

## Mission deserving of community support

It was with great enthusiasm that I read the article in Saturday, June 26, on the efforts of DuWayne Sipper to develop a local mission to help the truly needy and destitute.

I first met DuWayne through his place of employment, Fan World and Lighting. He has been to my home several times on installations, and I have found him to be a very genteel young man. He has spoken to me several times of his goal to start this mission. He is deeply committed to this goal.

Citrus County has often shown itself to be a loving and caring community, with many wonderful businesses and individuals coming to the aid of the less fortunate. This mission should be an extension of every single church in Citrus County, regardless of denomination. This mission is already taking important steps to ensure that the truly needy are helped, as it is an unfortunately a sign of the times that people would even steal from the poor. He has addressed this issue very effectively with the establishing of a "registry" and background check on all that apply for help. This can go miles in ensuring that donated funds are correctly applied. This idea will have a very strong backing of all churches, who at one time or another have been taken advantage of.

All county organizations that daily deal with those in need, would now have a reliable arm of the whole community to refer them to.

Any group or organization who really wanted to help the poor and needy could do so through this organization. Supermarkets could donate just out of date items; Restaurants can donate food that would normally be thrown out at day's end to the Christian mission. Clothing, furniture, canned goods, all

could be recycled for re-use by the needy.

All DuWayne is asking for is \$20 from the county's churches. Surely much more is spent on the un-needy. How can any church refuse this and not do even more, knowing this will go to those in need?

We need the entire county to get behind this. All of the local businesses that have done so much for the needy need to really back this. Mike Crippen, Scott Adams who have been so generous in the past, the Rotary, the Masons, the Knights of Columbus, the Irish Club, the Italian American Club, the Elks, the Moose, the VFW all can surely support this worthy endeavor.

It's an idea whose time has come, run by a most sincere and worthy group of individuals.

I call upon the community leaders, organizations, and churches of all faiths to support Path of Citrus County as they embark on road of God's work. Supported by all of us, by all the people who care about our fellow man, how can they fail?

**David F. Becker Sr.**  
Homosassa

## OPINIONS INVITED

### The opinions expressed in

Chronicle editorials are the opinions of the editorial board of the newspaper.

**Viewpoints depicted in political cartoons, columns or letters** do not necessarily represent the opinion of the editorial board.

**Groups or individuals** are invited to express their opinions in a letter to the editor. Persons wishing to address the editorial board, which meets weekly, should call Ken Melton or Charlie Brennan at (352) 563-5660.

**All letters must be signed** and include a phone number. Names will be printed. Phone numbers won't be published or given out. We reserve the right to edit letters for length, libel, fairness or good taste. Letters more than 350 words long may be returned to sender. Send letters to: The Editor, 1624 N. Meadowcrest Blvd., Crystal River, Fla. 34429. Or, fax to (352) 563-3280.

# Center would nourish souls

■ A Christian group awaits zoning approval to build a facility that offers Bible-based treatment.

By **JIM ROSS**  
Times Staff Writer

LECANTO — A Christian group is seeking county permission to build what it calls a residential spiritual treatment center.

The group, known as the Path of Citrus County, has an option to buy 20 acres off Menasha Street, which is just west of County Road 490 and south of State Road 44.

The Path will exercise its purchase option only if the Planning and Development Review Board grants a conditional use that would allow the

For information about the Path of Citrus County Christian group, call 341-0551.

Path to build and operate a 30-bed facility on that land.

The property is zoned for low-density residential development. A treatment center is a permitted use in such areas only if the board approves.

The board is scheduled to consider that matter during its June 15 meeting. The meeting will begin at 9 a.m. at the Lecanto Government Building, 3600 W Sovereign Path. The matter will not go to the County Commission.

County staff was completing its report on the application this week and had not yet decided to recom-

mend approval or denial. Two residents with land near the site have formally registered disapproval of the plan, but a third has signaled approval.

DuWayne Sipper, 38, of Hernando is executive director of the project. The Path is a nonprofit, interdenominational group.

Sipper said the center will be a place where people can live — long term, if necessary — and receive intensive, Bible-based, Christian spiritual care.

Men, women and children will be welcome. All residents will have a curfew. They will work in the community or pursue their educations, if they are able. They will study the Bible and pray.

Sipper was careful to say the facil-

Please see **CENTER** Page 5



Times photo — RON THOMPSON

DuWayne Sipper of the Path of Citrus County stands on the 20 acres off CR 490 on which the Christian group wants to build a spiritual treatment center.

# Center

from Page 1

ity will not be a homeless shelter. Rather, it will provide spiritual help to the people who live here, or come here, and need physical and religious assistance.

Stuart Green, chairman of the Path's board of directors, noted that a shelter takes people in for a night or two, helps meet their immediate needs, then sends them off. The Path intends to do more, hoping its clients "get a chance to get a fresh start on life."

Citrus is home to dozens of churches, many of which need a place to send people who have spiritual needs, Sipper said. Then there is the Citrus County jail, which releases many former inmates each week.

"With those kind of numbers," Sipper said, "we'll be swamped" with referrals.

The Path has worked for sever-

al years trying to establish this kind of facility, Sipper said. Sipper made headlines three years ago when he unsuccessfully petitioned the county to turn the old jail in downtown Inverness into a shelter for the poor and homeless.

The Path is part of the International Union of Gospel Missions, based in Kansas City.

