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Drew Rechsteiner, left, of The Fechtel Co. and pastor Steve Nunn go over plans at Trinity Gospel Church's 8½-acre site in east Tampa.

Lending a Helping Hand

A church's dream of building a permanent home is about to come true with help from a Tampa contracting firm.

By MICHELLE BEARDEN
of The Tampa Tribune

TAMPA

Drew Rechsteiner of The Fechtel Co. was looking for a project with a purpose.

Steve Nunn, pastor of Trinity Gospel Church, needed financial help to build a home for his congregation.

Together, they are making a long-held dream come true.

On Tuesday, Trinity Gospel Church broke ground at its 8½-acre site at 4410 E. Diana St. in east Tampa. Joining the festivities were representatives from The Fechtel Co., a general contracting firm in Tampa that will provide free construction services to

develop the site and make all connections to the building.

Nunn says without Fechtel's involvement "we could have remained homeless for a long time." He says he had been turned down at least seven times by local banks for financing.

"We're blessed they share our vision," he says. "We prayed about something like this coming along to help us. That's why we believe this is God-driven."

Nunn, a former national marketing manager with two Tampa companies, got a calling to the ministry 17 years ago. After taking ministerial courses through local Bible colleges, he founded Trinity Gospel 11 years ago with five people: himself, his wife, his son and two sisters.

The congregation grew steadily

during the years, climbing to the current membership of 150. They moved from leased hotel space to other churches for worship and Bible fellowship. When the opportunity to buy the \$100,000 piece of property at Diana Street opened, members pledged to make the commitment. They got a 15-year bond issuance.

Then, they got a big surprise when several donors — from the community, not the church — paid off the loan.

Nunn began pursuing the next phase of his plan, a \$5 million complex with a community recreation center, grade school, social hall, fitness center, 40 luxury town houses and a church sanctuary.

That's where the progress stalled. Even as Nunn pared down his ambitious vision, he could not find a lender.

Fechtel entered the picture through Nunn's friendship with Rechsteiner. The two attend Followers of the Way, a group of businessmen from area churches who meet every Monday at noon for Bible study and lunch at Palma Ceia Presbyterian Church.

"Business had slowed down, and I was praying for a project that had some meaning," says Rechsteiner, division manager for the company. "Steve had shared his story from time to time, and it occurred to me this is something we can do that will have a lasting impact."

It is also in line with Fechtel's faith commitment. The company is a member of C-12, which brings together business owners who are applying Christian principles in the workplace.

The \$5 million project remains a

dream. Now, in the works is construction of a 4,000-square-foot modular building to be used for worship and fellowship. The church will pay \$2,000 a month for a lease with an option to buy the \$100,000 building.

The agreement calls for Trinity Gospel to pay for materials and subcontractors' fees while Fechtel provides its services and site work.

"God called us to go help Steve. We're just answering," Rechsteiner says.

No one is happier for Nunn than John DeBevoise, pastor of Palma Ceia Presbyterian Church. They became friends about five years ago and have brought their congregations together for services and other community projects, such as building a Habitat for Humanity house. Friendships have formed between members of the predominantly white Presbyterian church in south Tampa and the black nondenominational church in a working-class neighborhood of east Tampa.

"The odds were against them. It would have been easy to understand if they had just packed up and given up, considering," DeBevoise says.

"But that's not Steve's style. He and his congregation are an example of what can be achieved with persistent faith, hard work and vision."

Nunn says he won't give up on this large-scale plan. While he already knows the power of prayer, he's also mastered the art of patience.

"Our motives are pure," Nunn says. "This isn't just about us. We want to build a better community. And given what's happened so far, we believe that God is smiling down on us."