



From left: Christa Noland, Greg Abel and Libby Malone from Grande Communications, and Frank Fernandez

## INVESTOR SPOTLIGHT: Grande Communications

Children LOVE playgrounds! As a part of the Glen Oaks Corner Capital Campaign in which Green Doors built 6 five star green residences for single parent families affected by a disability and exiting homelessness, Grande Communications' employees gave the 12 children at Glen Oaks Corner a playground. The playground is situated in a central location where all the Glen Oaks Corner children have ready access to play. The playground is key to a healthy community for the families because children and parents can begin to build their support system with their new neighbors, children have a safe place to play with one another, and parents can easily and conveniently supervise their children from nearby picnic areas and backdoor porches. Several parents at Glen Oaks Corner have difficulty walking and driving so ready access to play for their children is vital to the community.

Before Grande ever began building its deep-fiber broadband network in Central Texas, it built an internal culture of volunteerism and community service. The **Passion and Commitment Investment Club** at Grande Communications is an employee-giving program, matched by the corporation, which funds non-profit organizations in communities Grande serves.

In 2000, before Grande had paying customers, non-profit organizations became recipients of the Club's generosity. To date, over \$1,000,000 have been granted in Austin, Corpus Christi, northwest suburban Dallas, Midland, Odessa, San Antonio, San Marcos, and Waco. In 2009, Green Doors was a recipient of Grande Communications' generosity. On behalf of the 18 residents we serve at Glen Oaks Corner, we wish to share with all the employees at Grande Communications our sincere thanks!

### CONTACT US

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### FEEDBACK

To be added or removed from our mailing list, or to update your contact information, please contact Cynthia at 512.469.9130 or [cwilliams@greendoors.org](mailto:cwilliams@greendoors.org)



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# THE COMMUNITY VOICE

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## Footing the Bill: The High Cost of Homelessness

If you are like me, you may be a bit skeptical of people holding signs from Austin's street corners. Our fear comes from our discomfort, or possibly our guilt. On November 19th, Green Doors commemorated National Homeless Awareness Week by taking signs with a message to the streets. Nearly 40 volunteers from all walks of life, including Austin City Council Members Randi Shade and Sheryl Cole and their offices, joined Green Doors in holding up advocacy signs that read: "\$3,700: Taxpayer Cost of one ER visit for a person who is homeless. You can prevent this. Tune in to learn more at [greendoors.org](http://greendoors.org)." Responses varied. Some people stopped to smile, gave a thumb's up, or honked in support. Some people locked their doors and rolled up their windows as they passed. Others asked questions and then circled back around to ask more questions to learn more while lights were red. One thing was clear – many people read the signs. The purpose of our effort was to drive as many people as possible to view Green Doors' second web-video in its Tex S. Taxpayer Series at [greendoors.org](http://greendoors.org).

The video sheds a powerful light on the high taxpayer costs associated with the use of emergency rooms by people struggling with homelessness. Contrary to popular thought, people who struggle with homelessness do not use the emergency room as a temporary shelter through the cold. In fact, people who are homeless are often made sicker by the fact that they are not sheltered. The average person struggling with homelessness visits the ER 5 times per year, while some chronically ill people who are homeless visit monthly or even weekly. Studies show that Green Doors' strategy to provide affordable, supportive housing to people struggling with homelessness or at risk of homelessness is the most effective way to encourage and assist the highest users of emergency departments to access primary care physicians and holistic support for concurrent psychosocial problems often faced by people struggling with homelessness. The simple fact remains, once a person feels secure in their own home, studies indicate they are 77% less likely to use the emergency department for their medical needs.

The video depicts the average Austin couple, driving away from their new home and as they leave, they pass by the man struggling with homelessness they often pass when they leave their home. The couple notices the man hasn't been around in a week or so and ask what has happened. The man struggling with homelessness indicates that he had the flu and that he has

been in the hospital for four days while he recovered. The couple sympathetically inquires, "Who paid for that?" The man shrugs, unknowingly, and gestures towards the couple. The video's intent is to overtly suggest that the people footing the preventable medical and ER bills for people struggling with homelessness are Tex S. Taxpayers – you, me, all of us.

