

City & State

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2005

House will help a mission

By SAMIHA KHANNA
STAFF WRITER

DURHAM — David Martin grew up in Cary during the Great Depression, his family the poorest of the poor. He took his first job at age 11, picking blackberries and selling them by the quart. He was helping his mother, a two-time widow raising seven children.

Now financially secure, Martin, 77, understands the hardships of struggling families. That's one reason he donated a house Tuesday to the Durham Rescue Mission, an agency helping single mothers and families get back on their feet.

He had owned the small two-bedroom home at 1900 Avondale Drive for 30 years, part of a portfolio of properties he amassed as a builder and developer.

"I had in mind to put something like a Waffle House on it," Martin said. "I certainly didn't buy it to give it away."

SEE HOUSE, PAGE 6B

HOUSE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

But then Martin met the Rev. Ernie Mills and his wife, Gail, who founded the Durham Rescue Mission 30 years ago. The agency runs a shelter on Main Street. For the past two years, the Millses have renovated the abandoned Durham Inn near Interstate 85 to create the Good Samaritan Inn, a larger shelter, day-care and educational center.

Martin's little house sits right beside the newly renovated inn. It was the perfect site for a caretaker's house, where a staff member could oversee the shelter and gardens at all times of day. So the Millses asked about it, Martin said.

He wasn't convinced right away, he said.

"I wanted to make sure they were for real," Martin said. "And they are."

There was just one catch — Martin would only donate the house, worth about \$200,000, if the agency matched the dollar value in donations. From May to September, more than 1,200 people donated almost \$228,000 to

the Durham Rescue Mission. This week, Martin held up his end of the deal and turned over the house.

Next week, the Good Samaritan Inn will open its first 25 rooms to families who need help, Gail Mills said. As the rescue mission's ambitions become a reality, she said, she is grateful for the generosity of Martin and others.

"He has a tender heart," Gail Mills said of Martin.

That empathy comes from Martin's experiences as a child, selling salve door to door, peddling berries and newspapers while he and his siblings fought for food. His mother was ill and couldn't work.

"I cried myself to sleep wondering what we were going to do," Martin said. He knows that 60 years later, there are children in similar circumstances. Some of them could benefit from his contribution.

"There's an old saying, 'Don't condemn your brother until you've walked two weeks in their shoes,'" he said. "I've been in their shoes."

Staff writer Samiha Khanna
can be reached at 956-2468
or skhanna@newsobserver.com.