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Chronicle

CITRUS

COUNTY

CRYSTAL RIVER,
FLORIDA 34429

INVERNESS,
FLORIDA 34450

92

Weather

Today's forecast calls for partly cloudy skies with a 40 percent chance showers.



Complete forecast/2A

73

NBA Finals

The Los Angeles Lakers, up two games but playing without Kobe Bryant, went into Market Square Arena to take on the Pacers in Game 3 of the NBA Finals on Sunday/1B

Lecanto homeless shelter proposed

Group plans Bible-based program; Adjacent residents oppose project

By Jim Hunter
Staff writer

The non-profit group The Path of Citrus County wants to create a residential care shelter on 20 acres in Lecanto.

DuWayne Sipper, who would be the executive director of the center, said the shelter is badly needed and its resident program would be Bible-based and very

structured.

The 9,000-square-foot building that the group would build would initially house about 30 people. Sipper said the group has funding and a preliminary site plan.

Some of the neighbors near the Menasha Street site, however, are wary of some of the kinds of people they feel might be at the shelter and don't want to see it. The issue will come in front of the

county's Planning and Development Review Board this coming Thursday when the proponents ask for a conditional-use permit.

The county planning staff has recommended approval, but with 12 conditions. One of the major conditions, said Community Development Director Chuck Dixon, was that the property will need a paved road from County Road 490 into the property, which can be expensive. He said from the land-use point of view, the shelter could be a compatible use with the current zoning.

But some opponents have started a petition against the shelter, and Sipper

recently put out a press release to "silence the rumors" about the proposed facility.

Sipper said there is an overwhelming need for the center because there is no shelter in the county for people who lose their homes or for some reason have no place to go.

The county's assistant director of Housing Services, Joe Monroe, said Sipper is right on that part. Monroe said there simply is no shelter in the county. The closest is the Salvation Army shelter in Ocala, he said.

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Although his office has to remain neutral regarding specific proposals, he said of the issue, "There certainly is a need in Citrus County," and he wrote Sipper a letter saying there was a need for facilities such as the one being proposed.

Monroe said he knows firsthand the need for emergency shelter, as the Housing Division gets five to 10 calls a week from people who have lost their place to live for one reason or another.

Now they are referred to an Ocala shelter, he said, but within a few days they are returned to the county. He said Sipper's group seems to be the first to have approached such a project in the appropriate fashion with the means to start one.

Sipper said the group has the money for the shelter through the donation of Pirate's Cove in Ozello from the former owner, which The Path sold for more than \$100,000.

As to the clients who would be at the shelter, the need could range from someone losing their house to fire to a single mother who couldn't pay her rent and was evicted, to an abused wife with teen-agers, to someone getting out of jail who truly wanted to change his ways.

Sipper said the center will have zero tolerance for drugs or alcohol and will have strict rules of behavior. Those who don't abide by the rules will go, he said.

The idea of having ex-convicts at

the shelter — even those who say they have changed their ways — doesn't sit well with neighbors, who have initiated a petition against the center.

Beverly Swanson, for example, lives in nearby Crystal Glen and said her subdivision already has enough potentially problematic facilities nearby with the Cypress Creek center for youthful offenders, the county jail, and now the Brown Schools of Florida facility for emotionally disturbed children and adolescents, located just up County Road 491.

"There is such a heavy concentration of this sort of facility on three sides of me," she said. "This used to be such a nice, safe comfortable area. ... It's just too close."

She felt there are other places the shelter could be located that make more sense.

Resident Andrew Alesi echoed those sentiments. "I'm upset. I am vehemently opposed. I came to this area for the quality."

He said there were enough facilities nearby. "To me, this is downgrading the area. Why more to this area? Why can't they put it somewhere else?"

Crystal Glen resident Derek Thorne said, "A center like this is a good thing but not in this location." He said he knew it sounded like the not-in-my-back-yard syndrome but that the center would just be too close to the residential community of 50 to 60 houses, which has children.

Sipper said the goal of the shelter would be to provide security for everyone, not to pose a threat to anyone. He said the center is considering a "no walk" policy, meaning that no one simply walks

DuWayne Sipper said the center will have

zero tolerance for drugs or alcohol

and will have strict rules of behavior. Those who

don't abide by the rules will go, he said.

away from the center. They would be transported by the center's van.

