

Ready for a fresh spin



DuWayne Sipper spray paints an attention-getting fan outside Fan World & Lighting on State Road 44 west of Inverness Tuesday morning. The fan needs to be repainted about once a year, Sipper said, and is used to draw the attention of passing motorists. Times photo — RON THOMPSON

Turn old jail into shelter,

advocate urges

■ A Church of the Nazarene parishioner says the old Citrus County Jail is just the place for a soup kitchen and homeless shelter.

By IAN JAMES
Times Staff Writer

INVERNESS — Duwayne Sipper carries himself like a man on a mission.

His collar is buttoned to the top button, he carries a note pad filled with scrawl, and he talks briskly about his idea of opening Citrus County's only homeless shelter.

His ideal location: the old county jail in downtown Inverness.

Although the County Commission has decided to tear down the old jail, Sipper is convinced he could clean out the 30-year-old building and use it to house and feed the poor.

He said he has some powerful help on his side.

"God put this thing on my heart to do

something about it," he said. "I'm extremely confident that whatever is necessary, we can do."

At 35, Sipper is entering a new phase of his life. He moved to Citrus County last year and into his father's mobile home, leaving behind another lifestyle in Palm Beach County, where for the past seven years he had driven limousines, as he puts it, "for rich and famous people."

Something had been missing, Sipper said — a spiritual dimension. So, he said he found God, "got saved," and moved to Hernando, where he now attends Church of the Nazarene.

The idea for the homeless shelter sprouted earlier this year after he found that the county has no such facility. Through discussions with dozens of church leaders, Sipper discovered that several churches offer soup kitchens one meal a week and some also put up homeless people temporarily in local motels.

Food pantries offer enough of a boost for some people, but others in search of a place to sleep are sent away to long-term shelters in

Marion and Pasco counties.

To those who might say they don't see anyone sleeping on Citrus County's streets, Sipper said it is necessary to look a little closer.

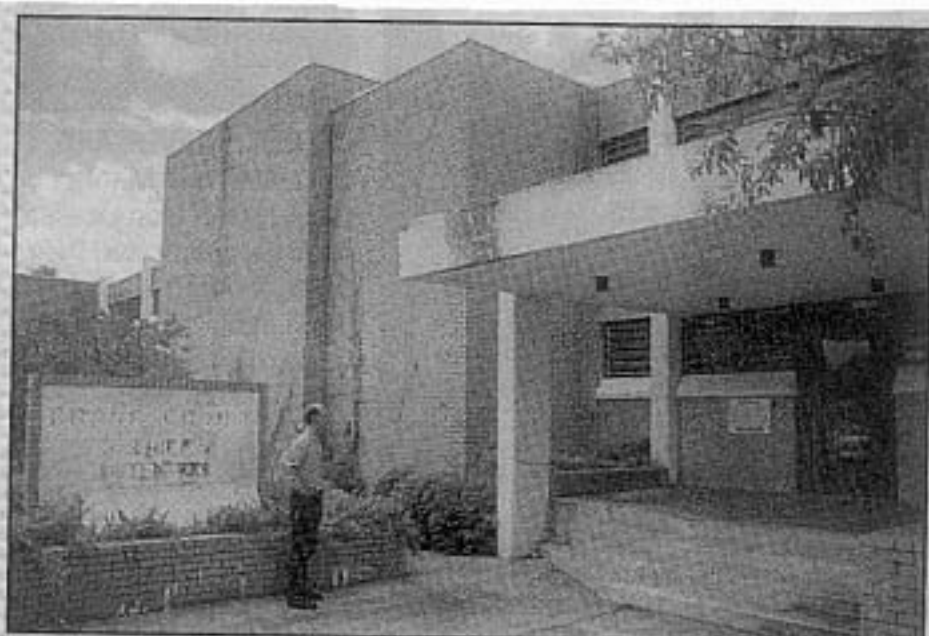
The homeless here, he said, can seem invisible. They may be behind on rent, addicted to alcohol or drugs, or mentally ill. In contrast to the stereotypical urban street people, Sipper said in rural areas these people might better be described as the "couch homeless."

