

## The Value of Every Human Being

An Interview with Dallas Gatlin, Ed.D.,  
Executive Director, Carriage Town Ministries

**EDITORS' NOTE** Dr. Dallas Gatlin retired from General Motors in 2009 and assumed his current role at Carriage Town Ministries. He served in many different roles for GM including Plant Manager. He is a graduate of Kalamazoo College, earned a master's degree in business administration from Central Michigan University, and earned his doctor of education (Ed.D.) degree from Olivet Nazarene University in May of 2014.



Dallas Gatlin

**ORGANIZATION BRIEF** Carriage Town Ministries ([carriagetown.org](http://carriagetown.org)) began in 1950 as the Flint Rescue Mission. Over the course of 67 years, it has been supported by faithful churches and individuals who recognize the calling of Matthew 25 to minister to those who are hungry and homeless. Today, it is a campus of learning and restoration in Flint's historic Carriage Town neighborhood. Visitors and residents find a haven of safety and acceptance, learning and responsibility, structure and productivity. Carriage Town Ministries also runs a free health clinic, a summer school for school age children that focuses on literacy and life skills to prevent future homelessness, and a job-skills learning center for men and women. It also has three community gardens that produce food for the mission and a bakery, Blueline Donuts, that provides donuts to local coffee shops and teaches baking skills to residents-in-training.

### What is the history and heritage of Carriage Town Ministries and how has the organization evolved?

For many years, Carriage Town was what some might call a traditional gospel rescue mission – a place for folks to come to chapel and dinner, get a shower, some clean clothes, and find a safe place to sleep at night. Residents ate a good breakfast and then left for the day. Those who came back that night slept in a different bed with fresh sheets, but no sense of home.

It seemed like the model of having people stay each night as if it were a unique experience wasn't a productive one. People needed a sense of home. Today, everything we do is grounded in a belief that everyone we meet is God's idea,

God's special project worthy of dignity and respect. It is our privilege to provide a clean, safe and encouraging place where desperate people can land, clear their heads and feel safe. Our first order of business every day is to remind ourselves of the extraordinary value of every human being and provide a clean, safe, encouraging environment for desperate men, women and children who are struggling with all the issues related to extreme poverty.

The second thing we try to do well is provide a mentored route to self-sufficiency to help folks extricate themselves from the streets in a sustainable way.

### How critical are partners, such as the Hagerman Foundation, in supporting your mission?

We are privately funded and we can't do what we do without people like the Hagermans, who made it possible for us to create and sustain a free health-screening clinic. It's operated exclusively by volunteer health professionals in cooperation with other local clinics. The mission of the clinic is to help uninsured individuals who have neglected their healthcare address acute and chronic health needs, get signed up for insurance, and then get connected with other local medical providers for follow-up and ongoing care.



Carriage Town Ministries main building

### With so much need, is it difficult to remain positive about meeting the need and changing lives?

What keeps us going is the simple notion that each morning when we wake up, we meet people who need help – people who

have tough challenges. Tough challenges call for creative leaders and teams committed to continuous improvement. Each year provides 365 opportunities to get a little better at what we do.

It is easy to get discouraged, but we don't want to stay in that state for more than a few minutes. There is enough positive impact to keep one pumped about doing something that is helpful, creative and constructive. Human beings were built to do that – we are a complicated organism, and we know how to be both lazy and productive, but we always feel better after we've been productive.

We can also accomplish much more when we're working together with others who might know more than we do. We don't get to live forever, and one can get really depressed about this if they want to. However, in Christ, I believe that life goes on after we leave here and while we're here, He's truly interested in what we're doing. I want to make Him smile. I believe He smiles when we love our neighbors. This gives me the grounding and hope I need to keep going.

One of the special things we have done here is connect with people who had been homeless but had extricated themselves from the streets and sustained this over a number of years. There is a ton of research about what causes homelessness, but little about who have made it out and how they did it. When we asked people the question, "How did you do that?" the themes that came up over and over were that they secured a dependable income stream, they reconstructed a social support structure, and they found a reason to hope and to believe that this was all worth doing, even when the challenges sometimes seemed overwhelming.

The same formula is true for a community or a city, no matter how big it is. Communities need to have dependable income streams and social support networks. Communities need a reason to hope.

Perhaps we don't think about God enough and so perhaps we have a wrong impression of who He is. I believe He wants us to succeed. I believe He wants each of us to help others succeed. This is what drives me each morning to get up and get after it. ●