

JUSST SOOUP MINISTRY

Dunning family back on track to open church

One year later: Jusst Sooup branching out

By Ron MacArthur

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With state approvals nearly complete, the Rev. Dale and Ken Dunning are set to begin operating Jusst Sooup Ranch Church. It's been a journey that started just over a year ago with the completion of the ranch off Route 9 in Coolspring.

Last Thanksgiving weekend, the Dunnings and their Jusst Sooup Ministry were the subject of a special "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" television show. During the last week of August, and after months of planning, the Cape Region was ignited with Extreme Makeover fever with thousands of volunteers and dozens of contractors volunteering their time day and night. Under the supervision of Schell Brothers, the Jusst Sooup Ranch was constructed in seven days, event with the threat of a hurricane.

Dale Dunning has been getting up in the early morning hours most days for the past 13 years to take her soup on the road to soup kitchens at local churches. So she was looking forward to setting up her own soup kitchen in the large dining room and commercial kitchen constructed as part of makeover building project. They ran into a major roadblock and became tangled in a controversial whirl of government regulations fueled by objections to their plans from neighbors.

The Dunnings soon learned that because of zoning restrictions – the land is zoned AR-1 – a soup kitchen was not allowed without an approved conditional-use application. The Dunnings had permission to operate an off-site ministry as a home-based business, but only family members were permitted to assist in the ministry. That meant that no volunteers were permitted to help on site.

During public hearings before planning and zoning and county council, neighbors turned out to oppose the conditional-use application. Eventually, county officials sided with the neighbors and denied the application.

That's when attorney Heidi Gilmore stepped in to assist the Dunnings. She helped them with the legal work to establish a church at the site, which is a permitted use in AR-1 zoning. Working pro bono, Gilmore guided the Dunnings through the process of site-plan approval. Although the final plans are not yet approved, it's only a matter of getting a wetlands consultant to sign off. "When they do that, the plan will be approved," said Shane Abbott, assistant county planning and zoning director.



Extreme Homemaker staff didn't skimp on the details when designing and furnishing the Jusst Sooup Ranch. They even provided the Dunnings with their own ice cream flavor.



RON MACARTHUR PHOTOS

DALE AND KEN DUNNING are shown in the Jusst Sooup Ranch kitchen complete with everything from a walk-in freezer to convection ovens. Dale

Dunning is still dishing up soup at local soup kitchens. Her Jusst Sooup Ministry is in its 13th year.



The Dunning's dining room looks like it did the day they first saw it Aug. 31, 2011.



Decorated by Extreme Homemaker designers, the Dunnings' dining room/kitchen has not been used as part of the ministry since it was built just over a year ago.

State agencies are requiring the Dunning to construct a stormwater retention system, upgrade the septic system, expand the driveway and provide additional handicapped accessibility, even though the interior of the soup kitchen is already wheelchair accessible. Milton firm Pennoni Associates is donating its engineering services to assist the Dunnings.

Ken said the estimated \$60,000 cost for the work is being covered by an endowment established by Schell Brothers to cover costs of operating the Jusst Sooup Ranch. Part of the makeover was establishing an endowment to assist the Dunning with utility bills and upkeep of the house, cottage, grounds and soup kitchen. Ken pointed out that endowment funds cannot be used for operation of the ministry.

Looking back, the Dunnings say they were blindsided. "The opposition was a big shock to us," Ken said. "We thought what we were doing was nothing more than a formality. We weren't prepared for what happened."

The couple said that does not diminish the good things that have happened to them. "We are so grateful for all of the volunteers and what they did," Dale said. "It's turned out to be a beautiful thing with a new beginning for our ministry – a church for my Little Soups. I wake up grateful every day."

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She said the new church can accommodate up to 88 people. "It's not going to be an ordinary church. It's going to be a church for people who are starting over, those who are coming back to church and others who have never been," she said.

Over the past year, a lot has happened. Ken retired from one of his three jobs;

their son, Dale, has moved to the area to help them; and the ministry has started providing breakfast at some of the soup kitchen sites. Dale gets up even earlier now – just after midnight – in order to cook soup and prepare breakfast. She has started 17 soup kitchens at area churches.

