

[glendalenewspress.com/news/tn-gnp-0209-boyle,0,4484938.story](http://glendalenewspress.com/news/tn-gnp-0209-boyle,0,4484938.story)

# Glendale News Press

## Homeboy with a heart

### Homeboy Industries founder details efforts to minister, provide jobs for region's ex-gang members.

By Megan O'Neil, [megan.oneil@latimes.com](mailto:megan.oneil@latimes.com)

11:56 AM PST, February 8, 2011

Ten months after shedding 330 of its 427 employees, Homebody Industries, the East Los Angeles gang intervention program, is slowly regaining its financial footing, founder Fr. Greg Boyle said during a recent visit to Glendale.

“People from all over the country started to send in funds, so we stabilized ourselves,” Boyle said. “Probably in the first 45 days we got \$3.5 million from all over the country, thanks to the press.”

The organization hired back some of those who were laid off, and is employing about 250 ex-gang members, Boyle said last week. Several Homeboy Industries ventures are also flourishing, including new chips and salsa products that Ralphs began selling late last month.

“We found on Monday that the No. 1 snack in all the 256 Ralphs sold for an entire week was Homeboy Chips,” Boyle said.

The Jesuit priest drew a standing-room-only crowd Thursday to Incarnation Catholic Church, where he shared excerpts from his new book, “Tattoos on the Heart.” It chronicles the more than two decades he has spent working with the poor in Boyle Heights.

“The whole idea of Catholicism is we are shaping this world in a place of peace, justice and love, and there is no better guy than Father Greg to teach us to do that,” said Dominic Pontrelli, a member of Incarnation’s Peace and Justice group who helped organize Boyle’s visit.

Boyle began his ministry in the 1980s when he was serving as pastor of Dolores Mission, a Roman Catholic Church nestled amid the Pico Gardens and Aliso Village housing projects. There he founded the Jobs for a Future program, which was designed to help people find sustainable employment.

advertisement

**DAILY CANDY**  
See a new side of LA.  
Get the latest in food, fashion, fun, and exclusive deals.  
**SIGN UP FOR FREE!**

In 1992, he launched his first business venture, Homeboy Bakery, creating a space where ex-gang members could gain work experience and learn to interact with former enemies.

The Homeboy enterprise has since expanded to include several new divisions, including a shirt printing business, Homegirl Café and the Homeboy mobile food truck. The nonprofit serves about 12,000 people each year.

It includes a wide range of social services, including tattoo removal, parenting classes and drug counseling, as well as professional development opportunities such as job placement and solar panel installation training.

Much of the organization is built around a single mantra: Nothing stops a bullet like a job.

“There is an idea that has taken root in the world; it is at the root of all that is wrong with it and the idea would be this — that there just might be lives out there that matter less than other lives,” Boyle said. “So how do we stand against that idea?”

Homeboy Industries was hit hard by the recession. In May, Boyle announced he would lay off 330 employees because of a \$5-million budget shortfall. He authored “Tattoos on the Heart” partly to provide a new revenue stream, Boyle said.

But while the financial success of Homeboy Industries is important, even more important are the therapeutic opportunities that Homeboy Industries businesses provide for employees, Boyle said.

“The real world believes in the survival of the fittest, and I believe in the survival of the un-fittest,” he said. “I don’t want to morph ourselves into a place that works with the most likely to succeed, and thereby abandons the least likely to succeed.”

Boyle turns 57 in May, and after a bout with leukemia in 2003, he is in good health. He said he has no plans to retire.

He is encouraged by the drop in gang-related violence, Boyle said, the result of hard work by numerous stakeholders, including business, civic and religious leaders.

“Whatever we are doing as a community is working,” Boyle said. “We are at 1967 homicide levels, and we have cut gang-related homicides in half and half again — that is extraordinary. And I always look to the fact that our first 10 years was marked most notably by death threats, bomb threats and hate mail. And the last 10 years have been nothing of the kind.”