

Jusst perfect: Soup ministry reopens

Rev. Dale Dunning: 'I'm finally home'

By Ron MacArthur
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The Rev. Dale Dunning takes a deep breath. "I'm finally home," she says.

Jusst Sooup Ministries has found a permanent home after 15 years of moving around Sussex County.

And that home is just a few feet from her front door along Coolspring Road.

Because of Sussex County zoning regulations, Dunning has been unable to use her commercial kitchen and dining room since it was constructed three years ago as a segment on the "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" ABC television show.

The show was filmed in August 2011 and aired as a Thanksgiving special that year. Hundreds of volunteers and dozens of contractors – coordinated by local builder Schell Brothers – mobilized over a week to construct the Jusst Sooup Ranch for the Dunnings, which includes a large soup kitchen as the answer to her prayers to have a permanent site for her ministry.

Dunning's dreams were quickly put on hold. Because of concerns expressed by area residents, Sussex County Board of Adjustment unanimously denied a special-use permit to operate a soup kitchen on the property. A public soup kitchen is not permitted on land zoned agricultural-residential.

Over the past nine years, Dunning has operated her main soup kitchen at the Rehoboth Presbyterian Church of Midway. In early August, she left the site,

and for the first time had to turn away those seeking her soup and ministry. But, it was only a temporary break – one she and her husband, Ken, needed. "As we got older, our schedule was starting to wear us out," Dale said.

The couple has been going to bed early and getting up around 2:30 a.m. to cook soup and prepare to transport it. Now all that preparation can be done on site. "It means we can get a little more sleep," Ken said with a smile.

Recently, site work – includ-

ing a parking lot and stormwater management – was completed to meet county and state regulations, which allowed Dunning to open a church, a permitted use on the 6-acre parcel.

The \$60,000 project was paid for by Schell Brothers and an endowment set up by the company to assist the Dunnings.

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— REV. DALE DUNNING



RON MACARTHUR PHOTOS

THE REV. DALE DUNNING spends a lot of time talking with people she calls her "Soupers."

"We are so blessed and so excited. This is amazing," Dale said. "God has answered our prayers again. It's so peaceful here, and now my Soupers feel the same peace we live in."

Church, soup kitchen open for business

Realizing a lifelong dream, Dunning opened the Jusst Sooup Ministries Church at the ranch two months ago. She started her 18th soup kitchen at her church last week. "We are taking baby

steps," said Ken Dunning.

The nondenominational church has about a dozen members each Saturday at 10 a.m., and the soup kitchen is serving about two dozen meals from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. each Thursday. Dunning said she hopes to expand that schedule in the future.

On Saturday, the Jusst Sooup dining room is converted to a church complete with drums and a sound system; it's changed back to a dining room on Thursdays.

Dale said as one door closed, another opened. Within two months of their move out of the Presbyterian Church, they not only opened the doors to their new church; they also received the donation of a 2015 RV thanks to Discover Bank. The RV – affectionately called Beulah Too – will aid the Dunnings in their mobile ministry. The original RV – named Beulah – has serious mechanical problems and has not been started for more than a year.

Since the ranch is located in a rural area, Ken said they are working on ironing out transportation issues. They want those in need to be able to get there. Other churches have contacted the Dunnings offering busing. A public bus stop is located about a half-mile away along Route 9. "We are working to get that stop, or another one, moved closer, but the process takes about a year," Ken said.

"We will make sure people have a way here and a way back. We need to determine where the greatest needs are," Dale said.



Part of Jusst Sooup Ministries Church outreach is a weekly soup kitchen.



The Jusst Sooup Ranch is now home to a church.



The Rev. Dale Dunning talks with those at her Jusst Sooup Ministries soup kitchen. She provides meals every Thursday to anyone in need.



Longtime volunteer Lois Carter serves up soup in the Jusst Sooup kitchen.