

Faith helped local guy “see” the homeless

BY BRIAN MELLOTT

For the Greene County Record

For two weeks each January, Spring Hill Baptist Church in Ruckersville becomes home to 50 men who would otherwise be on the streets in sub-freezing temperatures. As a participant with People and Congregations Engaged in Ministry (PACEM), Spring Hill has hosted the men for more than a decade. While many volunteers get involved with feeding, transporting and caring for the men during their stay at Spring Hill, there is one man spearheading the effort there.

Justin Kinsey is a busy guy. He co-owns a business with many employees. He is married with two high-schoolers who are active student athletes. He has spent many years coaching sports, helping neighbors and being active in his community. During these two weeks, he puts all of that on the back burner for one simple reason.

“The guys just need me more,” he said.

PACEM works with local churches to house approximately 50 men and 20 women for four to five months during the coldest part of the year. For these men and women, it’s a shelter of last resort. The group also works with the individuals to find long-term housing and work to help guide them back into the larger society.

Kinsey has been involved with PACEM since 2015, when his oldest son, Alex, signed him up to spend the night with the guys. At first he resisted the call to serve. He did not see how he could get involved in something else with so much going on in his life. That first night, though, lit a fire under him.

Kinsey took over the Spring Hill effort from Susan D’Arcy before she left for England several years ago.

“When Justin came to me, I knew I’d found the perfect person to take

over,” she said. “He has both the heart and the ability to do this and to do it well.”

Longtime volunteer Kadlin Leake said Kinsey is a special guy.

“Justin’s energy is contagious. He creates a sense of home for these guys who don’t have one,” Leake said.

Mark Drexel, a seasonal staff member for PACEM, is eternally thankful for volunteers like Kinsey. Each year, PACEM sees more need, more mouths to feed, more sheets to wash and more transportation needs for men who work late hours.

“Without volunteers like him, none of this would happen. Justin brings a great energy and a positive attitude and he interacts so well with the men,” he said.

But Kinsey did not always feel this way about this segment of the population.

“For years I watched the world and acted upon what I wanted to act upon. I’d see these guys standing on the corner, hand over a few bucks and think, ‘Wow, great job, man!’ Now I see that, while homeless individuals may have come on hard times, they are still human. I wonder about their story, about what led them to this point. Since serving with PACEM, I realize that this world is about so much more than just me. It’s about what we can do together,” Kinsey said.

The “we” part is very important to Kinsey. Over the 14 days at Spring Hill, the men are served by 20-25 volunteers daily giving about six to seven hours each. This includes setting up and tearing down the sleeping areas, preparing and serving meals, transportation, entertainment or just showing up to lend an ear.

On top of that, volunteers provide much needed supplies for the men.

Early in 2018, Kinsey coordinated for Spring Hill to purchase 60 “sleeping bag coats” from the



PHOTOS BY BRIAN MELLOTT/FOR THE GREENE COUNTY RECORD

Above, Justin Kinsey in conversation with the men during their stay at Spring Hill Baptist Church this month. Right, Justin Kinsey eats dinner with Daniel Stewart and Reuben Ealy earlier this month as part of PACEM.



Empowerment Plan, a Detroit non-profit that employs homeless women to make heavy coats that transform into sleeping bags for the homeless. He stepped out on faith, asking Spring Hill for \$6,500 to pay for them before a price increase. The congregation came through and members covered the entire cost to make sure that these men are able to make it through these dangerous winter months.

For Kinsey, his entire involvement with PACEM has been about stepping out on faith. With his schedule, he could easily be forgiven for turning his head the other way and saying that he’s too busy.

Kinsey, though, has found the challenge enlightening.

“Becoming involved is so easy,” Kinsey said. “You’ll probably gravitate

toward your comfort zone, but whatever you do, just show up and be blessed by these guys. We can’t do it without our volunteers.”

The men he served at Spring Hill Baptist for the past two weeks definitely appreciated the effort.

Daniel Stewart said simply that Kinsey is “a nice person doing a good job.”

Reuben Ealy said that Kinsey “took us in and that the food he’s arranged is really just excellent. I’m grateful. I’m very grateful.”

Rashawn Carr echoed the thoughts of most of

the men.

“He’s been really good to us,” he said.

Kinsey said he believes volunteering for this ministry can change you. He has also found that, once a person volunteers, they keep coming back year after year.

“I thought I knew my limits,” he said. “But God has given me the energy, patience, desire and willingness to serve our homeless community in a way that I could never have imagined before. God is using me as a vehicle to give hope and new life to community members that

many view as outcasts and as more of a problem than as a human.”

Moreover, he sees a legacy of service forming in his own family.

“This ministry gives me the chance to show my boys the importance of giving back,” he said. “God expects us to inconvenience ourselves to help others. Through PACEM, my boys not only get to witness me being a faithful servant, but I get to see them do the same.”

To learn more about PACEM, visit www.pacemshelter.org.