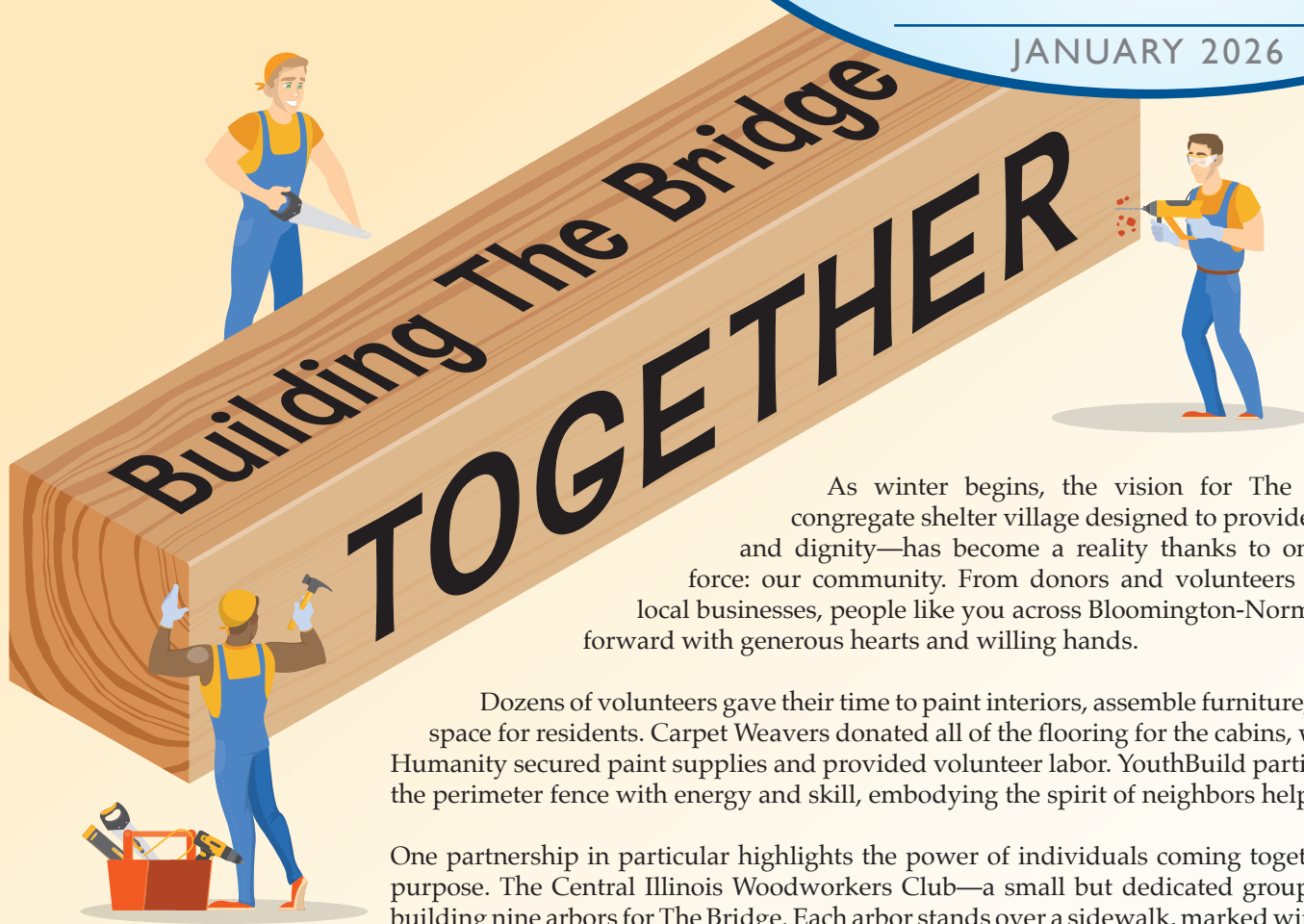


JANUARY 2026



As winter begins, the vision for The Bridge—a non-congregate shelter village designed to provide safety, warmth, and dignity—has become a reality thanks to one extraordinary force: our community. From donors and volunteers to students and local businesses, people like you across Bloomington-Normal have stepped forward with generous hearts and willing hands.