With coverage in a combination of traditional and emerging formats, Green Doors effectively used the media to educate the public, promote awareness, reach the Austin community, and expose the high social, economic, and emotional costs of homelessness. Green Doors produced and publically launched the second web-video in its Tex S. Taxpayer Series, a homelessness educational campaign. The 50 second public service announcement aired on 4 public access channels, including Channel Austin and the City of Austin Public Access channel. The video was made available through [greendoors.org](http://greendoors.org), placed right on the home page, and circulated through Facebook. Fox 7 News came to City Hall to interview Frank Fernandez, Executive Director for Green Doors, as he advocated along side of Austin City Council Member Randi Shade. The Daily Texan conducted an extensive interview with Frank Fernandez and the Austin American Statesman sent photographers to capture the day's events. According to our web analysis, since the launch of the video Friday, November 19, [greendoors.org](http://greendoors.org) has seen an additional 740 hits. Our hope is get at least 3200 hits by April. Help us reach this goal by logging on to [greendoors.org](http://greendoors.org).

Green Doors Volunteers holding signs outside of Whole Foods Downtown



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## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### A Day in the Life: Walking in Somebody Else's Shoes

I had a hard time holding my head up. Cold rain pounded down on me all day and my feet were shriveled and blistered. My clothes and shoes didn't fit. I hadn't eaten or slept in 24 hours. I was miserable – and starting to think it was crazy that I volunteered for this experience.

Last September, four Green Doors' co-workers and I signed up to participate in a poverty simulation weekend in Waco. The simulation program attempts to give participants experiential access to what it means to be poor, to be homeless. They didn't feed us, gave us ill-fitting clothes, had us dig through dumpsters for food, sleep outside, and ask people on the street for money. The experience took us all way out of our comfort zones.

While a weekend homeless can only give you a glimpse into the life of someone struggling with homelessness, it still was enlightening. For me, two things stood out. First, the physical and psychological stress that homelessness imposes on you is crushing. After just one day of being hungry and walking around in freezing rain with people walking by me and looking at me strangely, I felt defeated. I had a hard time making basic decisions and didn't want to look people in the eye. I cannot fathom what it must be like for someone who experiences this for months, if not years.

Second, the experience forces you to confront the question – what would I do if I found myself homeless? Many of us may think - I would never let myself get there. But that is what most people who end up homeless also think. They did not intend or consciously choose to be homeless. Circumstances – some within one's control, some not – often dictate a person's path to homelessness. And, unfortunately, the path out of homelessness also is often blocked by these same circumstances – whether it is poverty, mental and physical health challenges, or an accumulation of bad life choices.

Recognizing the role of circumstances does not absolve us of personal responsibility for our actions. It helps explain, not excuse, helps us understand, not rationalize, our actions. We at Green Doors are committed to providing individuals and families with the tools needed to take responsibility for themselves to overcome the circumstances that have led them to homelessness. People should not be destined to live a life where they cannot hold their heads up.



*From left: Andrea Garcia, Frank Fernandez, Christa Noland, and Greg Esparza on the streets in Waco during the poverty simulation weekend*

## GREEN DOORS VISION & MISSION

**Our Vision:** One day, all Central Texas families and individuals will have the opportunity to live in affordable, safe, quality housing.

**Our Mission:** Green Doors' mission is to prevent and help end homelessness and poverty housing for those working to achieve independent living in Central Texas.

**Green Doors accomplishes this by:** creating affordable, safe, quality housing; providing residents with access to supportive services; and educating about, and advocating for, individuals and families struggling with homelessness and at-risk for homelessness.

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## PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: Green Doors Food Pantry

### A Tiny Space with a Huge, Whole Heart!

Opened in 2004, the Green Doors Food Pantry has expanded beyond recognition. Five years ago, the Food Pantry served 7 military veterans exiting homelessness. At the close of December 2009, in one year, the program was visited 2,373 times and impacted 3,693 Central Texans struggling with, or at risk of, homelessness.

