

Local shelter does part to help homeless

DuWAYNE SIPPER
Special to the Chronicle

In my travels around the county, I have found that most of us have a common question. "Does Citrus County need a homeless shelter?"

Being in a rural area, we do not see many people on the streets or hanging out in doorways. Often, we have a man with a paper bag in an alley or a woman pushing a shopping cart with all of her belongings, to form our picture of homeless. When I use the word "homeless", it usually has a negative impact on the person hearing it — or it brings out compassion from the hearer.

Have you ever wondered what would happen if your house burned down tonight? Where would you go? Who would you call? Hopefully we would call upon the Lord. But if not, whom do we turn to?

I try my best to explain the situation in our county to people wherever I go. Once and for all, let us change our image of our fellow human beings, who for whatever reason, need our help for shelter. They are us. Simply, you and me. Today it's me, tomorrow it's you.

They want change from the garbage that is happening in their lives.

Seventy-five percent of the people in rescue missions around the country, are people from their county. Build it and they will come is a misconception, and people are still people.

Taxpayers must realize that small amounts of money to non-profits up front save large amounts of tax money and emergency services in the end.

Consider the sheriff's department who is often used as a very expensive taxi service to transport clients. Sometimes out of the county! These officers are badly needed in other areas that they are commissioned for.

**Have you ever
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The needs for our shelter are vast. Because we are biblically based, at this time, we do not receive federal, state or county dollars. We must be supported locally. Small but effective fundraisers are a constant need for all of Citrus County's Services. Any citizen putting in a couple of hours a month and a few dollars could help change lives.

Our county jail runs near to capacity. Many of those people would like to change their circumstances, if they could.

Let us take the single mother epidemic that is taking over our country with an alarming divorce and pregnancy rate. Many of these women are abused. The children are often innocent victims. Nine out of 10 calls here at the shelter are for women and children.

Let us consider the men who are injured and cannot work properly.

Many men must wait for months to receive even the simplest of disabled benefits. Our county is heavily retired with fixed incomes.

Our elderly often find themselves without affordable housing or in a transition that they cannot afford. Shelters can offer something that covers the gap. Our drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers need stable places for people to go that want to restructure their lives for a more positive life. Do people who have a place to live check themselves into a shelter? The answer is yes.

Do not think that you won't make a difference.

Transportation, phone calls, news letters, board members, letter writers are just a few of the things that a couple of hours would make a difference in someone's life now.

Consulting a qualified financial advisor for planned giving to a local charity, could have a tremendous impact on thousands of people as well as give you peace on how your money is spent when you leave this world.

The best reason for a gospel shelter is the love of Jesus. After a short time with Jesus few people are the same. The eternal is upon us now. Those that need help are with us now. Let us persevere toward the goal that the Lord has set upon us. Giving of yourself to a Gospel Shelter, is Christ in the simplest form.

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Street jamboree to benefit charity

The Path of Citrus County shelters homeless

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Chronicle

Get your motor runnin' and mark your calendar for Saturday, Feb. 14, for a street jamboree, sponsored by Powerhouse Cycles of Crystal River, to benefit The Path of Citrus County.

Beginning at noon, the community is invited to the parking lot of Powerhouse Cycles, 7922 W. Gulf-to-Lake Highway, for an afternoon of free food, live music, a 50-50 drawing and a live auction. Items to auction include a 1994 Dodge Caravan, a 1992 Mitsubishi XO van, like-new furniture and lots of gifts and gift certificates from local restaurants and businesses.

Donated items are still being accepted for auction. Call DuWayne Sipper, executive director of The Path at 527-6500.

Hot dogs and hamburgers are being donated

and cooked by a local Christian motorcycle group.

"Several of my customers help out The Path," said Bob Chiusano, owner of Powerhouse Cycles. "And bikers — we have a scary image, but we're here to help everybody. If we can have fun raising money for somebody else, that's great."

Chiusano has hosted several fund-raising street parties, all successful.

Music will be provided by Scott Kennedy and the Unexpected.

Sipper said, in addition to much-needed funds for the Beverly Hills-based shelter, he hopes the event will continue to bring publicity and awareness.

"People still don't know, one: that there's a shelter in Citrus County and, two: that there's a homeless problem," he said. "They still don't get it that the homeless problem in Citrus County is women and children."

Other immediate needs of The Path include volunteers,

computer education and Bible study teachers. Call Sipper at 527-6500 or e-mail diverse@inffonline.net.

■ **WHAT:** Street jamboree to benefit The Path of Citrus County.

■ **WHEN:** Beginning at noon Saturday, Feb. 14.

■ **WHERE:** Powerhouse Cycles, 7922 W. Gulf-to-Lake Highway, Crystal River.

■ **TO DONATE OR TO VOLUNTEER:** Call DuWayne Sipper, executive director of The Path, 527-6500.

Thanks from Kings Bay Lions



RUTH LEVINS/Special to the Chronicle

ABOVE: Marty Brown, right, president of the Crystal River Kings Bay Lions Club, presents a Certificate of Appreciation to Joan Chipkar of Opti-Mart for hosting a collection site for used eyeglasses.

TOP LEFT: Duwayne Sipper, director of The Path, a homeless shelter in Beverly Hills, receives a Certificate of Appreciation for bringing his message to the Crystal River Kings Bay Lions Club at the April 5 dinner meeting.

LEFT: Carol Thompson, Crystal River First Baptist Church, received a Certificate of Appreciation for hosting a drop-off point for the collection of used eyeglasses.

Thousands seek a savior in Lecanto

By Nancy Kennedy
Staff writer

IN MANY WAYS it was a typical church service: music, praying, squirmy kids, preaching. But it wasn't typical. Rainie Miller of Homosassa called it "the greatest Christian event this county has ever seen."

GRACE NOTES

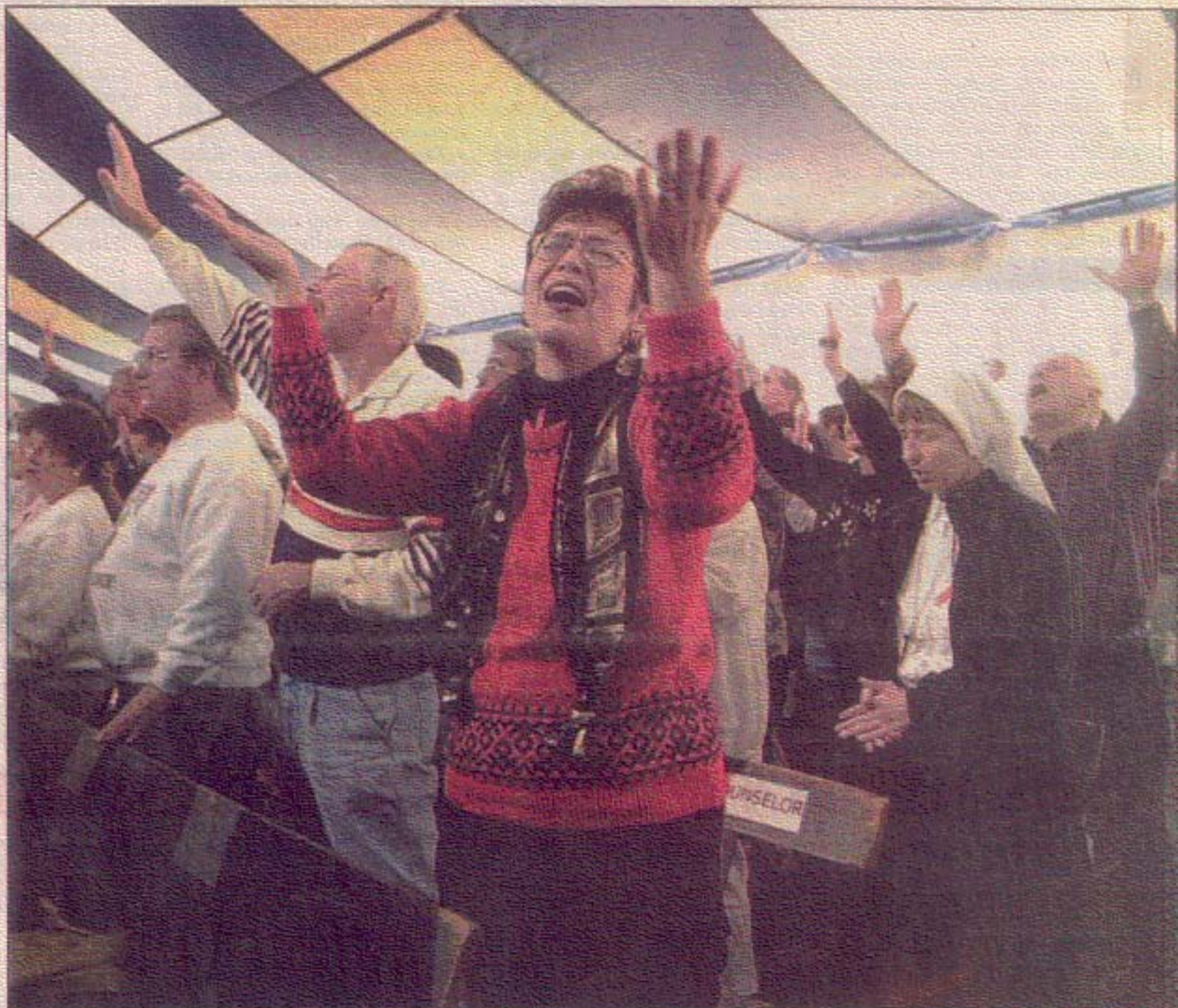
Debbie Barnes, general manager of Christian radio station WXJC said this week's Citrus For Jesus 2000 area-wide crusade is something many of the local church pastors and Christian leaders have been praying about for years — maybe even a decade.

