

The Leader

 BACK

 SEND TO A FRIEND

 FEEDBACK

From real estate to real compassion

By Kevin Diakiw
Staff Reporter

Real estate marketing guru MaryAnne Connor opted out of a speaking engagement in Nevada last Monday, because she had work to do with Surrey's homeless.

Connor was scheduled to address 1,000 members of the National Home Builders Association in Las Vegas, an engagement she felt paled in importance to bringing Whalley's homeless out of the cold.

Connor, a White Rock resident, has done exceedingly well as president of the Connor Group, a firm that specialized in marketing, advertising and selling major housing developments throughout the Lower Mainland.

Often a jurist for the Georgie Awards which recognize building excellence, Connor - known to friends as Mac (her initials) - began working with the homeless in Vancouver three and a half years ago.

No stranger to community involvement, Connor is responsible for orchestrating The Everywoman's Dream Home supporting Breast Cancer Research, the Z95 Sticker Give-Away Event supporting the South Fraser Child Development Centre, and recently, The Everyman's Dream Home supporting Prostate Cancer Research.

However, her work with the homeless has always been nearest her heart.

Frequently, she saw major housing developments she was marketing in Vancouver displace the people she was helping feed. Deeply conflicted, she felt compelled to do more for people who lacked food and shelter.

Two weeks ago, she closed the doors to the Connor Group office, laying off 10 staff, so that she could work full-time at the Gentle Shepherd ministry at 13501 King George Hwy.

She approached Pastor Steen Laursen about opening the church to the homeless on weekends.

Laursen did exactly that the following Friday. Connor and friend Mark Sims started working the weekend night shift from 9 p.m. to 9 a.m.

During the week, she helps out with the ministry's food line. She says the ministry doesn't sermonize or pass judgment. The goal is to provide as much love, care and understanding as the homeless will accept.



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MaryAnne Connor has closed her real estate business to devote her time to Surrey's homeless. Up to 25 people per night on Fridays and Saturdays stay at the Gentle Shepherd ministry run by Pastor Steen Laursen (background).

The pay isn't great, she jests, but the rewards are invaluable.

She lists a dozen or so people, some of whom are now in recovery from drugs and alcohol, others who are just starting to "open up."

The ministry is accepting donations including clothes, blankets, gloves and renovation materials, including a kitchen sink and countertops.

Volunteers are also welcome.

For more information, call Pastor Steen Laursen at 604-588-7278.