Dozens of volunteers gave their time to paint interiors, assemble furniture, and prepare the space for residents. Carpet Weavers donated all of the flooring for the cabins, while Habitat for Humanity secured paint supplies and provided volunteer labor. YouthBuild participants installed the perimeter fence with energy and skill, embodying the spirit of neighbors helping neighbors.

One partnership in particular highlights the power of individuals coming together for a shared purpose. The Central Illinois Woodworkers Club—a small but dedicated group—committed to building nine arbors for The Bridge. Each arbor stands over a sidewalk, marked with one of the nine

Fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These signs will not only help residents navigate the village but also serve as daily reminders of the caring values surrounding them.

Jim Evens, Co-President of the Woodworkers Club, shared that the idea to get involved began during a meeting where Home Sweet Home Ministries' CEO, Matt Burgess, presented The Bridge project.

"Hearing Matt speak really inspired us," Jim says. "I was impressed with the detailed planning. This meeting encouraged us to get involved as we heard about the needs of our unhoused neighbors and how The Bridge will help."

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## MISSION STATEMENT

**Home Sweet Home Ministries demonstrates Christ's love through innovative approaches that instill hope, restore lives, and build community.**



## A Message from Matt

*"He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love."*

– Ephesians 4:16

When we started out to develop The Bridge, I emphasized that the crisis of unsheltered homelessness is a shared community concern and that any effort to address it would require a shared community response. And while Home Sweet Home Ministries may have taken the lead in developing a response to the crisis, we have truly been joined by organizations, churches, and individuals from across our community in bringing The Bridge from concept to completion. This edition of our newsletter highlights some of the ways we're collaborating to serve our neighbors. We're forging new partnerships and deepening existing collaborations as we help our neighbors move from unsheltered to permanently housed.

I pray that you are encouraged as you read through the entirety of this newsletter and see how the "whole body" of our community is coming together to demonstrate Christ's love through the work of Home Sweet Home Ministries.

May God bless you all for your faithful support of our ministry.

*Matt Burgess*

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Chief Executive  
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# Get Inspired!



Make 2026 your year to give back. Home Sweet Home has plenty of opportunities for you to help serve:

**Advocate:** Share our story with others. Invite us to speak to your group, club, or friends. Help us spread the message of hope in our community.

**Participate:** Volunteer your time and talents. There are endless ways to help with the work we do. Share your experiences of hope with others.

**Donate:** Invest your financial resources in the restoration of lives. Become a Partner in Hope through monthly donations.

To learn more, please visit [hshministries.org](http://hshministries.org) for more details. You can also contact us at 309-828-7356 or at [hshinfo@hshministries.org](mailto:hshinfo@hshministries.org). HSHM looks forward to partnering with you to restore lives this year!



## Join Us!

Night In A Car, February 6th  
Sign up or Donate Now: [nightinacar.org](http://nightinacar.org)

# Fuel Change with Night In A Car

Home Sweet Home Ministries' 10th annual Night In A Car is right around the corner on Friday, February 6. Participants are eagerly gathering up hats, gloves, and blankets to brave a cold night in their cars. While only lasting one night, Night In A Car provides a real glimpse into the realities of facing homelessness through Bloomington's harsh winters.



Participants can choose to Drive-In to Trinity Lutheran Church in Bloomington and stay all night, Drive-Through and join us for activities and leave when needed or set Cruise Control and participate at your own speed online from home.

This unique event is something all ages can experience. It serves as a great educational opportunity to learn more about homelessness and the work HSHM does to help those in need. It's going to be another powerful night filled with fun games, client testimonies, and other educational activities.