And while there will be meals at the facility, it wouldn't be a kitchen facility where people come to be fed, he said.

Anyone who stayed for any length of time would agree to the program and would participate in Bible study and would go to church. If they didn't have a job they would have to be looking for one. One of the goals would be to get them training if needed and, Sipper said, computer training could be offered at the site, with maybe some GED or other programs offered.

Persons staying at the shelter would also have to do chores. Sipper he said he would not be surprised if there were not as many, if not more, women — and some accompanying children — as there were men in the dorm-like shelter, which would be divided with separate areas for males and females.

As to the shelter being a magnet for what he called "the wrong element," Sipper said, "That's not the case."

He said it would not be a "revolving-door shelter" but it would be there to help people regain their independence. He said the center would do criminal background checks.

The board of directors hopes to open a thrift shop and would use a newsletter to solicit donations. It would also pursue grants and foundation funding, he said.

Directors of The Path of Citrus County are: Stuart Green, Jeff Hollis, Diane Fudge, Thomas Upton and two pastors, George Dehn and Rick Welshans.

Monroe said it would be very expensive for government to provide such a shelter. To get the grants to operate it, government would have to provide support services such as dining, education and job training, which would be expensive and practically create a whole department.

On the other hand, he said, the need is already there and will only grow more acute.

Sipper said the group decided to build after realizing that it would cost about the same to fix up an existing building.

The idea of running such a shelter came to him when, after coming to the county, he decided he should volunteer to work at a homeless shelter and found there was none. The more he thought about it, the more certain he was

that that was God's calling for him, he said.

The Path had wanted to establish a half-way house for some years, he said, but did not have a director for such a facility.

Now, he said, both dreams can be realized.

"I hope that people understand that the good heavily outweighs the bad," he said.

Sipper, 38, came to Citrus about four years ago after pursuing a number of vocations. Originally from Wisconsin, he lived in South Florida before coming here.

Originally trained in mechanical design and drafting, he has driven limos in Palm Beach, worked as a DJ and an electrical worker and worked for American Conveyor, among other jobs.

His background is helping him to design the shelter, he said.

Sipper said the facility would be

an ideal place for a hurricane shelter for the county and could be a center for operations in such an emergency.

While he had never directed a shelter before, he said he has been preparing for the past few years and has worked at five different missions to get experience. He recently took part in mission training in Orlando.

The Path is a member of the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions and because of that he can get such training and utilize the experience of his mentor in the association's program.

The PDRB meets Thursday in Room 166 of the Lecanto Government Building at 9 p.m.

The Lecanto Government building is on Sovereign Path, off of County Road 491 south of its intersection with State Road 44.

*A busload of
Christian men
ventured from
Citrus County to
Washington, D.C.,
to join in the
Promise Keepers
rally*

Faith fuels journey

By Michael Barber
Staff writer

IT BEGAN WITH a simple prayer in an Inverness parking lot, hit its crescendo amid a multitude of men in the middle of the world's most powerful city, and concluded with a loving homecoming right where it had begun.

It was quite a trip.

It was the journey of 34 men from the Citrus County area who climbed on a bus in the predawn hours of Friday, Oct. 3, for a pilgrimage to the Promise Keepers rally in Washington, D.C. With a few exceptions, the men boarded the bus as strangers. But by the time they returned home, 64 hours later, they departed as brothers.

There was Larry, the ex-football star who now works as a carpenter. There was Charles, the quiet but insightful dentist. There was Kenneth, the 17-year-old high school student searching to experience something new. There was the other Larry, a tough 79-year-old bolt of energy who brought along his 58-year-old son, Tom, and 29 others.

