

Agencies Serving Poor Merge Woodlawn Site Gets Aid From Uptown

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BY GLENN JEFFERS Tribune staff reporter

A merger with another non-profit agency will prevent the shutdown of The Living Room Cafe, which provides meals and services to hundreds of poor and homeless people in the Woodlawn neighborhood, officials said Thursday.

The Uptown-based Inspiration Cafe and The Living Room Cafe will come under an umbrella company called Inspiration Corp., which will handle fundraising, training and social-service operations for both sites. The umbrella company will be based at the Inspiration Cafe's offices at 4554 N. Broadway.

Without the merger, it would have been "a matter of time" before The Living Room Cafe, located in the 6400 block of South Cottage Grove Avenue, would have been forced to shut down, said Elbert Hatley, former Living Room board president.

Hatley said the merger was crucial for both organizations.

"It allows us to increase our services. It really is needed for both organizations," he said.

Faced with declining donations, more than 300 non-profit organizations have closed statewide since January 2002, according to Atty. Gen. Lisa Madigan, a former Inspiration volunteer, who joined in Thursday's announcement.

Founded in 1995, The Living Room Cafe provides social services and serves more than 8,000 meals a year to more than 200 needy people in Woodlawn, officials said. The Inspiration Cafe was founded in 1989 and serves 13,000 meals to more than 300 people annually.

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