

Once a hospital, Volunteers of America's building still hub of help

Shelby Street unit feted for service

BY ELVIA MALAGON • EMALAGON@COURIER-JOURNAL.COM • AUGUST 8, 2010

For Terri Beeler, the celebration Friday held by Volunteers of America to mark the 60th anniversary of its building at 1432-36 S. Shelby St. was like coming full circle.

"I've always drove past here and said, 'I was born here,' but never went in," said Beeler, who was born in 1954 in the building that at the time housed the Red Cross Hospital, the first in Kentucky to serve the African-American community.

While the hospital closed in 1976, the space has been used by the Volunteers of America for the past 30 years as a center for people recovering from substance abuse.

For the celebration, there was a display of hospital documents that were placed in a cornerstone of the building in 1950. The documents, which held such details as a staff listing of doctors, were recovered this month.

Jane Burks, the president and chief executive officer of Volunteers of America, said the history of the building is related to the group's mission — healing people. It "exemplifies what we do today," she said.

Scott Lux, who works for Volunteers of America, researched the history of the building and said he was touched by what he found.

"It's a story that just had to be told," he said.

While Lux's research was under way, Dr. Morris Weiss, who at one time was a cardiology consultant for Red Cross Hospital, happened to visit the old hospital building to ask about the history. He had done research about a medical school for African Americans in the area and thought researching the Red Cross Hospital would serve as a transition for his research.

That's when he met Lux and found a photo of the documents being put into the cornerstone.

He told Lux, "We've got to take out this stone and see what's in the box."

Fourth District Metro Council member David Tandy attended Friday's celebration and said the documents and event represent "a continuation of transforming lives."

Those at the celebration got a chance to tour the building.

Beeler, who works for Volunteers of America in a different location, said she was excited to see the hospital's second floor, which once held its maternity ward.

She said she was glad the building is still being used to help people. "The mission is the same."

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