To sleep, he said they may borrow a neighbor's couch or floor, use a parked car or camp in the Withlacoochee State Forest, sometimes for a short time.

Sipper uses figures from the state Department of Children and Families for support. Based on a formula calculating the number of homeless at just over 0.004 percent of a county's population, the state estimated there were 433 homeless people in Citrus County on an average day last year.

Pointing to that number — 433 — printed on a piece of paper, Sipper said, "What is Citrus County doing about it?"

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Times photo — STEVE HASEL

Duwayne Sipper, 35, looks over the old Citrus County Jail on Wednesday. He says it could be used to house a much-needed soup kitchen and shelter and should not be demolished.

Even after talking with Sipper about his idea, Commissioner Vicki Phillips said she remains convinced that the building should be knocked down.

"I'm not keen on the idea of anyone going into that building and using it for any reason," she said. "I think it would just be a potential health hazard."

Phillips said she encouraged Sipper to bring his idea before the commission later this month. But, she said, "I don't believe my position's going to change."

Sipper, still hopeful, said he plans to check any previous air tests of the building to see what needs to be done to make it safe. "If it's just mildew, I'm not worried about that," he said.

Sipper has never walked inside the dank halls of the old jail, but on a stroll around the building this week, he pointed to its fortresslike walls and said, "This building is sound."

A moment later, as if he realized the odds are against him, he said, "Even if this building falls through, it's still going to happen."

— Anyone interested in donating to Sipper's homeless shelter project can call him at 341-0554.

County doing with them? Where are they going? We're shipping them out, or we're hiding them."

"It may look like I'm after a ghost population, but I'm not," he said. "They're here."

They're just squeezing by, he said, hanging on, but occasionally slipping.

Sipper knows the feeling. In his early 20s, as a community college dropout in Miami, he bounced from job to job. For a while it was working with steel in a conveyor-belt factory. Then it was delivering pizza. But the money was barely enough.

"There were many times when my rent was overdue and I'd have to eat bologna sandwiches to keep up," he said. "I was one step away from being homeless myself."

With an estimated 12.6 percent of Citrus County residents living below the government-set poverty line as of last year, a considerable segment of the population is in a similar situation.

Not everyone thinks the county needs a homeless shelter, though. "If there's a problem in Citrus

County Commission Chairman Jim Fowler.

County workers who enter the building wear gas masks to guard against possible effects of mold and bacteria.

"There's a lot of bad stuff in there," Fowler said.

Fowler also said the building lags behind current building codes and would require expensive work to use it again.

Taking these factors into account, county commissioners have set aside \$75,000 to tear down the jail by the end of the year. On Thursday, county workers led contractors interested in bidding on the demolition on a tour through the facility.

What the jail property will be used for remains undecided, but one St. Petersburg real estate broker has contacted the county to ask about buying the land for retail development. Commissioners also have discussed using the property for a new county building or for

Jail demolition to begin

By Earle Kimel
Staff writer

Demolition of the old Citrus County jail in downtown Inverness will start Aug. 11.

That's the word from Citrus County Public Works Director Ken Saunders, who spoke to Jeff Meigs, project manager for Kimmins Contracting Corp. Thursday.

Kimmins will be working on a six-day schedule.

"I gave them permission to work Saturdays," Saunders said.

The contract calls for demolition to be completed by Sept. 10.

Kimmins will remove anything that's salvageable first, then the building will be torn down by heavy equipment, and not explosives.

Citrus County Commissioners awarded Kimmins the contract to demolish the old jail earlier this month, for \$47,900. At that time, board members also voiced a concern that tuberculosis spores or other diseases locked in the old jail and festering since its close would escape during demoli-

tion.

In a July 28 memo to the county commission, Saunders said Citrus County Public Health Unit Director Marybeth Nayfield said that will not be a problem.

Nayfield made her finding after contacting the Tuberculosis Control Center in Tallahassee.

