

Ottawa Mission names Peter Tilley as new Executive Director

By Meghan Hurley, OTTAWA CITIZEN
May 1, 2013



The Ottawa Mission has appointed Peter Tilley as the new executive director. Tilley, the executive director of the Ottawa Food Bank, will begin his new position on June 3.

Photograph by: Bruno Schlumberger, Ottawa Citizen

OTTAWA — The newly appointed Ottawa Mission executive director says he has big shoes to fill. Peter Tilley, the head of the Ottawa Food Bank, will begin his new position on June 3. He replaces Diane Morrison, who retired in January after 20 years as the executive director.

“I don’t know the actual shoe size of Diane Morrison, but I imagine it must be like Shaquille O’Neal size 17 because they are huge shoes to fill,” Tilley said.

Tilley began working with the food bank as a driver in 1994. He left a high-paying job as an employment recruiting firm executive for the food bank during what he calls a “spiritual search.” After hearing a talk given by a pastor, Tilley thought a new job was exactly what he needed.

“Those thoughts resonated with me and at the age of 33 I wondered if there was more and maybe I just need a break from this,” Tilley said.

When a former client called Tilley in 1994 to see if he could recommend anyone to fill the spot of a driver at the Ottawa Food Bank, he jumped at the chance. The next day,

Tilley changed out of his suit into jeans and a T-shirt and went to the food bank to express his interest in the job.

“I took a huge leap of faith,” Tilley admitted. And also a steep pay cut.

It was during his work as a driver that he got to know the staff at the Ottawa Mission, delivering food to the downtown shelter.

Tilley rose to the rank of interim executive director of the food bank in 1999 before he was officially put in charge of the organization in 2000. Since then, the food bank has dramatically expanded from a 2,500-square-foot warehouse to 21,000 square feet and they feed 48,000 people every month.

Tilley said he believes the Ottawa Food Bank was the first in North America to hand out bags at the grocery stores for food drives.

Tilley said he was also behind helping to create a food bank in Gatineau.

When the opportunity to head the Ottawa Mission came up, Tilley took a walk around the warehouse to reflect.

“I see a warehouse full of food, I see we’re in good financial position,” Tilley said. “The Ottawa Mission has always been close to my heart and what an opportunity to look after the more vulnerable people in our community.”

The decision to take over for Morrison became clear after his walk around the warehouse. Tilley said he will talk to stakeholders, staff and clients in the first month on the job to learn about the needs of the community.

From there, Tilley wants to explore how he can help clients with mental illness, addiction and plans to tackle homelessness head-on to find solutions that are more permanent rather than a temporary fix.

What Tilley looks most forward to in his new job is meeting his “clients” and vows to know them all by name after a few weeks in his new position.

“If we’re not going to turn around their life that day, maybe myself or my staff team can just do a small thing that day that’s going to bring a smile to their face and make their day a little bit more bearable,” he said.