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## Mover Dudes celebrating 20th anniversary with '20 for 20' initiative

By BRIAN BREHM The Winchester Star

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In celebration of its 20th year of service, [Mover Dudes](#) of Winchester has launched a "20 for 20" campaign to raise \$20,000 for [The Laurel Center](#)'s new mission to help victims of human trafficking.

Company owner Jon Eye said he understands that his business would never have succeeded without community support, so he has made giving back to the community a top priority since Day One.

"That's a lot of what we do," Eye said about Mover Dudes's ongoing support of local nonprofits including the [Winchester Area Temporary Transitional Shelter](#) (WATTS), the [Congregational Community Action Project](#) (CCAP), [Family Promise Winchester Area](#), [Froggy's Closet](#), [Access Independence](#), [Blue Ridge Habitat for Humanity](#) and [Valleyhaven Furniture Bank](#). "We really want to make a difference in the community."

Eye and his chief operating officer, Walker Tyler, said Mover Dudes has a hard time saying no when a local human services organization needs help with things like delivering furniture, hosting "fill the truck" collections, installing ramps at the homes of people with mobility issues and providing donated home furnishings to area residents in need. From November through March, Mover Dudes also transports and sets up the cots used by WATTS when the nonprofit provides cold-weather shelter at various facilities that change every Saturday.

"I'm pretty sure I've got, like, 10 caseworkers who have me on their speed dial whenever they need stuff," Tyler said. "We're really doing stuff nonstop."

The Laurel Center in Winchester is the region's only agency that provides emergency shelter and ongoing support to survivors of domestic and sexual violence. When asked why it was chosen as the "20 for 20" beneficiary, Eye said it's because the center was one of the first nonprofits he assisted after Mover Dudes opened its doors in 2006. The company also helped the nonprofit in January 2018 when it moved from its former shelter on South Braddock Street to its current three-story facility on North Cameron Street.

"We were in that space for 30 years," Laurel Center Executive Director Faith Power said about her organization's former 2,000-square-foot shelter. "There was a ton of things."

A big reason why Mover Dudes is able to provide so much assistance to local organizations is because of its customers.

"We've moved over 20,000 people in our 20 years," Eye said.

Some customers also donate their unwanted furnishings to Mover Dudes so they can be used for things such as the WATTS Transitional House, a small home in Winchester where up to three homeless WATTS clients with jobs can pay reduced rent while reestablishing or building their credit and saving up enough money to buy a car and move into traditional housing. When the Transitional House opened in September, it was mostly furnished with donated items courtesy of Mover Dudes.

"We have trucks, we have people, this is what we do," Eye said. "Our vision as a company is 'moving communities, creating opportunities.'"

Eye chuckled as he recalled a disagreement he had about a decade ago with a now-former employee who wasn't quite on board with Mover Dudes's philanthropy and said the company's owner was "selfish" for doing it.

"He was like, 'The stuff that you do for the community, you just do it because it makes you feel good,'" Eye said. "And I was like, 'Yeah, okay. If that means I'm selfish, then I'll take that. ... I just love helping people.'"

Such disputes with staff have been few and far between. Eye and Walker said all of their current workers are on board with the company's mission to provide community assistance, and some even sacrifice their days off to help.

Those workers will now help Mover Dudes in its "20 for 20" campaign. They'll request monetary donations to support The Laurel Center every time they help a customer from now until the end of the year.

"The community has supported us this long by hiring us to do services for them," Eye said, "so that's why we want to ask the community for help with this."

Bryan Lloyd, development director at The Laurel Center, said he's optimistic the "20 for 20" campaign will be a success.

"We live in an area that's a very giving community, whether it be their time or their money," Lloyd said. "I love this area and I love how they give."

Power said "20 for 20" proceeds will be used to help The Laurel Center meet an unfunded 2024 state mandate requiring Virginia localities to provide services to human trafficking victims. Currently the center provides shelter for up to 60 days for survivors of abuse, but people who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation or forced labor require longer-term assistance.

"So we are looking at the possibility of purchasing another building to create a very small shelter that would just be focused on human trafficking victims," Power said. "This [20 for 20' campaign] would be a critical piece in helping us move toward purchasing that building."

If you're thinking that human trafficking is not really an issue in the Northern Shenandoah Valley, think again.

"We all think of Winchester as the all-American community, but human trafficking is a hidden danger and it exists," Power said. "I-81 is a major corridor for human trafficking. [The victims] are people who need help and need support. ... Those needs are unique and separate from someone that's experienced domestic violence."

Eye and Walker said Mover Dudes is happy to support all of The Laurel Center's efforts to help people who have been victimized, and they hope to assist even more human services agencies as their company grows in the coming years.

"We will get to a certain point where we're going to be able to do good deeds every day of the year," Walker said.

To learn more about Mover Dudes and The Laurel Center, visit [moverdudes.com](https://moverdudes.com) and [thelaurelcenter.org](https://thelaurelcenter.org). Both websites include links to their respective social media pages where opportunities to assist the "20 for 20" fundraising campaign will be posted in the coming months.

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