

New St. Paul homeless complex opens its doors, and it's already full

[Tim Nelson](#)

St. Paul

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Left: Catholic Charities CEO Tim Marx stands in front of the new Dorothy Day Residence opening at agency's campus in downtown St. Paul. Tim Nelson | MPR News

After \$100 million in fundraising and four years of construction, Catholic Charities has opened its huge six-story homeless shelter and social services center in downtown St. Paul, bringing the group's total number of beds on the campus to more than 500.

There still isn't enough room.

“Unfortunately, given the developments in our housing market — and this is happening not only here, but throughout the country — we see the unsheltered population increasing,” Catholic Charities CEO Tim Marx said as he stood in the lobby of the new building.

“In this region, it's doubled over the last three years, at five times the national average. Another 50 percent increase, I think occurred, between 2018 and 2019.”

Marx and his staff offered a look Tuesday at the new building as workers put the final touches on interior finishes, fixtures and decor at what's being called “Dorothy Day Place,” after the [well-known Catholic social activist](#) and namesake of the center built in the same location in 1981. It was vacated and demolished two years ago.

The new building is the second phase of Catholic Charities effort to replace that center, which had people sleeping on floor mats in the space about the size of a couple of basketball courts.

The first phase, called Higher Ground St. Paul, was built across the street beside Interstate 35E, and opened in 2017. That has 193 supportive housing units and 354 emergency shelter beds and bunks.

The new center has a two-floor “opportunity center” named for the Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation, which made a lead \$5 million donation to the effort. The center will offer everything from meal services and a laundry room, a hair salon, secure storage, veterans services, computer stations and job training programs.

Tracy Berglund, housing stability manager for Catholic Charities, said that the center will also feature built-in dental care facilities and a half dozen exam rooms for medical care, much of it provided by volunteers. She said the space for medical attention at the old Dorothy Day Center was “postage stamp” by comparison. “They’ll have pharmacy, optometry, chiropractic ... They’ll have foot care, as well. Just a real array of services.”

Right: Catholic Charities CEO Tim Marx stands in a new 24-seat computer lab that is built into the new Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation Opportunity Center. The center is anchoring the social service agency's \$100 million homeless services campus.
Tim Nelson | MPR News



Ramsey County is also locating various social services in the building.

“We’re so fortunate that we’re able to configure all of this together in one campus,” Marx said. “The synergy, the opportunity to integrate our services, integrate more partnerships, is going to be I think one of the shining lights of the new Dorothy Day Place.”

The upper floors, called the Dorothy Day Residence, offer longer-term shelter, and include both efficiency apartment and dorm-style units, as well as housing for veterans, youth and patients discharged from local hospitals who have nowhere suitable to live.

There’s even a chapter of a running club — [Mile in My Shoes](#) — that recruits residents to join local runners for training sessions and short running races, in an effort to get people fit and better connected with the community.