Unfortunately, Dale said, donations have dipped almost 80 percent over the past year, which means the ministry has had to cut back on some of its programs. "We still need donations of food and money; I don't think people understand we can't touch the endowment," Dale said. "Donations were down so much, we weren't able to provide school supplies this year, and we haven't been able to hand out many groceries. It's been really, really hard."

They have also cut back helping people pay for prescriptions and with emergency housing.

Most of the money Ken makes maintaining more than 50 yards and driving a limousine goes into the ministry. Dale is

Continued on page 4

Briefly »

Milton budget workshop set Sept. 18

Milton Town Council will hold a second meeting this month followed by a budget workshop, beginning at 6:30 p.m., Tuesday, Sept. 18, at Milton Public Library.

Council will first choose an engineering firm for the Ship-

builder's Village paving project and discuss and vote on loan pre-applications for the Office of Drinking Water.

Following the meeting, council will hold a workshop on the fiscal year 2013 budget.

To view the agenda, go to www.ci.milton.de.us.

Rehoboth to request reassessment proposals

The Rehoboth Beach commissioners will consider approving issuing requests for proposals for

a firm to perform a citywide property reassessment at the commissioners 7 p.m., Friday, Sept. 21 meeting in the city commissioners' room.

The meeting will see the re-administering of the oath of office to commissioners Patrick Gossett and Bill Sargent, who were re-elected in August.

The commissioners will adopt a resolution to the opening of bank accounts, hear a presentation by landscape architect RPZ Designs for a sister city garden and discuss possible placement

of an in-road pedestrian crossing sign.

Finally, the commissioners will consider adoption of a resolution authorizing the issuance of up to \$450,000 in general obligation bonds to finance improvements to the city's sanitary sewer system in the Schoolvue area.

Hearing on petition for water supply cancelled

A public hearing on a petition for an alternate drinking water supply for a private residence in

Harbeson that was announced for Thursday, Sept. 27, by the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control's Water Supply Section, has been cancelled.

The petition was filed by David Chicosky of Harbeson and Woolrich, N.J., requesting a determination of whether or not Lawson's Produce in Harbeson should be required to provide him with an alternate drinking water supply due to business activities that have impacted Chicosky's existing well.

Dunning

Continued from page 3

looking at taking on another job. "It looks like I might have to go back to work cleaning houses," Dale said. "We will do whatever we have to to keep the ministry going."

Son Dale is looking for ways to raise money for the ministry.

The ministry's vehicles are also getting old. The familiar green Jusst Sooup Ranch van was in the shop last week getting new brakes; it has more than 170,000 miles on it. The ministry's donated RV is not operational because it needs new batteries.

Dale said through all of the setbacks, she has never faltered in her mission to reach out to those less fortunate. "All they need is a hand up," she said. "This is the Lord's work, and I can't stop what I was called to do. There are people out there who are really hungry who need spiritual and natural food."

Dale has also shifted her attention away from actually serving soup - she has a dedicated group of volunteers who work at the various soup kitchens - to talking with those who stop by to eat a meal. She tells a story about a young woman who walked from the Long Neck area to eat breakfast. Her eyes swell with tears as she talks about the woman. "How can I turn away from her?" she asks.

She spends a lot of time sitting on the porch at Rehoboth Presbyterian Church at Midway. "This is where she should be," said longtime volunteer Lois Carter. Carter has been serving soup for most of the time the ministry has been in existence. "I feel more blessed than they do," she said. Dale holds no animosity toward those who testified against her at the public hearings. Several neighbors complimented the Dunnings for their selfless dedication, but at the same time, they said, their rural neighborhood was not the place for a soup kitchen or a facility that might attract transients or homeless people. Neighbors said they were concerned about an increase in crime and feared for their children.

"I hope their heart is changing. I hope our neighbors see us as God sees us," she said. "My Little Soupers are wonderful people who will not hurt anyone."



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