### Who walks through the pantry between 2pm and 3pm?

- Last Thursday, between 2 and 3pm we saw, Eric, Charles, Tom, Elaine, among 14 other Green Doors' residents;
- Each one served our country – in Germany, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq respectively;
- Each one walked into a Green Doors home with little or nothing to their name;
- Each one had the feeling of invisibility until they gained safe housing and weekly access to food;
- Each one defined survival differently; and
- Each one only takes from the pantry what he or she needs, doing so in order that others, also in need, may have enough.

### From 3pm to 6pm, the food pantry opens its doors to people who are not Green Doors residents but who struggle with, or are at risk of, homelessness. For example:

- **James**, a husband and father of two young boys, when asked about his income answers \$0. He was laid off in May 2009 and still has been unable to find work in the Austin area. His family was lucky enough to find short-term housing, but he's scared for his family, scared of landing on the streets.
- **Helena**, a teenage mom abandoned by her family, lives with her boyfriend and young daughter. She found safety in government housing, earning her GED, loving her daughter, and looking toward the future.
- **Julia**, a visually impaired, single mom, works two jobs to support her three children. She believes strongly that – you always feed your children first.
- **Edward** struggles with chronic mental illness, is homeless and barely functional. And still, he only takes the food he knows he will eat.

### Who works at the Food Pantry?

On Thursday mornings, Green Doors staff members, Andrea Garcia and Felix Suarez, and long-term Green Doors volunteers Mike and Hilda Mikan, can be found at the Capitol Area Food Bank picking up the food needed to stock the shelves at the Green Doors Food Pantry. They stuff vehicles with cartons of canned foods, non-perishables, fresh produce and meat. Some days, the line is already 15 people deep when the first delivery of food arrives at around 11am. By the time 2pm rolls around, when the pantry opens, the intensely small, 400-square-foot pantry is ready for its first customers. From 2pm to 6pm, backs sore from lifting, the four never stop moving their bodies as they restock shelves and serve the long line of people (measuring upwards of 80 people at a time) waiting for food. And at the end of the day, when they lay down, backs melting into their beds, they are left with conflicting thoughts and emotions: the feeling of pride in serving someone less fortunate but also frustration at the knowledge that so many of our neighbors struggle with homelessness and poverty.



### The Food Pantry

Green Doors Food Pantry is dedicated to the proposition that no one – whether a child or adult, disabled or not, man or woman – should be allowed to live without access to wholesome food. Though the space has been no bigger than the size of a large closet, it provided 3,693 people with food last year alone. The Green Doors food pantry is a tiny space, but it's fueled with a huge, whole heart.

### Volunteer at the Food Pantry

If you are free on Thursdays, anytime between 9am and 6pm, volunteer at the Food Pantry by calling or e-mailing Greg Esparza at 512-469-9130 or [gesparza@greendoors.org](mailto:gesparza@greendoors.org).

## MAKE OUR WISHLIST COME TRUE

Green Doors accepts both financial and material contributions that directly benefit its residents. If you wish to contribute items listed below, please contact us for delivery arrangements.

Our Food Pantry is always in need of:

- Canned meats (i.e. tuna, chicken)
- Jellies (i.e. grape jelly)
- Oil
- Salt and Pepper or Sugar and Sweetener

Our Clothes Closet is always in need of:

- New Men's and Women's socks
- New Men's underwear or undershirts
- Jackets
- XXL or XXXL shirts

Our Houses are always in need of:

- USB Sticks
- Sets of Dishes or Pots and Pans
- Movies on DVD or Games (i.e. Chess Board)

To make a donation to Green Doors programs, contact Greg Esparza at 469-9130 or [gesparza@greendoors.org](mailto:gesparza@greendoors.org).

Financial donations can be made via our website at [www.greendoors.org](http://www.greendoors.org) or mailed to:

PO Box 685065, Austin, TX 78768