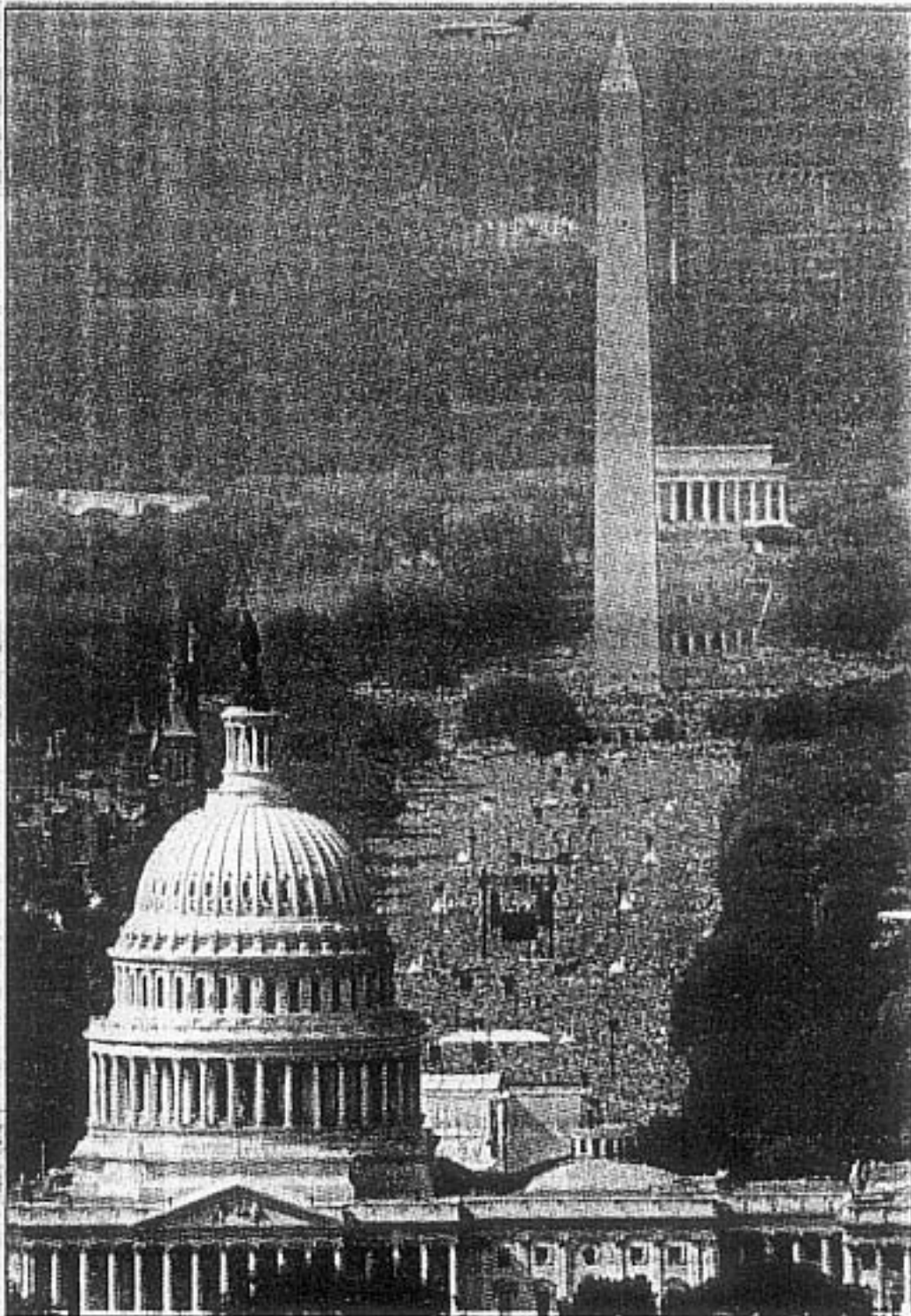
DuWayne Sipper, a gentle and serious 36-year-old, who has devoted his energies to mission work in and around Citrus County, put the trip together. The fact that the trip took place at all required a leap of faith on Sipper's part.

"I sent out letters to every church in the county and received virtually no response," Sipper said. "A week and four days before we were going to leave, I had only eight seats sold. I had to seriously think about canceling, because I was going to have to cover the cost of the trip on my own."

But Sipper didn't panic. He prayed. He prayed with Stefan Butin Bik, one of the bus riders, and Butin Bik convinced him that things would work out.

"I stepped out in faith," Sipper said. "I said, 'Even if I have to pay for it myself, we were going.'"

Know this — Sipper is unemployed. He's been looking for work since the first of the year, and while he's been looking, he's been serving God in a variety of ways. You may remember him as the young man



Associated Press

In a soul-searching quest for spiritual renewal, hundreds of thousands of Christian men pray and sing on The Mall among the great monuments of Washington, D.C., last weekend.



Michael Barber/The Chronicle

A group of 34 Christian males, young and old, traveled from Citrus County to Washington to celebrate their faith.

