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Bohannon to retire from Helping Hand of Hope

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Helping Hand of Hope Executive Director Gary Bohannon is retiring, effective Nov. 1. He took the helm of the agency in 2014. MARY ALFORD/The News-Enterprise

After five years at the helm of Helping Hand of Hope, Executive Director Gary Bohannon will retire effective Nov. 1.

Bohannon, 65, was hired in 2014 as executive director. He will turn 66 in November.

"It's just time for another chapter," he said.

During his tenure, the agency established an endowment fund with the Central Kentucky Community Foundation and paid off the remainder of the mortgage on its facility at 6796 South Wilson Road.

Under Bohannon's leadership, Helping Hand of Hope also expanded its services with new programs, including the Beds for Children program which provides beds for children who do not have a bed to sleep in, the Affordable Christmas program which empowers low-income families to provide Christmas gifts for their children and the first client-select food pantry in Hardin County.

Bohannon said the Beds for Children program came about after speaking with family resource centers.

"We were surprised to find there are a significant number of children in this community who don't have a bed to sleep in. I can't imagine not having something as simple as a bed to sleep in. ... So we have been working with the family resource center to identify those families where we provide beds for the kids," he said.

The program began at the start of this year and so far has provided more than 70 beds.

Also, during his tenure, Helping Hand of Hope partnered with United Way of Central Kentucky to offer the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program which offers free income tax preparation for low-income families and individuals. Bohannon also noted Helping Hand of Hope is a United Way funded agency.

Before working for Helping Hand of Hope, Bohannon said he didn't realize how big the need was in the community.

"A lot of families are just living from pay check to pay check and all it takes is one big medical bill or one big car expense and they are in a very difficult position," he said. Bohannon said the obstacles highlight how challenging some of the barriers are for people to be self-sufficient.

"There are just some significant barriers in their lives. It is usually more than just one thing that is getting in the way of them becoming self-sufficient," he said.

The Helping Hand of Hope mission, according to its website, is to offer "help and hope by providing compassionate service and support to meet emergency needs and provide partnerships to enable self-sustaining lifestyles."

Prior to beginning his career with Helping Hand of Hope, Bohannon worked with Hosparus for 24 years. He started out as a bereavement counselor then spent eight years as director of Hosparus of Central Kentucky. He also pastored churches in Virginia for nine years.

He has a bachelor's degree in biology from Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, and a certificate in health care management from Bellarmine University. Bohannon also has a master's in Divinity from the Southern Baptist Seminary and an MBA from Western Kentucky University. He also is an ordained minister.

Bohannon entered the ministry after battling cancer at 22. People were very kind to him at that time and helped him and his family while they went through the crisis, he said.

"People were incredibly wonderful to me. I really felt blessed because of that. And so that is when I decided to use my life to return the favor as an expression of gratitude to God," he said.

"That was kind of a watershed experience for me," he added. "Like I said, people were incredibly helpful to me during that time. ... I truly sensed God's love through the love of those folks so that is where my values come from and has been my focus since then."

Originally from Knoxville, Tennessee, Bohannon and his wife, Pat, reside in Elizabethtown. As far as retirement goes, he said he probably will take a few months off and "rewire" then look for other opportunities.

"I would really like the opportunity to teach. I've got two master degrees (I) might as well put them to good use," he said.

Helping Hand of Hope board's personnel committee has begun seeking a replacement. More information on the position can be found on the organization's Facebook page.

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