

The Langley Times



Gateway of Hope opening filled with emotion

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Joe Roberts tells the crowd at the Gateway of Hope opening on Friday that 20 years ago he was living on the streets, addicted to drugs. He said that he found salvation in God and the Salvation Army. Now married and the father of two children, he is a successful businessman.

In 1989, Joe Roberts had hit rock bottom, living in the seedy alleys of the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver.

What he remembers about those days of being 'a broken heroin addict,' living on skid row, is the constant cold, the wet, the loneliness and depression.

“The only thing I liked about the rain is it hid my tears of despair,” said Roberts.

Roberts, now clean cut and wearing a nice suit, was speaking to the crowd who gathered inside the Salvation Army’s Gateway of Hope homeless shelter for the official opening of the facility on Friday. More than 100 people came out for the ribbon cutting ceremony. Another 500 toured the Langley Bypass facility on Saturday, during a public open house.

The Gateway of Hope is expected to open to the homeless later this week.

“We all face adversity where we are down so low we wanted to give up, but I had nothing to give up. It was through the light of God and the Salvation Army where I was shown grace. They didn’t judge me. They helped me into detox, then into treatment.”

Roberts, the self-professed skid row CEO, went to college, and is now a successful, happily-married father of two.

“My first positive step in life was through the Salvation Army.”

Langley City Mayor Peter Fassbender choked back tears when he spoke about the opening.

“I make no apologies for having emotions. This community is all about heart and this facility is all about heart,” he said. “The opening today represents a community that cares. The word ‘gateway’ is important because this will be a gateway to help. Today is the beginning of a new journey,” said Fassbender.

Everyone who spoke at the ceremony thanked Gary Johnson for his vision and devotion to bringing the facility to Langley.

“Gary’s persistence and undying belief this could happen, we have to thank Gary for that and let’s give him a round of applause,” said Langley MLA Mary Polak.

Township Mayor Rick Green thanked former mayor Kurt Alberts for his support for this project, commenting that his daughter works in the Downtown Eastside so he has great appreciation for the important work being done here.

South Surrey-White Rock-Cloverdale MP Russ Hiebert, who represented MP Mark Warawa, said he couldn’t believe the support such a facility was receiving.

“I cross the country attending events like this. Usually a few people attend, not a packed house,” Hiebert said.

The federal government contributed \$1.4 million to the facility, while the province contributed \$3.1 million plus \$1.2 million annually in operational funding.

Salvation Army Colonel Don Copple commented about the investment this community has made into the \$13.7 million facility.

“I wish I could clone all of you and send you across the country,” he said. “Thank you for believing in the people who will come here. Langley is precedent-setting. All the social services have come together, so there is no overlap of services. That speaks to the high level of commitment here.”

City bylaw enforcement officers, outreach workers and many other service providers who have regular contact with Langley’s homeless have been telling everyone they can about the shelter and its location.