The tuberculosis fears were raised, Nayfield said, because some of the inmates five years ago may have had active TB.

"I called the state, they said there was absolutely no threat of tuberculosis," Nayfield said.

The only way it's possible to catch the disease, Nayfield said, is if air was breathed in after an infected person breathed out the spores either through talking or coughing.

"They have to be in the air, in the room, with the patient," she added. "Five years later, there isn't going to be anything viable."

The same holds true for other possible diseases as a result from the air quality in the building, Nayfield also said.

Kimmins workers will wear

masks on site, Saunders said, but for dust protection.

Before deciding to tear down the old jail, located in downtown Inverness near the Old Courthouse, the commission considered several requests to use the building. The most recent came from DuWayne Sipper, a 35-year-old Hernando man who had hoped to use the building as a Christian outreach center.

The commissioners also considered converting the building to records storage but feared that the costs both for cleanup and renovation for Americans With Disabilities Act compliance would be prohibitive.

For now, there is no plan to use the jail land other than possibly as a parking lot. County Administrator Gary Kuhl is currently working with the judiciary and constitutional officers on a long-term solution for space needs in downtown Inverness.

If the county did not add on to the current courthouse, it could construct another building on the old jail site.

Personal water craft controls needed

THE PERCENTAGE OF accidents that happen with personal water craft is unbelievable. Almost 40 percent of all boating accidents are from personal water craft. They absolutely must be put into an area sooner or later that is separate from all other boats and all other people. They're just too darn dangerous ...

Park names confusing

I'd sure like to know why there's two Bicentennial Parks in Crystal River. I read about the activities taking place in Bicentennial Park and every time I drive by the City Hall, I see a sign there that says "Bicentennial Park." By the way, where is Little Springs Park? Seems like the park names are awful confusing. The city should take action to get that fixed.

Little Springs Park is right by Crystal River City Hall.

Name deputy please

I have completed reading about the

arrest of the Mosquito Control driver, who continually has his name mentioned in the article by news editor Mike Wright. I do not see in any article at any place, the name or the position of the deputy who made the incorrect arrest. Why not, Mr. Wright?

Auxiliary Deputy Tim Hitson was fired and Deputy Nancy Suto was suspended for 30 days without pay for the false arrest.

Keep the power on

NASA can go to Mars, but in Inverness, lightning and thunder can knock out power. Our power went off at 5:05 and is out now at 9 o'clock. Our neighbor two doors down has power. Thanks for nothing.

Find use for old jail

This is in regard to the old jail: I just can't see why there isn't some use of the old jail rather than tearing it down, besides paying the cost of tearing it down. There's got to be something that folks in this county can use that old jail for.

been in our paper for repeat offenses. He needs counseling, not to be forced to do his GED. He is unable to comprehend the eighth-grade reading equivalency material.

Jail use makes sense

I think the old jail would be a perfect place to house the homeless and help them re-establish themselves in society. We all need a bit of help now and then and what better place to make a fresh start? What a reward to the old jail to be used for a good cause. I think if all the Chronicle readers called and wrote the county commission and let them know how we feel, it could make a difference. Remember they're in office because of us and our choice is what matters. Our choice should count ...

More coverage please

With all the exciting things going on in this world and also on other planets right now, you mean to tell me that the only thing you could put into the Sound Off column is two dogs' heartworm situations and a few other little items? Give me a break ...

Keep electric chair

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wings to fly and a family to fly with. Why not treat our fellow earthlings fair? Also, it stands to reason a human would be safer if kept in a cage. Please understand the cruelty in both these circumstances. Birds do have feelings, too.

CALL 563-0579

The Chronicle invites you to call "Sounding Off" with your feelings on any subject. You do not need to leave your name. You will have up to 30 seconds, though are asked to be as concise as possible.

Comments will be edited rigorously for length, personal attacks, slander, and good taste. While this does not prohibit criticism of public figures, the editors will cut what they deem libelous or inappropriate.

The recorder will be in service 24 hours a day. If you get a busy signal, call back later.

Opinions expressed are purely those of the callers.