

Concert will mark community center opening

By Rachel Mahoney

After a concert and worship with Christian rock group Third Day this Saturday, the Shenandoah Valley Coalition for Christ [SVCC] will be opening a community center in Edinburg to help provide immediate assistance to members of the community who are in need.

The Third Day concert will begin at 7 p.m. Saturday at the Shenandoah County Fairgrounds. SVCC president Brannon Racey said the coalition is already expecting more than half of its 2,500-person potential for concertgoers.

Last October's concert featuring Newsboys sold out at its Central High School location, prompting pursuit of a larger and more appropriate venue. Fairgrounds General Manager Tom Esheleman said

the coalition made the perfect move to accommodate the crowd he knew Third Day's performance would draw.

"It was a great fit for us and we were glad to be an asset to the coalition to help facilitate putting on the event," he said.

Racey said the uplifting nature of the event echoes the kind of help SVCC hopes to offer through the community center.

"It gives everybody an opportunity to literally drive 20 minutes and have a night that is a family night," he said. "It's a good, hearty, family oriented atmosphere."

The Third Day concert will serve as the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new community center, which is located at 100 N. Main St. in Edinburg. Executive Director Sharon Hollar said the center will bolster the coalition's

efforts to help people who need assistance immediately.

"Our goal has been that we would be able to help people quickly and get all the resources in one place," she said.

According to Hollar, there are 50 nonprofits, 42 churches and 67 businesses that have formed a network of support through SVCC since its 2005 inception. The coalition regularly hosts Bible study, Bible school and provides free community meals at different area churches. It also hosts a free Family Fun Fest every fall with a car show and various activities.

The volunteer-operated center will serve as the coalition's meeting place and headquarters to the SVCC Rapid Response Homelessness and Hunger Team of about 20 members.

Part of the SVCC's homeless help initiative is the setup and distribution of blessing bags. Materials collected for the bags include hygiene products, food and some clothing, and SVCC will deposit them with police stations and board members to help individuals they encounter.

Billy Rice, a leading member of the team, made his mark two years ago when he and fellow member Tom Murden helped out five homeless people living in tents near Woodstock.

"There's people out here all the time willing to give, willing to help," he said. "The problem is there's no centralized location."

A retired law enforcement officer of 27 years, Rice said he knows there is a lot of potential for abuse with programs like these and said the team

will set up a questionnaire and interview system for candidates. Hollar also recognizes the challenges posed by an organization set up to help those in need.

"We wanted to be able to say who are we going to help and how are we going to help them, how many times are we going to help them," she said. "We want to be good stewards of that money; it's very hard."

Racey has confidence that the unique expertise members bring to the response team will help them fulfill their mission in the Shenandoah area.

"I feel that everybody does their job and everybody loves what they do ... they're just driven to help people," he said.

Find out more about SVCC programs and events at <http://www.svcc4u.com/>.