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The Business of Being Nonprofit

A blog about Southeastern Michigan nonprofits

[The lifecycle of nonprofits and need for adapting to changing needs](#)

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While listening to a bit of the Detroit Rescue Mission's 100-year history at its recent anniversary dinner, I was struck by the momentousness of a local nonprofit keeping its doors open for a century.

The mission was founded by a man named David Stucky who moved his family to Detroit from Saginaw in 1909, with just \$1.50 to his name, to get medical treatment for his polio-stricken daughter.

Amidst his other troubles, Stucky saw all of the homeless in Detroit and felt it was his calling to open a mission. He rented an old poultry store for a poultry fee because it was so dirty, cleaned it up and borrowed chairs to start the mission and church services on Feb. 14 of that year.

The Detroit Rescue Mission grew over the years and moved in early 1963 to the Cass Corridor where it provided a soup kitchen for the homeless. The staff and leaders of the mission began to notice the same people returning again and again and many who were addicted to drugs or alcohol.

The Detroit Rescue Mission began providing services to help addicts recover.

Within the last year or two, the mission has once again launched new programs, these aimed at helping those who are homeless because of poor economic conditions. It has developed a number of job training programs with Wayne County Community College District in a number of areas including: video editing and production, Web design, medical assistant and home wiring.

Now the mission is planning to open a restaurant in Highland Park to provide a training ground for those in a new culinary arts program, as well as revenue to help fund the training programs.

Nonprofits that survive for many years adapt to changing needs in the community to keep their work relevant, said John Brothers, senior fellow at the [Support Center for Nonprofit Management](#) in New York.

But not all nonprofits should be in business for a long period of time, he said.

As it works to develop and fulfill its mission, every nonprofit goes through a lifecycle spanning several stages: the idea phase, start-up, maintenance phase, downward phase and sunset phase, Brothers said.

"If you're working towards a cause, and the cause has been met, change has been created, and a nonprofit should be working their way out of business," he said.

But if a nonprofit isn't making progress on its mission, "it needs to get out of the game or adapt to what needs to happen," Brothers said.

Nonprofits that survive also use the down economy to build their capacity, he said. It's an optimal time to fill board governance needs or to look for opportunities to provide staff with professional development opportunities that are within reach such as job shadowing, Brothers said.

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