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By ROBERT PIERCE

- Daily Leader

People suffering with illnesses often have trouble meeting financial obligations, and now, thanks to a group of local individuals, those people can get assistance with those needs.

Tracy Gutierrez of Southwest Miracles said the mission of the organization is to help someone in need and give them a little lift over a little hump in life.

This includes helping someone get to a doctor in communities such as Amarillo and Wichita with picking up the tab for fuel costs.

“We’ll pick up a motel room for them, get them some food vouchers,” Gutierrez said. “We don’t give any cash. It’ll be a gift card or a fuel card, or we pick up the motel.”

Gutierrez said Southwest Miracles started with three people, and it was initially combined with Southwest Miracles for Children.

"It's for any age as long as we feel like they're in need," he said. "With only three directors, we can give somebody an answer if we can help them or not in 30 minutes instead of having to wait 10 or 15 days. They may need the help today."

Gutierrez said the organization can even help with getting prescriptions or paying gas bills.

"We'd like to get some of the high school kids involved as far as the community service," he said. "They may be able to go out and mow grass or trim hedges or paint houses, just help them along through a tough time. If you're sick, you don't need to worry about that small stuff."

Southwest Miracles has a share closet where items are donated such as medical supplies, electric scooters and walkers.

Gutierrez said the organization's volunteer list grows daily.

"What we're doing instead of just asking for money, we thought we'd give them something for their money," he said. "With the economy like it is, people seem like they accept this type of fundraiser. We're having pretty good success at it."

Gutierrez said the group who started Southwest Miracles actually came up with the idea about four or five years ago, but the organization officially got off the ground in 2009.

"The first fundraiser was the car show that Bill Hill puts on," he said. "That was a success."

Gutierrez said there are many people who want help, and there are many who need help, and Southwest Miracles is focused on people who need help.

"We've noticed the people who need help won't ask you," he said. "We use people as our filters."

When somebody comes in and tells us it's a co-worker or somebody in their church or a lady next door and they could really use some help, we believe them, and a lot of times, we take that as a positive. We go and look and see if we can help them. If we can help them, we do. If we can't, we try to find them help."

Gutierrez said local businesses have come forward to help with things like donating items.

This Saturday, Southwest Miracles is hosting a dinner and dance from 6:30 p.m. to midnight in the Seward County Ag Building.

"Billy's Bar B Q is providing the dinner," Gutierrez said. "It's going to be pulled brisket and pulled pork with beans, cole slaw, potato salad. We're going to have a silent auction with things that have been donated from businesses in town."

Gutierrez said much in the way of help has been received from community businesses such as Mead Lumber, Flooring America, Tan It, Weaver's Alignment, RSC, National Beef, Seaboard and Eisenhauer Trucking.

"Without them, it would have been really difficult for us to make any headway on this," he said. "We know we've got to spend money to make money."

Gutierrez said the Clear Creek Band will begin playing around 8, and the silent auction will end around 10.

"The band will keep going till midnight," he said. "It's going to be a nice time. It's halfway between New Year's and spring when everybody's out and running amuck."

Gutierrez said those in need of help can call Southwest Miracles.

“All we have is a phone with an answering machine,” he said. “They can leave their name and number and how we can contact them or a contact person. We’ll get back with them. We’ll find out what they need and how we can assist them and if we can.”

That number is 626-5035.

“It’s not just for Seward County. It’s not just for Liberal,” Gutierrez said. “It’s anyone in the southwest part that really needs help. If anyone wants to volunteer or donate, they can do it at the same spot.”

Gutierrez said he is not sure how much money he expects Saturday’s fundraiser to bring in.

“We can only get about 450 people in that building,” he said. “We’ve made 400 tickets. We’ve got about 380 out. Tickets are \$20 and are available by calling 626-5035 – they will not be available at the door.”

Gutierrez said this year’s event may not be as big as liked.

“But you’ve got to get started somewhere,” he said. “Hopefully, after this year, we’ll just keep on growing and growing. The more we grow, the more people we can help. The more people you help, the more it’s going to grow.”

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