



Saying goodbye

*Jim and Lorraine Beatty
move on after 20 years
at the Washington Street Mission*



Lorraine and Jim Beatty soon will turn over administration of the mission.

On a recent Friday night, 9-year-old Candice is playing baby dolls with a couple of other children, seemingly oblivious to the basketballs being shot and push toys racing by. "We don't have a mom," Candice says. "A long time ago, e and my dad got in a fight and after four days, my mom packed up and got on a train. Dad's raising us, and he does the cooking."

Candice's oldest brother is in jail. Her 11-year-old sister and 5-year-old brother come with her every night to the Washington Street Mission.

This is where they hang out, soak up the love and doughnuts provided by Jim and Lorraine Beatty and learn about God's love.

"I've been coming since I was 7," says Candice. "Mostly I come for the Bible verses and the songs. There's more fun stuff here than at home."

Jim and Lorraine Beatty have run the Washington Street Mission since 1980. Jim is a former teacher and administrator, having taught at the University of Illinois in Champaign while doing graduate work and at Greenville College. In the '70s, he and Lorraine ran a Christian school in New Berlin.

"Someone told us Mrs. Miller, the lady who ran the mission, needed help," says Lorraine. "That was just after we had closed the school because of the energy crisis — we couldn't afford to keep it heated. We had thought Jim would get a teaching job in Springfield; instead we came to the mission."

Since 1910, when a group of prominent Christian businessmen opened the Washington Street Mission in downtown Springfield, it has offered comfort and the gospel to the poor and indigent of the city. Every morning, there are day-old doughnuts (shared from St. John's Breadline) and coffee for the hungry and racks of clothing for those in need.

At night the red brick building, a rehabbed garage at 408 N. Fourth St., is filled with 30 to 40 children who play, learn Scriptures and listen to a Bible story. On Tuesdays after school, tutors help them with their homework.

The mission moved from 111 N. Eighth St. in 1974 to make way for the Prairie Capital Convention Center.

Inside there is a chapel, coffee hall

and huge activity area. In another room are books, flashcards for multiplication tables, computers and comfortable places to do homework.

The nondenominational mission is overseen by a 15-member board of directors and individuals from various local churches. Its budget of \$250,000 is provided by private donations.

President of the board is Thomas Kay, chairman of the history department at Wheaton College. He is the grandson of Robert Thomas Brown, who started the Springfield Mission at 819 E. Washington St. after having been converted by evangelist Billy Sunday.

Prior to World War II, the mission housed up to 100 men — out-of-work miners and anyone else who needed a bed — per night. They slept in metal bunks and wore uniform cotton nightshirts. During the day, they helped with chores.

Beds and baths aren't provided today. The emphasis

is on children.

Brown's daughter, Mary Louisa Miller, ran the mission until 1980, when the Beattys took over. On March 31, the couple, both 69, will leave 20 years of work and move to North Carolina to be near their daughter.

The mission's clientele has changed since the Beattys took over.

"There aren't very many truly homeless," says Lorraine. "But we have a lot of people who come because they need something. We give away lots of clothing — a lot of people depend on us for clothing.

"We used to get adults coming at night, but now we pick the children up on the bus. The kids don't seem to have things to do, and they need something to do. Jim and I have always done kids' services. Our heart is with the children."

The Beattys' goal has been to teach children who come each night how to live according to the Bible. This includes a bit of patriotism, such as saying the Pledge of Allegiance and singing some simple songs.

"We don't teach against drugs or about sex education, but it all comes up as we teach the Bible," Lorraine says.

In summer, there are field trips to the museum, a farm, Lincoln Memorial Garden, picnics and trips to camp.

Birthdays are celebrated in grand

fashion, with cake, donated from the St. John's Breadline, and ice cream.

"Most (birthdays) don't get celebrated at home," says Lorraine. "We single the children out to make them feel special."

The Beattys — Lorraine with her endless supply of hugs and Jim with time to listen — become everyone's favorite grandparents.

"We're not sad about leaving," says Jim. "We'll really miss these kids and we feel like we're not through. But someone else has to go ahead. We feel like it's the right time."

