

Nomination for Gene McKown for the City of Norman Human Rights Award 405-364-8915

Submitted by Colleen Bennett, October 28, 2017

918-213-9025

Gene McKown truly has a heart for the homeless and underprivileged. This has been evident for many years, but his most recent accomplishment is absolutely over the top in reaching out with compassion to touch the lives of many in need and in touching the lives of those who are in a position to give assistance. It began as an idea for homeless people to have a place to live while getting back on their feet. Few of us realize how difficult it is to pull yourself out of homelessness...just getting the money together for a security deposit on an apartment is basically impossible. Gene wondered what would happen if homeless people had a transitional place to live, a place to feel secure, a roof over their heads, and access to community services.

Being a home builder, Gene drew up plans for small cottages (400 – 800 square feet) with one to three bedrooms each. After wrangling with city hall for the land on which to build the cottages, he put up the seed money to begin the project. He also found donors and sponsors (churches, organizations, businesses, and individuals) to build the 32-cottages, kitchen and dining hall that seats 100, a playground for children, and laundry and showers for those still living on the street. Gene laughingly says that “I fleeced crowds wherever I could!” He has a tremendous gift for raising funds and he has used that gift for the benefit of others. It was a labor of love that took several years of intense effort.

The cottages were completed and opened as homes in July this year. They are not meant to be a permanent residence. They are meant to provide a loving place of hope; a place that makes a difference in the lives of people. Under the oversight of Food and Shelter, residents are given counseling to help with addiction or mental health problems if needed, and are offered job training. One wonderful success story that I know of personally is a family who had their young daughter removed from them because they could not provide a safe place for her to live. Now the family is in a cottage and back together again. The plan is for them be in the village for about one year and then have the skills and support they need to be able to find a place of their own.

These cottages are furnished with items that the residents are free to take with them when they transition to their next home. It is an amazing project that is now called McKown Village in honor of the author. And it is not finished yet. There are plans for 8 more cottages and a warehouse.

Romans 12:8 says that if your gift “is encouraging, devote yourself to encouraging others. If it is sharing, share generously. If it is leading, lead enthusiastically. If it is helping, help cheerfully.” (ISV) Gene McKown has exhibited all of these traits in abundance. I cannot think of anyone more deserving of the **City of Norman Human Rights Award** than he is.

Thank you for your consideration of this nomination.

Colleen Bennett,

National Board Certified Chemistry Teacher and Recipient of the 2005 Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching