

Ministry finds cash in castoffs



Times photo — STEPHEN J. CODDINGTON

Christopher Watters of Inverness, left, talks with Judie Peterson of Nature Coast Community Church during a yard sale on Glenn Street in Homosassa on Oct. 4. Proceeds from the yard sale went to the Path, a Citrus County ministry for the homeless.

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How to help

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■ A Christian group that provides shelter for the homeless gets its funds by holding yard sales in the community.

By GAIL HOLLENBECK
Times Correspondent

LECANTO It wasn't an ordinary yard sale. It was huge. Not only had members of two church Bible study groups contributed items to be sold, but two huge truckloads of donations were dropped off during the two-day event.

And although it was conducted at a private residence, the sale was for the benefit of the Path of Citrus County, a local ministry that provides shelter in a Christian environment for the homeless. More than \$800 was raised for the rescue mission.

The idea to raise funds this way was one that DuWayne Sipper, executive director of the Path, said "kind of evolved."

"For the last year and a half I've been looking for store space and can't find anything that's affordable enough to allow us to run a thrift store and still make money. We have saleable items donated to us all the time, so we had six yard sales here. We gave everything away and would hold out a jar for donations. That worked tremendously well, but we're only allowed four sales per house per year. People were asking what they could do to help, so the yard sale idea kept bubbling up."

The sale in Leisure Acres last week-

end was coordinated by Joan Roberts and her sister, Judie Peterson.

Mrs. Roberts said she first became acquainted with the rescue ministry when her church, Seven Rivers Presbyterian, worked on fixing up the women's shelter in Beverly Hills last summer as a part of a local mission project.

"My husband and I worked there, and I could really see DuWayne's sincerity in helping people right here in our own home (town), and the need for it is tremendous. It makes you look around and see how much we are blessed and how much others need. I had no idea that the ministry was even going on here locally, and then being right there with the people, working on their house, just kind of touched our hearts."

Mrs. Roberts said women from her church and from her sister's church, Nature Coast Community Church, helped at the sale.

"We even had two gentlemen who came to the sale stay and work about two hours helping DuWayne unload that truck. That was nice, just to see the people pitching in."

The sale was a blessing for all involved; Mrs. Roberts said.

"It was sort of like a beneficial staircase. I benefited because I got rid of things I didn't need, and I have space now as did all the others that donated. The residents of Citrus County really benefited because they got some real bargains. And then one step up on the staircase, the Path definitely benefited, because they need the funds."

Sipper thinks this method of fund-raising will work to bring in the cash flow that is needed to run the ministry.

"The yard sales give us what we ultimately need, which is cash. And wouldn't this be perfect of the Lord? He gets more people involved, because if I'm running a thrift store by myself, I would never get all those people involved. And it keeps my overhead down. What would happen if we had four or five of these a month strategically located throughout the county?"

Currently, the Path has two 1,100-square-foot homes with garages, one for women and the other for men, that can accommodate four residents each. The main focus, Sipper said, is bringing people to Christ through long-term Bible study, church attendance and stable work.

"The one reason I'm doing this is because of Jesus," he said. "Otherwise I wouldn't be doing it. That's my priority. When they come here to these two houses, Jesus is preached."

The ministry provides housing on a transitional basis, he said.

"People don't realize that a rescue mission takes you from A to B," he said. "We look for jobs for them, get them their driver's license, take them to court, to their probation officers, to Bible studies. We counsel them and take them to family counseling."

Sipper said the clients attend a variety of churches in the area, including Nazarene, Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran and Church of God.

Sipper has had the vision to help homeless people for about six years. He is hoping to expand the ministry to include emergency housing that would provide shelter for those in need for just one or two nights.

How to help

If you would like to have a yard sale to benefit the Path or for more information on sheltering the homeless, call (352) 527-6500 or visit www.pathofcitrus.org. Donations to the Path are tax deductible. Current needs include a printer, fax/copier, meats, milk, vegetables, land for a large shelter, transportation for clients, night chaperones, mentors, budgeting classes, a male intern, Christian board members, cars, cleaning or other odd jobs for clients, and opportunities for speaking engagements for the administrators to present the ministry.

"There's different stages," Sipper said. "There's the emergency stage, the transitional stage, which is what we are doing now for 90 to 180 days, and then there's another phase that we're working on possible grants next year for. It's what they call single-room occupancy, which is the last stage of transitional housing with separate units for each family, low-income housing. The key is that their rent is low enough that they can live there and go to the next phase and get their own permanent housing."

A young woman graduated from the program last week.

"She became a CNA (certified nursing assistant) while she was here, and got her driver's license," Sipper said. "We got a donated car for her and just got her an apartment in Citrus Hills. She's doing wonderful. If the things to come are like what happened to Dawn, then these girls are doing great."