

# Shelter helps man find

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## the way home

David Youther was in bad shape when he came to Citrus County.

He left Tampa on foot to make his way back to his hometown in Rhea County, Tenn.

Youther, 39, tried to hitchhike on the ramps along I-75, but state troopers insisted that he stick to U.S. 41, and rides weren't plentiful.

"It took me eight days to get from Tampa to here," Youther said. "I slept several nights on the side of the road. It's a long ways. When you start getting blisters on your feet, you start to slow down."

Along the way, a spinal injury flared up and the wound started draining, leaving him with a still-red sore at the base of a scar. He said he also felt some pain in his back, but he thought it was just muscle aches from walking.

"I kept telling myself it will go away in a day or two," Youther said.

He isn't clear on the details, but Youther said on the eighth day of his journey, the last thing he remembers is waiting for a traffic light to turn red, and then he must have passed out along the road.

Youther doesn't know if a pedestrian saw him and reported it, but an ambulance picked him up and took him to Citrus Memorial Hospital.

Youther said he had "a touch" of pneumonia. When he told a hospital worker his situation, someone at the hospital contacted The Path of Citrus County, a faith-based homeless shelter in Beverly Hills. DuWayne Sipper, the shelter's executive director, agreed to let Youther stay there to recover.

The hospital paid for a taxi to take him to the shelter.

"They was real nice to me," Youther said.



BRIAN LaPETER/Chronicle

David Youther recently spent time at The Path, a homeless shelter in Beverly Hills, before returning to his hometown in Tennessee. After an unsuccessful job search in Tampa, a medical problem landed him in Citrus Memorial Hospital with no money or place to stay.

When he first arrived at the shelter, Youther was still recovering.

"He looked a little ragged when he got here," Sipper said.

"I wouldn't have given you a nickel for me," Youther said.

Sipper said when Youther arrived, he had a prescription for medication from the hospital. While the shelter couldn't afford to fill the entire prescription, Sipper said there was enough money to buy medication to last Youther a few days.

Though he planned to stay at the shelter only two days, Youther liked the people he met there, and stayed for a week.

He considered staying in the county if he could find a good local job, or at least working long enough to earn bus fare back to Tennessee.

Youther came to Florida with a buddy a few months ago to work construction jobs. He said his friend left, taking Youther's tools and money, leaving him without transportation.

He left Dayton, Tenn., after his father died in October. He had been living

with his father since he was laid off at a furniture factory. After that, he did landscaping work on the side, but as the weather cooled, the work slowed.

"When it gets cold in Tennessee, jobs are really scarce," Youther said.

That's why Youther and his friend packed up and came to Florida.

He didn't want to return to Tennessee and stay with family. Youther said his sister was battling cancer and he didn't want to burden her family, "because they got enough grief already."

But after an unsuccessful job search, Youther decided to go back home. Sipper said Youther planned to stay with a brother until he can find a job.

"That's his home ground," Sipper said. "He knows how to get work up there."

Last week, Sipper paid for Youther's

bus fare home. Sipper hasn't heard from him yet.

During his stay at the shelter, Sipper said Youther helped out. If other shelter residents weren't busy, Sipper said Youther put them to work, too.

"He was pretty much like a sergeant," Sipper said. "He got them all riled up and went back there and did the jobs."

"He got rest, but he was one of those guys that had to work. He wouldn't sit still. He went into both of our garages and totally revamped them."

Youther enlisted the aid of another shelter resident and installed insulation in the new addition to the women's shelter. He also scrubbed the kitchen floor on his hands and knees.

"He was a worker," Sipper said. "When God sends me workers, I want to hold onto them."