



# LOVE IN ACTION

A publication from  
**The Society of St. Vincent de Paul Phoenix**

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serves numerous meals throughout our charity dining rooms every day?

Thrift store donations help fund our programs. Schedule your next pick-up.

## Building common ground for the helpers and the helped

**INSIDE:** SVdP's new Center for Purpose, Hope, and Mission will be the nonprofit's first-ever dedicated space for volunteerism and community partnership.

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# Message from the CEO

Shannon M. Clancy

Dear Friends,

**St. Vincent de Paul once said, “Charity is infinitely inventive.”**

How true that is! Thanks to friends like you, SVdP Phoenix continues to find new ways to meet the needs of our community and provide person-centered service that gets to the core of our neighbors’ needs.

You’ll read about some of the ways we’ve been doing that in this newsletter. From the Feeding Our Neighbors Together campaign, to SVdP’s new Center for Purpose, Hope, and Mission, to our scholarship program, we continue to meet our neighbors where they are, providing help where it’s needed most.

While we are proud and grateful for the difference we’re making together, there is still a great need in Phoenix. As a friend of St. Vincent de Paul, I know you understand all too well that the work of caring for those in need is not over.

For many of us, these weeks of spring are a season of renewal, hope, and joy. What better time to help our neighbors in need find new hope and renewal, too? Your continued partnership in this ministry will provide those in need with the security and confidence to make a better tomorrow. I hope you’ll keep walking this path of service with us and putting love into action.

Sincerely,

Shannon M. Clancy  
The Rob and Melani Walton Endowed CEO  
Society of St. Vincent de Paul

# YOLY gives back by sorting food

Her vibrant service spirit helps SVdP get food to thousands of families. Plus, she's an inspiration for anyone who didn't grow up volunteering.

BY TROY HILL

**ONE ALWAYS KNOWS** when Yoly Casarez is at St. Vincent de Paul. She's easy to identify by her welcoming and exuberant voice, and the spry spring in her step as she bounds around the nonprofit's Food Reclamation Center.

Yoly has been a consistent volunteer for more than four years, usually serving five to six hours a few days per week when she's in Phoenix. (She splits her time between her homes in Phoenix and Roswell, New Mexico.)

Yoly makes a difference in her volunteer spot of choice: Quality control. By going through all the donated food and checking that packaging isn't damaged or food isn't expired, she ensures that the food boxes she helps create are the absolute best for SVdP's community pantries, and by extension, the families they serve.

"Through her hands, she's probably checked millions of pieces of food," says Adam Young, SVdP's director of food services. "She's probably helped build hundreds of thousands of food boxes. That doesn't happen overnight, that's commitment."

For Yoly, there are a number of reasons why she gives so much of her time.

"I come here to give, but let me tell you, you guys give more to me than I give to you," she says. "I feel like the more I give, the happier I am."

She also loves the community she's found at SVdP.

"I haven't met somebody here I didn't like," she says. "Everybody's all cheery and friendly and positive. There's nothing better than that."

Surprisingly, Yoly's passion for service is a relatively new development. A little more than four years ago, a friend in Roswell invited her to volunteer at a soup kitchen. At first, she wasn't interested — she hadn't grown up volunteering — but after her friend persisted, she reluctantly agreed to help make Christmas cookies. The experience changed her perspective.

Back in Phoenix, she saw SVdP on the local news asking for volunteers. "I thought, 'Wow, I did it over there. Maybe I can help here,'" she says.

She's been a regular ever since.

**"The bottom line is you're helping another human being, and that's what life's about."**

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# SVdP

## Breaks Ground on New Community and Volunteer Center

**The 26,162-square-foot Center for Purpose, Hope, and Mission** will serve as a hub for community engagement in service, learning and advocacy.

BY ANDREA ARIZA

**GOLDEN SHOVELS DIPPED** into a dirt box as leaders from St. Vincent de Paul, Ryan Companies, and SmithGroup gathered in early February outside a former warehouse on SVdP's main campus just south of downtown Phoenix. Dressed in hard hats, executives and partners stood shoulder to shoulder, symbolically lifting and moving the dirt to mark the official start of construction of SVdP's new Center for Purpose, Hope, and Mission.

Once completed, the 26,162-square-foot center will serve as a hub for community engagement, volunteerism, advocacy efforts and mission-driven programming. It will have an airy check-in lobby, a flexible assembly space, several versatile gathering spaces, conference rooms and a large, shaded courtyard — all with community in mind.

The project is a repurposing of an existing warehouse space, made possible through the generosity of donors and supporters who believe in SVdP's work and the importance of inviting people into the mission.

As the shovel ceremony began, SVdP Rob & Melani Walton Endowed CEO Shannon Clancy reflected on the deeper purpose for the center.

**“Providing common ground for people across our community to come together to serve one another and experience the joy of service has always been an equal part of our mission,”** Shannon said.

“Our new Center for Purpose, Hope, and Mission gives that important work a formal home. It will be an inspiring place where members of our community can gather to learn, advocate, and belong — while working together to build the kind of community where everyone can thrive.”

SVdP was honored to celebrate the groundbreaking alongside the project's general contractor, Ryan Companies US Inc., who have been long-time partners in SVdP's campus development and recently helped construct new shelter space for the nonprofit.

