

Quiznos founder using movie, restaurants to fight homelessness.

Colleen Slevin
Associated Press
10 April 2008

The founder of the Denver-based Quiznos restaurant chain and his wife are starting a business-minded group to help raise money for cities fighting homelessness.

The first project of Richard and Cheryl Schaden's America's Road Home, announced Thursday, will revolve around marketing a film about homelessness, "Where God Left His Shoes." A restaurant in Denver could follow, with proceeds going toward America's Road Home.

Richard Schaden made the announcement in Washington where he and his wife received an award from the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness.

Their work started last fall with a \$1.5 million donation to help convert vacant buildings in Denver into apartments for homeless people. Schaden said he realized he and his business partners could use their marketing experience to reach people who want to help the homeless but don't know how.

He said America's Road Home will start by holding fundraisers and private screenings of the film starring John Leguizamo in Chicago and Los Angeles. Later, the group plans to air the film on television, giving viewers a chance to donate by text message. The film will also be sold on DVD.

A restaurant could also be added to one of the renovated buildings in Denver, Schaden said.

He said America's Road Home will pay the capital costs of screening the movie and the merchandise and other investments, but all the money raised will go to the approximately 300 cities and counties that have adopted 10-year plans to fight homelessness. The aim is to create a steady stream of money to support those efforts.

"Rather than just writing a check, we're creating a business around each one of these investments," Schaden said in a telephone interview.

He said people would be able to direct their donations to the anti-homelessness efforts in their community. For example, people texting donations during the broadcast of "Where God Left His Shoes" would key in their ZIP code to direct it to the right place, he said.

The movie was made by "Vulcan Productions, which is owned by co-founder Paul Allen. Vulcan has agreed to donate all the money it makes from the venture, said Richard Hutton, vice president of media development. He said the company made the film purely for its entertainment value but, after noticing strong support for the movie among homeless advocates, began looking for a more grass roots way to release it. Hutton connected with Schaden after a clip of the movie was shown at the homelessness summit in Denver last year.

Michael Stoops, executive director of the National Coalition for the Homeless, welcomed the private-sector help.

He said the effort to fight homelessness hasn't had many high-profile boosters since Comic Relief in the 1980s. His group has been trying to get public officials, including the presidential hopefuls, to agree to live on the streets for 48 hours to draw attention to the issue.

"We really need whoever, I don't care if it's a Democrat or a Republican, we need people who have more influence than you or I to mobilize and lead the way," Stoops said.

Schaden said fighting homelessness is important to him because both he and his wife have had relatives who have ended up on the streets. One of the relatives had had medical problems while another lost a job and was too embarrassed to let the rest of the family know, he said.

"What it tells you is that anybody can end up there," Schaden said. "With a volatile economy it can happen pretty quickly."

Atlanta, Denver, Fort Worth and St. Louis are among the cities that have adopted 10-year plans to fight homelessness.

The plans focus on helping the chronically homeless -- people who live on the street for years with untreated substance abuse and mental illness -- get into temporary housing so they can get the services they need to stay off the street.

In Denver, churches and other faith-based groups have also been mentoring homeless families and paying their first month's rent to get them into apartments.