

Building goodwill as well as projects

By: [Josh Kulla](#) in [Construction](#) December 20, 2018 1:43 pm



Volunteers, including Walsh Construction employees, serve dinner Dec. 5 at Doreen's Place – a shelter for men run by Transition Projects in Portland's Old Town Chinatown. From right, Matt Stephenson (husband of Walsh employee Shelly Stephenson), project administrator Linda Woolery, an unidentified volunteer, and superintendents Pete Bruns and Ted Friedman participate. (Courtesy of Walsh Construction)

It's simple enough for a contractor to complete a project, turn the keys over to the owner and move on. But Portland-based **Walsh Construction** takes pride not just in its professional work, but also how it impacts the community.

For instance, Walsh Construction in 2011 finished building the seven-story **Bud Clark Commons** transitional housing facility in Old Town. Company employees have since spent substantial time serving numerous people who have stayed at the facility operated by **Transition Projects**.

“It’s a mentality that you either live by or you don’t,” said Martin Houston, Walsh’s quality director. “Supporting our clients is a lifestyle as well, and you look for the opportunities to contribute to the mission because that’s ultimately what it’s all about.”

Walsh employees just served their 42nd dinner to people staying at **Doreen’s Place** – a short-term 90-bed emergency shelter for men at Bud Clark Commons.

The dinners started shortly after the building opened and now take place on the first Wednesday of every other month.

“It started with our partnership with **Home Forward**,” said Walsh Project Administrator Linda Woolery, who runs the company’s volunteer efforts at Doreen’s Place. “When we were under construction, Julie Livingston with Home Forward had been doing shelter dinners at the old shelter on Hoyt Street, so we got involved as a team. We started to pick up some of the costs of the meals and it started there. After we turned over the keys, I went to (Walsh Construction President) Matt Leeding and said, ‘We need to continue this; it’s a good cause.’”

Woolery receives from Walsh Construction a budgeted amount, which she uses to purchase food for the meals. The focus is on providing as much fresh and seasonal produce as possible. She also coordinates a team of company volunteers – typically six to seven cooks and seven to nine servers for each meal. Spots are often filled within minutes of Woolery’s email being sent out, she said, and any money left over is donated to Transition Projects.

“Usually by 10 that morning it’s full, if it hasn’t already been full,” Woolery said.



Walsh Construction President Matt Leeding, left, and project administrator Linda Woolery share a laugh Dec. 5 as they prepare hamburgers for men at Doreen's Place – a shelter in Old Town Chinatown. (Courtesy of Walsh Construction)

The latest dinner served by Walsh volunteers took place Dec. 5. And, as is the norm, once dinner was served, volunteers fanned out in the surrounding neighborhood to seek out people needing shelter but unable to secure it. And when volunteers offer these individuals boxed meals, they are often gone within minutes.

“We try to feed 30 to 50 people on the street who are not in the shelter,” Woolery said. “And they are in the immediate vicinity; you don't have to go find them.”

These efforts have left a lasting impression on both the people receiving the aid and those providing it. “The first one I did two years ago, at the end of it I was doing a debrief and all I could do was walk over to Linda and give her a great big hug for including the opportunity to be included and to give back to the community we're making a living in,” said Mike Sloop, Walsh Construction's director of health care and a senior project manager. “That night was cold and windy, a November or December, so we brought some food to not just the people inside the shelter – we went around the block and the most vivid image in my

mind was coming to a tent and saying, 'Would you like a meal?' And they wouldn't respond until someone next door said, 'It's OK. They're bringing you food.'"

The conditions outside were "palpable," Sloop said.

"I've done it twice since," he said. "And when Linda sends out the email you better be on your toes because it fills up."

Roma Peyser, director of development for Transition Projects, said her organization could not serve as many people as it does without the help of the hundreds of volunteers who spend time at Bud Clark Commons and other facilities.

"It's been over eight years that they've been doing this, and it is incredibly thoughtful and generous on the part of the company," she said. "They also have my angel, Linda Woolery. She's the one that heads up the meals and she's just built it into this wonderful opportunity for her colleagues to come and participate, and I'm just blown away by all she does to make it happen. We are just so thankful to Walsh, but also really to Linda and her leadership around meal-providing and rallying her colleagues to do the same."

Woolery most appreciates the chance to simply talk to the people she's serving.

"I think the thing that gets me the most is the people in the shelter don't get the one-on-one as much; they're out on the streets and people don't talk to them," she said. "But there they want to talk. And they'll come and ask, 'What are you fixing? Can I help?' You just start a conversation with them and that's the most meaningful part of this whole thing. That's why you're there, is to help."