

From Pasadena Now

Rabbi Joshua Grater will be heading the local non-profit and interfaith collaborative Friends In Deed effective January 3 as the new Executive Director following the retirement of Reverend Donna Byrns. Friends in Deed is Pasadena's longstanding community organization that that began back in 1894 and has since transformed into a local non-profit force that is dedicated to meeting the many needs of the most vulnerable residents of greater Pasadena and programs that most notably include the Bad Weather Shelter, the Women's Room and the Food Pantry for the city's homeless and at-risk individuals.

Rabbi Grater brings over a decade of professional experience in this capacity as he prepares to begin a new chapter that starts at the beginning of the new year.

"I am thrilled to be joining the Friends In Deed team. As a leader passionate about social justice, especially helping the homeless and most vulnerable in our community, I am committed to meeting the challenges we face with determination, energy, and dedication. I plan to utilize the strength of our collective spiritual traditions and community resources to further our mission. Along with the wonderful board and staff, we will work together to ensure a better future for the poor, hungry and homeless men, women and children of Pasadena and the greater San Gabriel Valley," said Grater. Rabbi Grater previously served 12 years as the Senior Rabbi at the Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center. His professional experience in Pasadena and compassion for the people who interface in the city on a daily basis is merely the surface of his qualifications.

"I'm a very collaborative person and I'm a big thinker so I'm looking forward to collaborating with many people involved in what we do and to also plan for not just the immediate future, but the long-term so we can find ways to help alleviate these devastating problems that continue to exist in our community," said Grater.

With new responsibility comes new plans and Grater is ready to hit the ground running.

"My main priority is getting into the community and meeting as many people as I can and to re-engage the congregation. I plan to go around to as many different congregations and meet the clergy and talk about our mission at Friends In Deed," said Grater. "But that's just where it begins." "Focusing our efforts on raising money to support the great programs that we're doing is a big one. I would like to increase the current budget that we are working with so we can further strengthen the programs we have and ultimately expand where possible," said Grater.

Friends in Deed hosts community programs that are tailored to primarily serving the homeless population and at-risk women and children. The programs include The Food Pantry, The Bad Weather Shelter, The Women's Room, Family Programs and Education and Outreach Programs. These programs date back to 1978 when the community built the current Friends In Deed House at the corner of Washington and Los Robles, for offices, a clothing program and a food pantry. Known then as the Ecumenical Council of Pasadena Area Churches, in 1988 it expanded operations to take over Pasadena's Bad Weather Shelter.

Various homeless service programs including rental assistance, summer camp support for youth, and school supplies for local students have been among the programs, according to the Friends in Deed website.

"I'm very confident that the skills I have will be well used here. I've always been an activist Rabbi and someone who cares about the world so I'm humbled and grateful to do that now on a daily basis for our most needy," said Grater.

Friends in Deed opened the Women's Room in 2007—an innovative day program serving homeless women. This program provides respite and needed services, including laundry, showers, health check ups, computer access and classes and is a program Grater is eager to expand upon. Grater will be following Reverend Donna Byrns who served as the Executive Director for three years.

“These are big shoes to fill coming in after Reverend Donna Byrns. I think the main reason Friends In Deed is so healthy is due in large part to her leadership over then past three years. Thankfully she will be staying on in a part-time capacity to be there to help,” said Grater.

Byrns is hopeful that Grater will be able fulfill his vision for Friends in Deed.

“I think the work that Friends in Deed does is critical to our community's well being. I'm very, very excited about Rabbi Joshua Grater coming on board. He comes with a great skill level and an even greater heart and that's what it takes to do the kind of work that we do. He's the perfect man to take it to the next level,” said Byrns.

Grater will assume the Executive Director position on January 3, 2017.

“It's very exiting and i'm happy to join such a great organization which I've been a part of and volunteered with for a long time in my previous capacity and to be able to help people right here in Pasadena every day. I'm looking forward to helping and make a difference in our community for the city's most vulnerable population of people,” said Grater.