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The Open Door Shelter Receives Major Gifts for New Center

Norwalk, CT - The Open Door Shelter is pleased to announce it has received an important leadership gift from philanthropist Joel Smilow to support the transformation of a historic factory building at 2 Merritt Place in South Norwalk into a multipurpose center.

The project will include sixteen efficiency apartments for individuals needing supportive housing, a health center which will provide for community medical needs, and a job training program to support skilled trades education, job search tools, and GED and college entrance classes.

Jeannette Archer-Simons, Executive Director of The Open Door Shelter, stated “We are honored to receive this funding to support this project and as a result name the building the Smilow SoNo Life Center. We are deeply touched by Mr. Smilow’s belief in our efforts. His vision for building stronger communities through education and healthcare has benefited people nationwide. We hope this gift inspires others to support this transformative project as we finalize funding for this campaign.”

Mr. Smilow added that “as soon as I learned about this project, I knew it was something that needed sufficient support to insure its timely completion. I’m delighted to be the agent for change for this wonderful expansion of the work of The Open Door Shelter”.

In addition to his support of the Smilow SoNo Life Center, Mr. Smilow has been very active in a wide variety of causes, including: Smilow Cancer Hospital in the Yale-New Haven Hospital System, the Smilow Heart Institute at Bridgeport Hospital, 10 Boys & Girls Clubs of America Clubhouses in various parts of the United States, the Coachella Valley California Rescue Mission and charter school systems in New Haven, Connecticut, Washington, D.C., and Jackson, Mississippi.

The Open Door Shelter will publicly launch the capital campaign on September 20, an \$8 million effort to fund the Smilow SoNo Life Center along with additional family housing in the region. Construction on the \$6 million Center project will begin in September as well.

Corky Stewart, president of The Open Door Shelter board of directors, said “I have been overwhelmed by the incredible support the Shelter has received from our local, city and state representatives, as well as the very generous support received from individuals in our area. I offer my profound gratitude. Our village is showing its compassion, support, and understanding for the needs of those less fortunate in our midst.”

“This is an amazing opportunity for Norwalk to greatly reduce homelessness in our community while giving folks in need assistance on how to get into the workforce and have improved healthcare,” said capital campaign co-chair Jeff Erdmann.

More than 29% of the families living in the greater Norwalk area, have been identified as struggling to survive or as working poor. Once completed, the Smilow SoNo Life Center will serve individuals and families in the greater Norwalk region.

The Open Door Shelter currently provides nightly shelter for up to 95 individuals and families including children. The shelter's kitchen and pantry, known as Manna House, provides approximately 11,000 hot meals per month and provides boxed food for over 1,000 individuals and families trying to make ends meet. More than 1,500 individuals and families who come to the shelter for services are provided with help and coaching by case management staff to address short term needs and long term goals. In addition, The Open Door Shelter operates 27 units of supportive housing in multifamily houses in South Norwalk.

Ground breaking for the Smilow SoNo Life Center will take place at 2 Merritt Place on September 20 at 1:30 p.m. The launch of the capital campaign and announcement of progress to date will take place at Cesco's Trattoria on September 20 at 6:30 p.m.

To support the Smilow SoNo Life Center or other services at The Open Door Shelter, please call The Open Door Shelter at (203) 866-1057 x11 or email info@opendoorshelter.org.

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About The Open Door Shelter: The Open Door Shelter's mission is to effectively address the causes and complexities of the homeless and working poor by providing shelter, food, clothing, case management services, treatment services, transitional planning for short and long term goals, subsidized housing, education, employment, and a path towards independence and success.