Home Sweet Home encourages you to join the ride. Team goals can start at \$250, but we challenge you to raise \$1,000 per team. Together we can achieve our goal of raising \$175,000 to support those in need. Because of you, families experiencing homelessness can discover refuge and renewal at Home Sweet Home. It's such a blessing to have you as part of this caring community. We couldn't do it without you.

There is still time to help! Please consider signing-up or donating today by visiting [nightinacar.org](http://nightinacar.org). If you have any questions, please reach out to our Night In A Car Coordinator, Leslie Bunge, at 309-319-2820 or [lbunge@hshministries.org](mailto:lbunge@hshministries.org). Thank You!

## Match Your Gifts

Does your employer offer matching gifts? Many employers do. Your gift can double in value with an employer match. Some employers that provide matching gifts are: Benevity Causes, Caterpillar, Constellation, JP Morgan Chase Foundation, State Farm, and Thrivent Financial. Employer matching gift programs are often available for spouses and some retirees, too. Please check with your employer to see if your donation qualifies. This wonderful opportunity allows you to double your contribution to Home Sweet Home Ministries and make an even larger impact in our community. If you have any questions, please contact our Director of Development, Leslie Bunge, at 309-319-2820.

## Pray With Us

As Home Sweet Home embraces the new year, we kindly ask your help in praying for:

- All those involved in making The Bridge possible.
- Our staff and community partners at The Bridge as they inspire new hope in others.
- Individuals, families, businesses, and other organizations participating in Night In A Car.
- Individuals, families, and veterans searching for new beginnings.
- Volunteers and staff who devote their time to helping others.

Your prayers for our ministry are sincerely appreciated. Thank you for lifting HSHM up in spirit.

Like us on Facebook  
Home Sweet Home Ministries

Like Us!



# Building The Bridge Together

*continued from page 1*

However, the project quickly proved bigger than the club could complete alone. The arbors required heavy 6x6 posts and 18 hand-dug holes filled with cement. That's when Bloomington Career Academy instructor Jeff Frantz and his construction students stepped in to help dig and set the posts—an effort that made the entire project possible.

“This is a service project that is very different from anything else that the club has worked on previously,” Jim reflects. “The truth is that the completion of the arbors is coming together because of the help of so many others.”

For Jim and the Woodworkers, the project carries deep meaning. “We are excited that our club will be helping a group of people society had given up on,” he shares. “It is exciting to see so many groups in the community helping. Home Sweet Home is a wonderful organization.”

This winter, The Bridge stands not only as a shelter, but as a testament to what a community can accomplish—together.



# Current Needs

Because of your compassion, Home Sweet Home can provide comfort to individuals and families seeking a fresh start. Please kindly consider collecting the following items for us:

- Bottled Water
- Coffee
- Canned Fruit
- Canned Soups
- Paper Towels
- Toilet Paper
- Disposable Water Cups
- Disposable Razors
- Deodorant for Men and Women

Donations can be made Monday through Friday from 9 am to 4 pm at the Bread For Life Food Co-op at 301 East Oakland Avenue in Bloomington. Be sure to check out [hshministries.org](http://hshministries.org) and click on the “Ways to Give” tab for our updated needs and Amazon Wish Lists. Thank you so much for providing hope to your neighbors in need.

# Spreading Some Grateful Cheer

Home Sweet Home would like to thank all of you for your generosity this past holiday season. Your donations, time, and prayers blessed several men, women, and children in our community. With the support of our partners at Midwest Food Bank, Thrivent Financial, and Hy-Vee, over 1,500 families received complete meal boxes and frozen turkeys through Give Thanks.

Additionally, volunteers and staff graciously prepared and served over 600 meals on Thanksgiving Day. Second Presbyterian Church creatively turned HSHM into a Christmas wonderland once again. Many other organizations and businesses also generously hosted food drives.

Because of you, many of our residents experienced the true spirit of the holidays. With all our heart, we thank you. Home Sweet Home appreciates all you do to ensure the wellbeing of your fellow community members. May God richly bless you and your families in this new year.

