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Published April 01 2009

## State view: New approaches aimed at ending homelessness

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By: Jim Frey, Duluth News Tribune

This evening at the Depot, a photo exhibit — "Portraits of Home II: Veterans in Search of Housing in Greater Minnesota" — opens, featuring more than 50 images made by six distinguished photojournalists. The pictures capture the deeply personal impacts of nonmetro Minnesota's affordable-housing crisis.

While the exhibit shows some of the real challenges Minnesotans face due to homelessness, there is hope. In Duluth, the New San Marco Apartments were built. The supportive-housing development for long-term homeless people with chronic chemical dependency is making a real difference and improving our community.

We at the Frey Foundation took what some have seen as a bold step — but we see as a logical move — by upping our commitment to help Minnesotans with an additional investment of \$5 million statewide to end homelessness.

We make this gift at a time when homelessness is on the rise because of the economy. Yet the economy has had an impact on foundations as well, causing some to struggle to meet commitments and making all of us much more deliberate in how we spend our dollars.

That's why we have chosen to make this additional contribution — and why others should as well. Investing in this comprehensive effort to end homelessness is not only the right thing to do but also the smart thing to do.

Since the state of Minnesota adopted its Business Plan to End Long-Term Homelessness in 2004, 10 counties and/or regions around the state developed and adopted 10-year plans of their own. The Heading Home St. Louis County plan was one of the first when it was adopted in 2007. All the efforts have come together under the umbrella of Heading Home Minnesota, a statewide campaign to end homelessness.

This statewide approach makes sense. Wilder Research shows that almost a third of Minnesota's homeless individuals and families live outside the Twin Cities metropolitan area. So a portion of the dollars we are investing will be spent in communities around the state, including here in Duluth and St. Louis County.

The Heading Home approach is compelling in that it has the right ingredients for solving big problems. We believed this in 2006 when we made our first investment of \$5 million, and we especially believe it now. The approach is based on real evidence of what works and what doesn't. It has been bipartisan. It recognizes that neither the public nor the private sector can solve this problem alone. And it focuses on the right goal: ending homelessness, not just managing it. That means our investment is aligned with an effort well positioned to succeed.

Simply managing homelessness has been expensive and inefficient. Those in St. Louis County know this firsthand. However, housing like the San Marco have a proven track record of cutting the use of expensive services while still helping those it serves make real progress. Ending homelessness through a three-prong approach of prevention, supportive housing and outreach is really working.

In Minnesota, we are well into reforming the system. We have created more than 2,500 housing opportunities with supportive services since efforts began five years ago. We have a goal of creating 1,500 more.

Public and private funding is too precious to spend on ineffective systems. At the same time we are scrutinizing corporations and government for their actions, we should be holding our community efforts to similar standards. Public and private investments must be productive.

This is what we want for our communities. This is what we need for our future.

JIM FREY is president and CEO of the Frey Foundation and serves as vice chairman of Heading Home Minnesota.

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