Ken and Mary Mitchell of Springfield will take over the mission on March 15, spending a few days with the Beattys. Ken Mitchell has been president of the board for the past five years after joining the board in early 1990.

Mitchell, 47, former pastor of Fairview Baptist Church, will leave his job as chief of the Bureau of Rules and Regulations, Illinois Department of Public Aid, on March 12. Mary, 46, will say goodbye to the preschoolers she works with at Central Baptist Church.

"We feel so good it's a couple coming," says Lorraine. "You have to have a man and wife; the kids need that. So many of the children come from fractured homes."

Adds Jim: "When I think about the mission, I think about a little boy whose mother died. His little heart is so huge. He came and just wanted a big hug. Sometimes I pick him up; sometimes he just stands next to me."



The mission will continue to serve the needy after the Beattys' departure.

During service time, the Beattys demand no fighting and no bad language.

"We expect the children to be respectful to God, to each other and to us," says Jim. "Most of the time, it's never a problem. If we find kids who are continuously disrespectful, we just don't let them come back."

They look at each situation as a teaching experience.

"Last night, a little boy cursed at a little girl, then denied it," says Lorraine. "I told him he needed to sit in a chair until he could tell her he was sorry. He said nothing. Two minutes later, he told me he was sorry."

He played for a while and then came walking in the kitchen.

"Will I get a doughnut?" he asked.

"I said, 'Jeffrey, you'll get a doughnut. You said you were sorry, didn't you, and I forgave you. That's what forgiveness is all about. You're all right now'" "

She pauses. "It takes a lot of energy to handle these kids."

"Working at the mission has been the greatest chunk of my life and I guess in some ways, the highlight," says Jim.

The Beattys are quiet, unassuming and conscientious, says Thomas Kay.

"They've always had a very strong concern for fulfilling the goals and objectives of the mission. The goal has always been to minister to the people of Springfield who have physical and spiritual needs. It's a social and a spiritual ministry."

Kay used to help his aunt, Mary Louisa Miller, run the mission as a boy.

"The methods have changed and the backgrounds of the people who need the mission have changed," he says. "In the early days, it was Italian immigrant coal miners out of a job. Now it's African-American boys and girls."

Ken Mitchell's father, an Italian immigrant, took classes for citizenship at the mission.

"Oh yeah, this is life-changing," he says. "But when Mary and I first met, we were attending Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. We were both interested in reaching out to the inner city and we worked at Cabrini Green and other places in Chicago. We've always had a heart for kids and the inner city

"In a sense, this is coming back to our roots."

The Mitchells' son, Ryan, is in graduate school at the University of Tennessee studying physics. Their daughter, Shana, a sophomore at Bethel College in Minneapolis, is in social work. Shana will help at the mission this summer.

"The Beattys have really put so much energy and effort in this," says Mitchell. "Their dedication over the years is going to be hard to live up to. They've personally reached out to so many kids.

"Our hope is to involve more people from a number of churches and do less of it ourselves. Our first plan is to design a summer program to involve more kids. But it will depend on what other agencies are doing. We want to find that niche of needs not being met rather than duplicating what is being done."

Mitchell plans to continue the Tuesday-night tutoring and the nightly services.

"Since I've been working for the state, this will be a 30



T.J. Salsman/The State Journal-Register

Lorraine says she'll miss the kids. Anteana Abbott, left, and Septembra Perkins ride the bus from their east-side homes to the mission for nightly youth services.

percent reduction in pay for us, but the mission is fairly well funded. It's not like we'll have to hold a tin cup up, but we'll do a little belt-tightening.

"We're pretty excited. It's hard to hold back from making lots of plans until we spend some time there. Our plan is to spend the next 20 years there doing what we can to make it viable.

"In some ways, churches aren't equipped to reach out to the people with great needs," Mitchell continues. "The nature of the audience of the mission is different than most churches are comfortable with.

"I think the mission can be a place to facilitate that. The coffee hall where people off the street gather can be a good opportunity for church folks to come and make friendships, to have Christ-directed conversations.

"It ought to be more than just a cup of coffee."



Mary and Ken Mitchell will take over the Washington Street Mission on March 15.