“Ryan Companies is incredibly proud to continue our long-standing partnership with St. Vincent de Paul, an organization that provides such vital support to our community and neighbors in their time of need,” said John Strittmatter, Southwest region chairman, Ryan Companies. “Our construction team looks forward to delivering the Center for Purpose, Hope, and Mission, which will advance SVdP's critical mission and serve as a beacon of hope for many years to come.”

SmithGroup, the architects for the project, also joined in the celebration. They worked closely with SVdP to translate its ideas and vision for the center into a functional and welcoming design. SVdP looks forward to seeing that vision take shape as construction progresses and the center becomes a space for community, service, and purpose.

What started as a quiet lot and vacant building that groundbreaking morning, soon became an active construction site buzzing with excitement. SVdP and its partners expect the Center for Purpose, Hope, and Mission to be completed by 2027.

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# 25 YEARS

of the First-Generation  
Scholarship Program  
changing lives



**Learn about the scholarship program bettering life trajectories** and meet one scholar on the road to be the first doctor in his family.

BY TROY HILL AND ANDREA ARIZA

**HUNDREDS OF BRIGHT MINDS** given the chance to reach their full potential and become the next doctors, engineers, teachers and more for the community — that's the success at the forefront of the 25th anniversary year of St. Vincent de Paul's First-Generation Scholarship Program.

The program goes far beyond financial support, helping scholars overcome the unique barriers that first-generation students face. Often coming from low-income families, many scholars balance work with paying family bills and navigating the socioeconomics of being a college student.

Russvel Perez is one of the bright minds that's been given a chance to flourish thanks to the First-Generation Scholarship Program. He's on track to be the first doctor in his family.

Russvel grew up with a single working mom who always emphasized the importance of education in his future. When she passed away from COVID-19 complications, he continued to push forward in his education.



# IMPACT:

## since the First-Generation Scholarship Program launched in 2001:

**140+**  


GRADUATES WHO HAVE  
EARNED COLLEGE DEGREES  
AND COMPLETED TRADE  
SCHOOL CERTIFICATIONS

**70%**  
GRADUATION RATE  
OVER A 25-YEAR SPAN



GROWN TO SERVE   
**50 SCHOLARS**  
AND 50 MENTORS ANNUALLY

As he was transferring from community college to ASU, Russvel knew it would be increasingly difficult to work while attending university. After hearing about SVdP's First-Generation Scholarship Program, he decided to apply.

"Getting the scholarship felt life-changing," he said. "It gave me the opportunity just to be a full-time student."

Using a relationship-based model, the First-Generation Scholarship Program provides one-on-one mentoring, access to SVdP's wraparound community services, and connection to opportunities through donors and community partners.

Russvel had the privilege of having two mentors: Sue Weiner, a former Metro Tech High School Counselor who saw him through his undergraduate career; and Debbie Castaldo, Senior Vice President of the Arizona Diamondbacks and the Executive Director of the Arizona Diamondbacks Foundation, who became his mentor as Russvel neared graduation from ASU.

**"I feel like having a mentor kind of gives you a guardian angel,"**

said Russvel, who greatly relied on Debbie's mentorship as he began considering graduate school.

Debbie helped Russvel believe in his own potential, particularly helping guide him through moments of doubt.

"I would look into his eyes and say, 'You have everything it takes. You have the integrity, you have the passion, you are a great communicator, and you're a phenomenal leader,'" Debbie said. "I think little by little, over time, he could look in the mirror and see himself in those roles."

After graduation, he worked as a physical therapy technician before getting accepted into the Doctor of Physical Therapy Program at Northwestern University in Chicago.

Russvel has already completed his first semester of medical school and received his white coat. At this rate, he'll finish the three-year program in just over two years. Russvel plans on going into sports medicine and wants to work with professional athletes.

"As someone who has walked alongside these scholars year after year, it is incredibly powerful to witness their growth — not just as students, but as leaders, professionals, and changemakers," says SVdP Development Officer Andy Romley, who oversees and leads the First-Generation Scholarship Program.

For 25 years, transformational change has been made possible through the program's belief in systemic change through education. SVdP looks forward to the many more lives that will be changed through the program, and the mentors that will help shape the trajectory of scholars' academic journeys.



SCANTO  
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# 100 DAYS

## Countless Ways to *Shine by Sharing.*

**AS THE TEMPERATURES RISE**, so do the needs of vulnerable Arizonans across the state. St. Vincent de Paul's 100 Days of Summer campaign is dedicated to meeting the heightened summer needs of our most vulnerable neighbors when extreme heat threatens lives, utility bills increase, and families have increased food costs with kids out of school.

It's people like you, near or far, who Shine by Sharing and help vulnerable Arizonans get through the season.

### You can help vulnerable Arizonans this summer by:

- **DONATING:** Monetary donations help us provide water, heat relief, utility support, and so much more to those in need all summer long.
- **HOSTING A DRIVE:** Whether at your school, church, or workplace, you can host a drive to help us collect much needed food, water, and other essential items this summer.
- **VOLUNTEERING:** There are plenty of opportunities to spend your summer volunteering in our dining rooms, urban farms, water distribution stations, or from home.



**SCAN THE QR CODE** to learn more about 100 Days of Summer and how you can stay involved with St. Vincent de Paul all summer long.



**THE SOCIETY OF  
ST. VINCENT DE PAUL**

**FEED. CLOTHE. HOUSE. HEAL.**

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