

# Initiative to help foster children

By Elise Solloway, Area Correspondent

Nov 17, 2017

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The Legacy of Care campaign is to help alleviate this problem, one home at a time in Oklahoma, by building large single-family homes and club house/activity centers across the state.

Local businessman Bob Jones was born in Oklahoma in the summer of 1948. By the time Jones was two-years-old, both parents had died, leaving him and his older sibling as orphans sent to two different orphanages. Eventually both children were adopted, but by two different families.

Jones was six when he was adopted by Cecil and Mildred Jones. At that time, neither he nor his adoptive parents knew he had a sibling, or where that sibling lived.

It wasn't until Bob was 18 years old that he found out he had a sister. He and his sister eventually met, but were never able to bond like most siblings.

“Currently in Oklahoma only 65 percent of sibling sets of three or more are able to stay together in foster care,” said Raquel Razien, family specialist at the Woodward Circle of Care office. “Lack of space and other resources prevent otherwise willing foster parents from accepting more than one or two children at a time.”

Oklahoma United Methodist Circle of Care is a statewide foster care agency contracted by the Department of Human Services to increase the number of foster children receiving foster care in a home setting.

“The agency has embarked upon a campaign to build eight large, single-family foster homes across the state for this purpose,” said Sarah Steffes, director of development for Circle of Care.

Two United Methodist churches in western Oklahoma have already stepped forward to partner with Circle of Care in the initiative. These churches are in Alva and Woodward.

“When it was announced at Woodward First United Methodist Church that the Oklahoma United Methodist Circle of Care wanted to do something about keeping more siblings together in foster care, Bob Jones felt compelled to get involved,” Steffes said. “Once each home is built, the church will wrap its Christian love around the foster family that will reside there, providing a strong support network for sustainable fostering,” says Don Baston, CEO/President of Circle of Care.

A \$5 million capital campaign is currently underway to build eight large foster homes in various communities in Oklahoma. Each site will consist of two large single-family homes for three to six foster siblings, and a clubhouse/activity center.

Steffes explained that \$3.4 million of the money raised will be used to build the homes and clubhouse/activity centers. The remaining \$1.6 million will be put into an endowment to help cover the long-term costs for the homes.

By having no housing expenses and by receiving money from DHS for each foster child, it is possible for a foster parent to stay home and care for foster siblings. It is also possible for foster parents to work and be able to afford childcare for multiple foster siblings in their care.

“I think it’s exciting, that as a church, we are reaching out and helping to solve the problem in the community of foster children needing homes,” said Rev. Shannon Davis, pastor of First United Methodist Church in Woodward. The Woodward church has donated land for two foster homes and clubhouse/activity center to be built on their grounds south of Downs Avenue.

Bob Jones grew up on a farm near Hollis, Oklahoma, with his adopted parents. After high school he went to butchering school and served in the United States Air Force.

After completing his military service, Jones began a 43-year career as a butcher at United Supermarket. While there he developed seasonings for steaks, burgers, chicken, and pork. Soon customers wanted to buy his blend of seasonings for their meats so Jones and his wife Ronda began producing seasonings.

Bob’s Gourmet Spice Company started in 2013. The first two seasonings Bob’s Gourmet Spice and Hunter’s Cajun Seasoning. In November, four additional seasoning blends became available at both United Supermarket and Homeland Grocery.

Bob Jones both knows and appreciates how lucky he was to have been adopted by Cecil and Mildred Jones. “They reared me to be an honorable and God-fearing man. They loved me beyond measure,” said Jones.

The Legacy of Care goal for the multi-sibling foster homes in Woodward is to raise \$400,000 to be matched with \$400,000 from Circle of Care, by May or June of 2018. The money will be used to construct the three buildings on the Woodward site.

“Quality foster care is imperative, and it is essential to keep brothers and sisters together,” Bob Jones said.

Jones has made a \$1,000 commitment to this campaign. He is challenging other local businesses and community members to match his \$1,000 gift to make this vision a reality.

For more information you may visit [legacy.circleofcare.org](http://legacy.circleofcare.org) or to make a donation, you may contact Sarah Steffes at [sarah.steffes@circleofcare.org](mailto:sarah.steffes@circleofcare.org). Steffes may also be reached at (405) 215-1400.

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