full vision of the new shelter with the public – including all of the donors and volunteers who will be needed for the project.

Sheryl Zeitler is the coordinator for the volunteers. The 43-year-old estimates that for the month of September she has approximately 120 volunteers that are working in some capacity, and she expects these numbers to grow as development efforts ramp up for the new shelter.

“We will need a lot of volunteers to help out along the way,” Zeitler said.

The organization is also taking advantage of federal and state tax credits in their lending agreement with, what Osmundson called, new market tax credit financing. She said the savings for CASA could be as much as \$4 million over the term of a 7-year, \$10 million loan.

A bigger shelter was not always in the strategic plan for CASA. For many years the organization put its emphasis into expanding community programs.

“When the bottom fell out the market we noticed we were housing fewer people for longer periods of time,” Osmundson said. CASA’s leader said the average stay for an individual or family went from 28 to 40 days.

“The sad irony is we are also serving fewer survivors with children,” Osmundson said. The organization could find room for one more person but a family of three was not always an option.

The existing shelter serves its purpose well but privacy is very limited. Six people share a room and bunk beds are the most efficient way to accommodate the women and children seeking a safe place to live. Osmundson is excited about the design for the new shelter, which will have smaller rooms and multiple family-style kitchens.

Berger is looking forward to the effective design of the proposed shelter.

“We have the opportunity to build a green, energy efficient home,” he said.

Berger said that even though CASA is tripling capacity, the expenses per person will come down.

Osmundson said, “Our time is now. We can do this. Our community is ready to do this.”

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