Why we went to Washington

There was much discussion and speculation in the media as to why the recent Promise Keepers rally drew so many men to Washington, D.C. On the bus ride to Washington, men from Citrus County and the surrounding area shared their individual reasons for attending what has been billed as the largest Christian gathering in the history of our nation:

Jim Elliott, 33, Homocasson, teacher: "Self-evaluation. Being open to the role of Christianity in my life."

Charles Thomas, 44, Lecanto, dentist: "I like what Promise Keepers stands for. I've never known them to lead me wrong. I think we do need to pray for our country and to do it in a

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FUEL

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who wanted to turn the old jail into a shelter for the homeless.

As soon as Sipper gave way to faith, the seats on the bus started filling up. Some local churches paid the way for a few of their men to go and when a plane flight to the rally was canceled at the last moment, Sipper's bus became a welcome alternative.

It took 16 hours to make the trek from the parking lot at the Citrus County Fairgrounds to the heart of Washington. On the way up, the constant hum of the bus' motor was broken by quiet conversations as the men began to share their backgrounds and hopes for the journey with one another.

All along the route, from Florida to Georgia, through the Carolinas and into Virginia, the bus from Citrus County would pass and honk at scores of other charter buses, vans and cars marked with signs indicating they too were on their way to the Promise Keepers rally.

As the bus got closer to the nation's capital, a growing sense of

excitement and enthusiasm enveloped the men.

D.C. at last

Around 10:30 p.m. Friday, the bus rounded a bend on Interstate 95 and suddenly the men saw a sweeping view of Washington's most historic sights. The Washington Monument. The Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials. The Capitol building and the White House.

Since there were no hotel rooms available anywhere near Washington, Sipper had secured a place for the men to sleep at Archbishop Carroll High School, located 5 miles from downtown near one of the toughest sections of the city. The men camped out on the floors of empty classrooms, spreading blankets and sleeping bags on the cold hard tile. No one complained.

In adjoining classrooms, scores of men from Los Angeles, Dallas, Sacramento and other cities bedded down next to one another. Black men shared smiles and stories with white men. Bikers shared prayers and anticipation with accountants. All the men went to sleep believing the next morning would bring the dawn of a glorious day.

only one that believes in Jesus there," the young man from Virginia said.

"I know what you mean," the young man from Texas said. "But God has probably put you in that job for a reason. Maybe you're there to tell somebody else about Jesus."

"That's what is so great about coming here today," one of the Kentuckians said. "It's so great to know that there are this many men out there who love Jesus."

That's what the media and political pundits covering the rally couldn't understand. Politics, fighting feminism and homophobia were not even blips on the radar screen to the great majority of men gathered on The Mall. As a group, they were there for one primary purpose: To stand together and proclaim without shame that they believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

That is also what made this gathering different from any other massive demonstration in the history of Washington. The men on The Mall weren't there to place blame on anyone else, they were there to accept blame. They weren't there to demand a solution, they were there to offer a

What you didn't see on TV

The rally didn't officially start until noon, but by 7 a.m. Saturday Washington's subways were filling up with Promise Keepers heading to the national Mall from all directions. As packed trains passed by, waiting men on the platforms cheered and waved at the men moving downtown.

By 9:30 a.m., when the group of men from Citrus County reached The Mall where the rally was to be held, the mile of grass between the Capitol building and the Washington Monument was already filled. The men stared with awe at the mass of men, humbled by the enormity of the humanity present.

While some of the Citrus County contingent found a spot and settled in for the day, others roamed around soaking in a variety of experiences.

Like the group of over a thousand men who spontaneously broke into "Amazing Grace" inside the Lincoln Memorial. The powerful words, "I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see," echoed off the great statue and cascaded down over the very

solution. A spiritual solution.

The day was long and the sun was draining. Access to food and other facilities was difficult. No one complained.

The Ultimate Welcome

Thirty-four weary men rode the bus home on Sunday. Somewhere in South Carolina, they held their own small church service led by the Rev. James Murray of Crystal River. Along the way, the men discussed ways they could serve their families, churches and communities better.

When the bus pulled back into the parking lot in Inverness, just after 10 p.m. Sunday, a good-sized group of wives, children and loved ones were waiting. When the bus came to a stop, the waiting group showered the men with waves of applause. Then the men piled off of the bus and fell into loving embraces.

