

## Born for a mission

*Exec's childhood in foster care drives push for clinic*

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CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS



**Jim McElya, chairman of Cooper-Standard Automotive, is helping raise \$1 million to open a clinic for homeless and uninsured children and their mothers.**

**J**im McElya didn't always talk much about his childhood.

But the chairman of Cooper-Standard Automotive has reason to now.

Left on the doorstep of the Salvation Army in West Chester, Pa.,

when he was

just 6 weeks

old, McElya

has made it

his mission to

help raise \$1

million to open a

medical clinic for home-

less and uninsured children and

their mothers.

Cooper-Standard and its employees have chipped in \$150,000.

McElya and his team have raised another

\$250,000 through donations from the supplier's private equity owners, its vendors and peers,

including Lear Corp., BorgWarner Inc., Continental Inc.,

Excel Polymers, Marimba Automotive, GKN Sinter Metals,

Yazaki North America Inc., Deloitte & Touche L.L.P., Ernst &

Young L.L.P., Foley & Lardner L.L.P., Watson Wyatt World-

wide and in-kind or product support from IBM Corp.

and Microsoft Corp.

"My mother couldn't support me and my older sister,"

said McElya, who grew up in nearly a dozen foster

homes with families who depended on assistance

from safety net organizations such as pantries and the

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Salvation Army.

"Those were tough times in the '40s," he said. "But the good news is there were resources around — people willing to give food, clothes and their time. ... That's what got me through."

Something clicked last fall when McElya, reading an in-flight magazine, came across an article that mentioned **Super All Year Detroit**, the charity started by *Detroit Free Press* columnist Mitch Albom in 2006 during Super Bowl XL to help Detroit's homeless.

McElya called Albom. The Novi-based supplier and its employees pick a charity to support each year, and this year, McElya said, they wanted it to be SAY Detroit.

McElya knows "what's it like to be put aside in society. ... I think, particularly with the kids, this is like a straight line of him looking back to his childhood," Albom said.

In January 2007, there were approximately 18,000 homeless in Detroit, Highland Park and Hamtramck, according to the **Homeless Action Network of Detroit**. But the organization's biennial count did not include a breakout of how many were women or children.

By offering immunizations, the new clinic will be a first step toward getting homeless kids into school, said Chad Audi, CEO of **Detroit Rescue Mission Ministries** and a member of SAY Detroit's board. And need for other preventive care and medical treatment for those children and their mothers is high.

But the center has a long-term objective, too, Audi said.

"We're hoping through this clinic to ... find a permanent solution to their problems," he said. The clinic "will be like a triage area for us to find out why they are homeless and to try to help get them back on their feet."

Case managers will offer referrals for addiction treatment, housing assistance, and job training and placement.

Detroit Rescue Mission is offering space for the clinic on the first floor of a former **St. John Health System** medical building in Highland Park it purchased five years ago.

The outpatient counseling program for people who have completed treatment is also in the building, along with continuing education in areas such as computer programming and repair and Web design, offered through Wayne County Community College. Four physicians also lease space.

The nonprofits hope to open the 24-hour clinic before the end of September and plan to include 12 beds nearby so people who are under care can rest for up to a week and then be seen again by a doctor.

With \$400,000 in hand, there is enough to open now, McElya said. But opening the clinic and giving hope, then closing it for lack of ongoing funding, is "almost more cruel than not having it at all," he said.

The clinic will need \$1 million for its first two years of operation, which will include a shuttle to bring the homeless and the uninsured to the clinic, Audi said.

For his part, Albom makes pleas for donations through his radio show on **WJR 760 AM**. He also is raising money through a number of oth-

## JAMES MCELYA, 61

**Title:** Chairman, **Cooper-Standard Holdings Inc.** and **Cooper-Standard**



McElya

**Automotive Inc., Novi,** which had sales of \$2.8 billion last year.

**Background:** CEO of both Cooper-Standard companies from 2004 through June

this year; former vice president of **Cooper Tire & Rubber Co.**; president of **Cooper Tire & Rubber Co.** and **Handy & Harman.**

**Education:** Attended West Chester (Pa.) University

er initiatives.

According to its IRS Form 990, SAY Detroit collected \$287,697 in 2006 and made grants of \$130,100 to nonprofits that include **Capuchin Soup Kitchen**, **Cass Community Social Services**, **Neighborhood Service Organization**, **Michigan Veteran Foundation** and **New Day Multi Community Center.**

SAY Detroit and Detroit Rescue Mission plan to hire four nurses and contract with a pediatrician, an obstetrics-gynecology physician and an internist to start, Audi said. That should give the clinic the capacity to see about 30 people daily.

The groups are also in talks with the **Wayne State University Medical School**, **William Beaumont Hospital** and **Oakland University** — which are in the process of developing a new medical school — about providing interns or volunteer physicians and physician assistants. They also plan to approach the **Detroit Medical Center** to establish a referral process for patients who need surgery or trauma care, Audi said.

It's critical to have a medical home for children to make sure they are developing properly and to provide preventive care, including hearing and vision testing, immunizations and monitoring of lead levels, said Patricia Soares, interim executive director of **Detroit Health Care for the Homeless**, which does business as **Advantage Health Centers.**

Children with undetected high levels of lead, for example, can develop learning disabilities, Soares said. But with detection, those conditions can be treated and abated.

Overall, homeless children are sick more often, have more emotional problems and more likely to repeat a grade than other kids.

The organization provides care through a clinic on West Grand Boulevard and a mobile clinic that goes to church soup kitchens, drug treatment centers and **Latino Family Services** in Southwest Detroit.

McElya said he is asking several automakers for grants and plans to go to foundations for help next.

Unfortunately, not everyone gets it, he said. One tier-one automotive supplier McElya approached for help wrote a letter asking if McElya realized how poor the economy was.

"If it's tough for us CEOs, imagine how it is for the homeless people," McElya said.

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