

**“As a physician, I’ve always felt that I’ve been entrusted to provide care for all individuals, irregardless of their circumstances. It’s a natural extension of what I see a physician being.”**

— Dr. David Deci ■ WVU Family Medicine



## Med students give back to the community

**TO LEARN** more about MUSHROOM or how to help the area’s homeless, contact Dr. David Deci at 598-6900 Ext. 5943.

in Morgantown.

With more than 400 client encounters, however, the group just completed its 20th set of street rounds around the downtown area of Morgantown.

is one of the most important things.”

“Socks are the currency of the streets,” Deci said.

While on street rounds, the group attends first to basic human survival

**BY MELANIE MOROZ**

For The Dominion Post

In a program sponsored by the department of family medicine at WVU's School of Medicine, WVU medical students, with the help of physician faculty and social workers, have given medical attention to the area's homeless population.

Dubbed MUSHROOM, which stands for Multidisciplinary UnSheltered Homeless Relief Outreach of Morgantown, the program is patterned after the successful "Operation Safety Net," developed by Dr. James S. Withers of Pittsburgh.

Medical students who learned about "Operation Safety Net," along with family medicine's Dr. David Deci, wanted to try to bring a similar program to Morgantown, as they felt a need for these services in the area.

Deci and the interested medical students began by doing on-the-job training in downtown Pittsburgh, where they assisted the homeless in "street rounds."

Still, according to Deci, they weren't sure if they could replicate the success of "Operation Safety Net"

reflecting its positive impact on the Morgantown homeless community since its inception last June.

"As a physician, I've always felt that I've been entrusted to provide care for all individuals, irregardless of their circumstances," Deci said. "It's a natural extension of what I see a physician being."

"It's such a humanizing experience," said medical student Anna Skold. "Everybody is so grateful."

"We've come across a lot of people who really appreciate what we're doing. You get to hear great stories and people come from all walks of life," she said.

Every other Tuesday evening since last June, Deci and a group of medical students, including Skold, along with a social worker and a member of the area's homeless coalition, go out into the Morgantown community with medical supplies, food, drinks and clean socks, which are a hot commodity amongst the homeless.

"Socks are a big hit. Socks are golden," Skold said. "You don't really think about socks being so precious, but if you can't clean socks and you're out in the cold, getting a fresh pair of clean socks

needs, then to forging a strong relationship with their clients based on mutual trust. On an average evening, according to Deci, the group can encounter and attend to between 15 and 20 individuals.

Creating a bond with their clients is one of the main goals of MUSHROOM, as well as providing "non-judgmental, compassionate caring," Deci said. "We're there to encourage and provide care that they wouldn't have received otherwise."

MUSHROOM also serves as a link to other area services that help the homeless, such as HealthRight and Valley Mental Health.

"We're linking up the resources that are already out there with the people who aren't getting them," Skold said.

The group is hoping to expand its Morgantown base, and is looking for a small storage space in the downtown area to store their supplies, such as blankets, socks, beverages and plastic sheeting.

The group also wishes to increase their services to provide vaccinations and transportation vouchers for the needy, and would also like to develop their client number.