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Dinner/auction to benefit homeless in Va. Beach

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The 2010 fundraiser for The Lighthouse Center in Virginia Beach had the theme, "Rock Around the Clock with Us to End Homelessness." (courtesy photo)

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IF YOU GO

What Sixth annual Make a Difference Dinner and Auction

When 6 p.m. Friday

Where Virginia Beach Resort Hotel and Conference Center, 2800 Shore Drive

Cost \$50 includes dinner and silent auction. Order by Tuesday by calling 646-8599

Info Open to public and supporters. For more information about The Lighthouse Center visit www.VOACHesapeake.org/Lighthouse

By **Liz Carey**
Virginian-Pilot correspondent
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VIRGINIA BEACH

Beach resident Julie O'Neill knows that homelessness can happen to anyone. She has taken in several members of her family who were near homelessness.

But she knows not everyone has family who will help. That's why she's been volunteering at The Lighthouse Center, a day program for homeless adults, for nearly 15 years.

"It's important that there are programs out there," O'Neill said. "It's a real important, personal passionate venture to me."

O'Neill helped coordinate the silent auction for this year's annual Make a Difference Dinner to be held at 6 p.m. Friday at the Virginia Beach Resort Hotel and Conference Center.

The money raised at the event will help keep the center's winter shelter and drop-in programs going, said Debbie Maloney, executive director for Volunteers of America at The Lighthouse Center.

"There's been some economic cutbacks in grants, and we're trying to fill the gaps," Maloney said.

Since 1997, The Lighthouse Center has provided drop-in services, including showers, laundry services, Internet access and links to community services including health care and employment assistance, to homeless individuals. The center also operates a winter shelter program in conjunction with local churches, synagogues and mosques.

"It's not just a handout," O'Neill said. "It's more of, 'let's see what we can do to get you back on your feet.'"

The dinner was started six years ago as a way to thank the churches that support the winter shelter and to raise extra funds, O'Neill said.

This year's theme is "Come to the Big Apple and take a 'bite' out of homelessness," and there will be New York-themed decorations and entertainment, including a Frank Sinatra impersonator and tap dancers.

Auction items include gift certificates from local restaurants and hotels, a vacation at a timeshare in Florida, a certificate for Panera Bread, jewelry and various themed baskets, including golfing, Italian dinner and chocolate.

O'Neill hopes the event will raise awareness, and

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let those that are homeless know that there is hope.

Hampton says many of the center's clients have either lost their job, been displaced to lower-paying jobs or have to work more than one job to pay for the basics.

"Homelessness can touch anybody in any walk of life," O'Neill said.

Fundraising committee chair Dottie Hampton said homelessness, especially family homelessness, is becoming more of a problem.

"It's so tragic to think of kids not having a home," Hampton said.

Liz Carey, lizking6@gmail.com

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