It was the ultimate welcome home and the ultimate confirmation that the trip had reached those who were willing to be touched. It was also the ultimate sign that, in many ways, the most important journey was just beginning.

steps where Martin Luther King Jr. gave his, "I Have a Dream" speech.

When the group finished the final verse: "When we've been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to see God's praise, then when we first begun," applause and amens swept down the stairs and rippled down both sides of the famous reflecting pool.

To the side of the reflecting pool, men stood in line for 45 minutes to get to a restroom. In one line, there were two black men from Kentucky who had flown up that morning, a young white man from Texas who had ridden 24 hours on a bus to be there, a man from Florida who had ridden 16 hours on a bus and a young black man and his son who had driven up that morning from nearby in Virginia.

As the men stood there in line, no one mentioned sports, or women, or politics, or any of the things that men usually talk about when they're gathered with other men. The men stood there in line and talked about Jesus. It seemed to be that way everywhere in the crowd.

"Sometimes I feel like I'm so alone at work, because I'm the

KEEPERS

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visible way."

James Murray, 37, Crystal River, pastor: "I strongly believe in the concept of unified repentance. According to Biblical revivals, it's always been an initial move in bringing about revival to a nation, community or church."

John Sipes, 47, Crystal River, electronics: "To come together in repentance with others in our capital."

John Sipes Jr., 10, Crystal River, student: "Because I want to experience the realness of God."

Reginald Lloyd-Jones, 42, Homosassa, self-employed: "I believe it is something ordained by God to bring people back to Himself."

Anthony Longshore, 16, Lecanto, Student: "I just wanted to be a part of a big historical event, and I can't wait to see what God's going to do."

Kenneth Perciful, 17, Lecanto, student: "My church asked me if I wanted to go. I said yes. I wanted to experience something new."

Larry Upton, 79, Homosassa Springs, retired: "This will be my seventh time at Promise Keepers in four years. I think prayer can change our country. Without God, man is unfulfilled."

Larry Upton, 58, Crystal River, Florida Power: "I was in Jacksonville last year at a Promise Keepers meeting and (Bill) McCartney asked people who were serious about going to Washington to stand up. I stood up. Plus, my dad was going and we wanted to go together."

Thomas Hibbard, 32, Inverness, Emergency One: "I wanted to go because I know it's ordained by God and I know he has a reason for me to be there. I just enrolled in a Bible college and I'm going into the ministry."

Joe Deddo, 37, Inverness, Florida Power: "I brought my son along. I want to strengthen my Christian walk and show that there are men out there willing to be an example."

Brad Deddo, 11, Inverness, student: "It's my first time to go. I figured it would be fun and so far it

is."

Joe Pisciotta, 43, Inverness, video productions: "My wife suggested it to me. I've never been to anything like this, so I want to see how it will affect me. I want to feel what everyone else is feeling."

Dan Callahan, 33, Inglis, student: "I'm just hoping to learn more for my family, I have six kids. I want to show them that I'm standing up for God. I want to set a good example."

Fred Keiser, 42, Inglis, sign builder: "I wanted to be a part of this good example we're setting and to pray for the nation."

Michael Barber, 38, Inverness, reporter: "I wanted my wife to be able to say to my young sons, 'See all those men out there standing up for God, your daddy is right there in the middle of them.'"

Stefan Butin Bik, 27, Lecanto, business owner: "Just to be a part of repentance to God and to show the nation that there are still Christian men willing to stand up for what's right in God's eyes."

Jack Lee, 42, Dunnellon, Power: "I brought my son to let him know that there are people who will stand up for God. And to get more into the word."

Ron Faulk, 47, Leesburg, church worker: "I need the Lord to restore some relationships."

Carl Cooper, 28, Leesburg, church worker: "To pray for the unsaved."

Josh Spraul, 17, Crystal River, Student: "To learn what God's purpose is for me. To learn how he wants me to raise my kids."

Fred Markett, 68, Reddick, self-employed: "Basically, I want to stand up and be counted and to praise the Lord."

DuWayne Sipper, 36, Hernando, missions: "Seeking to get closer to God. If I try to make it more complicated than that, it loses its meaning."

Leroy Van Antwerp, 65, Crystal River, retired: "To repent and seek the face of God with my fellow Americans, because if we do, He says He will heal our land."

Mark Aller, 43, Inverness, business owner: "There's something inside of me that needs to go. I think it's a divine appointment to go up there and I think God is going to honor that."