"Basically there are more than 200 other missions that have joined and who are basically doing what we want to do. We wanted to get the mentoring from those who have already been there and done it," Sipper told the *Citrus Times* last year.

The Menasha Street site is fairly remote. Still, Sipper said he would understand why nearby residents would have concerns, especially about safety.

"It's just a fear of the unknown," Sipper said.

Sipper planned to meet with Sheriff Jeff Dawsy to discuss the project. Sipper also noted that resi-

dents, while not in a locked-down facility, will be well supervised and working "under a very tight schedule."

"The people we're trying to work with are . . . people that want to change their lives," Sipper said.

Green, the board chairman, said some people who live near the proposed site have raised concerns. In the long run, however, Green said he thought the facility would be positive for all Citrus County.

"The people that we would be helping are out in the community right now," he noted. "And they're more of a threat to the county when they are not receiving any help."

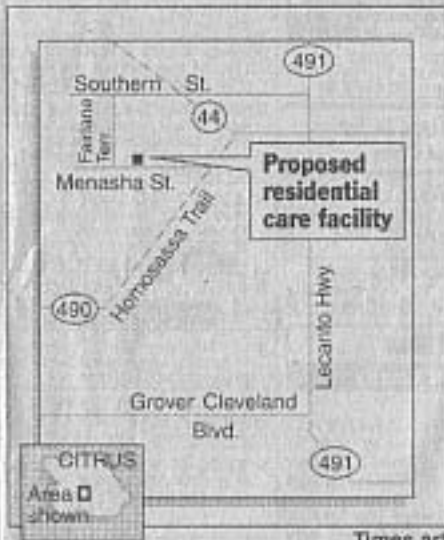
The Path's efforts to establish this center received a boost in 1999, when someone donated land in Ozello. The group sold that property and is using the money to finance the Lecanto land purchase and subsequent construction.

Of course, the Path needs more

money to get the center built and to maintain an operating budget. The group plans to open a thrift store and start a newsletter to help generate revenue.

Prayer and faith have gotten them this far, Sipper said.

"There's no reason to stop that step of faith," Sipper said.



# Shelter in time of storm

*Ministry delivers through tough times*

NANCY KENNEDY  
*Chronicle*

Although their path has taken a few twists since their ministry journey began nearly six years ago, DuWayne Sipper, executive director of The Path, says they are one step closer to reaching their destination.

The Path, a rescue shelter ministry, recently purchased and opened two houses in Beverly Hills that will serve as rescue homes for people in need of shelter.

As Sipper explained, "The goal of this ministry is still and always has been to build a hurricane-resistant shelter in the center of the county. This is just one step closer to our mandate from God, and that's to rescue those in need. People ask us all the time, 'Oh, you rescue animals?' Not animals — we rescue people! That's who God wants us to rescue."

Sipper is careful not to use the word "homeless" when he talks about the rescue ministry, because he says society considers it a derogatory word. It puts people into categories and subjects them to the judgments of others.



MATTHEW BECK/Chronicle

The Path of Citrus County, Inc. recently opened two rescue missions in Beverly Hills. Currently, three women and a baby live in the ladies' home, including expectant mother Kristina Harris, left, and mission overseer Violet O'Neill. Above, the two share with a Bible study Monday morning.

"We need to understand that some people just need help, and that's what we're here for," he says. He points out that people find themselves in need for a variety of reasons: house fires, sinkholes, mobile home park residents who find themselves evicted. Being in need could happen to anyone.

And that's what has always driven Sipper and the other board members — to rescue those in need.

Even so, Sipper says their path has taken a few twists and hit a few roadblocks. They've found property when they didn't have funds, then hit zoning obstacles when they did. Two years ago, the Pirate's Cove in Ozello was donated to them. Part of the proceeds went to purchase the current two houses, and they still have money left over — but not enough to build a large shelter.

Last year, The Path opened a thrift store in Inverness as a means of raising building funds. Although it failed at that, it succeeded in raising community awareness. Sipper says thousands who had never heard of The Path came in and out of the store. It helped launch their monthly newsletter, and garnered them valuable publicity.

However, after a year "in busi-



The rescue missions sit side by side. The ladies occupy the home on the right, and the three men live in the house at left.

ness." The Path has closed its thrift store doors so they can concentrate on their true mission, to rescue those in need.

"God blessed the thrift store, but it wasn't our called ministry. Actually, the store took me away from what God called me to do, but he covered my mistake," Sipper says.

He went on to say that God uses

everything in the lives of his people, including their straying from their called path. As a result of running a thrift store, he learned how to conduct garage sales, something the ministry plans to use to raise funds.

Not only that, almost all of the furnishings in both shelter houses came from donations to the thrift store.

"Here's where God's hand is provi-

### THE PATH NEEDS:

- A licensed electrician to put in the breaker panel in the women's home.
- Carpenters to build the two walls after the contractor gets the permit.
- Someone to update the agency's Web page.
- Jobs and mentors or people to train and help residents get diplomas and GEDs.
- Quality household and personal goods donations that can be sold.

For information, call DuWayne Sipper at 746-6746, or visit the Web site: [www.pathofcitrus.org](http://www.pathofcitrus.org).

dential over everything," he says. "Talk about timing — it was absolutely perfect." As was finding an overseer for the women's house. Violet O'Neill, once in crisis and need herself, serves as a peer-housemother. Currently, two other women and a baby reside in the house with her.