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Giving Issue

Samaritan Car Care repairs vehicles so its clients can get to work

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Bruce Kintner sees the intersection of the region's housing and transportation crises all at once in his role as executive director of Samaritan Car Care Center.

Kintner described a typical situation facing some of the nonprofit's clients: A single mom is working but must have a car because her job is not on a nearby bus line. Her rent goes from \$850 to \$1,400, so she moves in with a family member in an already-crowded apartment. Then her car breaks down, with a repair bill she cannot afford.

That's where Kintner and the nonprofit he helped start come in.

Kintner has always had basic mechanic skills, but the former PNC



CORRIE SCHAFFELD | CBC

Bruce Kintner, a former PNC banker of 34 years, started

banker of 34 years never expected to run a nonprofit that fixes and maintains cars for mostly single moms who cannot afford repairs but need their cars to get to work.

Samaritan Car Care to help families – often single mothers – with the repair and maintenance of cars they need for transportation to work.

The genesis of Covington-based Samaritan Car Care came in 2007 at the church Kintner, 59, attends, Madison Avenue Christian Church in Covington. The minister there, Chinnamuthu Simon, knew of Kintner's skills and said single moms were coming to the church's community meals.

"They're in desperate straits," Kintner recalls Simon telling him. "They need oil changes. They need brakes."

That year, Kintner and David Brownfield, the owner of Walther Auto Body, began offering a quarterly maintenance program staffed by knowledgeable volunteers for people with such needs. Valvoline donated the motor oil they used.

"Every car we saw desperately needed more than an oil change," Kintner said. "We were mechanical. But none of us were mechanics."

In 2011, Kintner met Vanessa Freytag, then the director of the Women's Fund, at a social gathering and they discussed Samaritan Car Care.

"I said, 'Vanessa, I help women in a very strange way,'" Kintner recalls. "She said, 'You don't know how much transportation is a barrier for our low-income single moms.'"

The fund gave Samaritan Car Care a small grant, its first. Another major donor came along in 2015 after Kintner met with the Butler Foundation, a Northern Kentucky foundation started by developer Bill Butler, Marty Butler and their family. The Butler Foundation believed in Kintner's method, which was to offer free oil changes, but charge reduced prices for other services, with those in need paying the costs back with no interest as their income allows.

"We are a nonprofit, but we are doing our best to be a hand up," Kintner said. "We're just trying to keep their cars on the road so

they can get to work.”

By 2019, Kintner met with the Butlers themselves, who wanted him to scale up Samaritan Car Care.

But the pandemic grinded those plans to a halt until 2021. By then, Kintner’s time was being eaten up by the clinic and his full-time job. The Butlers, the R.C. Durr Foundation and the Carol Ann and Ralph V. Haile Foundation agreed to a three-year funding commitment, but only if Kintner became executive director.

Samaritan Car Care is now building its own garage on Madison Avenue, a few buildings north of the church, with an opening date likely early next year. Today, six shops give it a discounted rate. Corporex donated the land, while the Catalytic Fund of Northern Kentucky financed the shop’s construction, and Samaritan now has a \$600,000 mortgage that it will need to pay off. When finished, it will have three bays, as well as a bicycle repair shop. Jim Dennis, who owns A-N-D Auto Repair, will be director of the garage and train its mechanics.

Last year, the clinic helped 227 families. They generally perform an oil change, install an air filter and/or new wiper blades, but most cars it sees have bigger problems. The average repair costs \$1,100.

This year so far, the clinic has helped 255 families. Its goal is to repair 250 to 300 vehicles per year, a fraction of what is needed. About 80% of its clients are single moms, with 30% being minorities. But the clinic needs more funding, \$500,000 to \$600,000 per year to have an administrator, one or two mechanics.

“The problem is we’re out of money,” Kintner said. “If donors would like to help thwart an increase in the welfare rolls, transportation barriers are huge.”



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