

# THE DOVE CENTER

## Offering Healing & Hope

Written by **Sara Mullins**

For centuries, the image of a dove holding an olive branch has symbolized peace. And so is a fitting symbol for Garrett County's Dove Center, which serves as a refuge and resource for people seeking help when life hurts. They represent all age groups, both sexes and varying socio-economic levels; what unites them is pain resulting from abuse. The Center's mission is two-fold: to empower these victims of domestic violence and sexual assault by helping them develop a sense of self-worth and take control of their lives; and to raise public awareness about these issues.

According to Executive Director Heather Hanline, the Center assists more than 400 people each year with a wide spectrum of services that include a 24-hour helpline, temporary shelter, counseling, safety planning and a variety of educational resources. The Center's Hope's Chest provides professional attire for clients seeking employment.

For the past ten years, the Center has participated in the Clothesline Project, a program in which clients decorate t-shirts with words, artwork or both to tell their stories and then hang the shirts on clotheslines that are then displayed in prominent locations or at special events. The Project thus serves as a healing tool for victims of abuse, a means of educating the public, and a way to let other victims know that they are not alone.

"It's a way of airing society's dirty laundry," Hanline says. Those who developed the Project in 1990 began with 31 t-shirts displayed on the Village Green of Hyannis, in



Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Since then, this grassroots project has taken root nationally and internationally, with an estimated 500 to 600 programs displaying more than 50,000 t-shirts.

The Center participates in other activities to raise public awareness and revenue, including Safe Night Out, the Annual Wisp Chili Cook-Off, and the Western Maryland Truck Show.

Nationally, October is designated as Domestic Violence Awareness Month. As part of its public awareness campaign, the Center sponsors the Official Maryland State Banjo and Fiddle Championships and Mandolin Contest as part of Garrett County's Annual Autumn Glory Festival. The Center also participates in the Festival's Grand Feature & Fireman's Parade. Last fall, its float featured the theme, "Peace on Earth Begins at Home."

Fundraisers, a committed staff, caring volunteers and financial support from government, businesses and individuals help to keep the Center's doors open. Its shelter houses more than 125 abuse victims each year, and the numbers are growing.

"Our crisis advocates have a strong sense of mission," says Hanline. "They're very loyal, and most have been with us for more than seven years."

To allow for needed expansion, The Dove Center has launched a Capital Campaign for the purchase of property near Oakland. The new location would provide the Center with additional space to shelter clients and to expand its educational and counseling services. The Center's growth offers clients a better chance to grow "wings" allowing them to rise above their troubles and transform their lives.

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