It's been brewing. It's been building. The leaders involved — Baptists and Pentecostals, Catholics and Episcopalians — they've all been saying it: "God's going to do something big in Citrus County — so big that it'll be hard to miss." Something like bringing thousands of people to a field in Lecanto to hear the gospel — including a skeptic like me.

It's not that I don't believe God can do great things. I always know he can. I'm

Please see **SAVE**, Page 4A

Nancy Kennedy can be reached at 563-5660, Monday through Thursday, or via e-mail at nancyk@hitter.net.



Margie and John Sipes were moved by the Holy Spirit during the music portion of the Jesus 2000 Area Wide Crusade during the Wednesday night services. The week-long event brought thousands of Christians together to worship God under the tent on State Road 44 in Lecanto. The crusade continues today at 7 p.m.

Dave Siper/Chronicle photo

SAVE

continued from Page 1A

just not always sure he will. Can God make an alcoholic sober or a drug addict clean? Can God put a broken marriage back together or heal a terminal disease? Can faith in Christ change lives so profoundly that entire communities are transformed?

For nearly a decade I've written the stories of people who believe that, yes, God can and does work such wonders in the lives of those who trust him. I recognized many of them at the crusade. They brought their friends. Hundreds answered the evenings' altar calls, repenting of their sin and accepting the gift of salvation.

Duwayne Sipper, a man who has great faith and believes God can and will one day erect a homeless shelter right in the middle of Citrus County, said the people had been coming each night with eager anticipation and excitement over what God's going to do. He said he came "seeking God."

I came to get a story for the newspaper. Maybe, like Sipper, I really came seeking God.

The night I went, the wind whipped through the tent flaps. I

remembered what Jesus told another skeptic named Nicodemus, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

I took a seat on a far bench, and while the wind blew over me, I imagined the wind of God's spirit moving through the tent, moving through the people, moving through me. I didn't want to be a skeptic, but I was. I am.

More than 60 people professed new faith in Christ at the crusade's first night, Sipper said. The 3,500-seat tent was packed. On Monday, more made faith commitments. Each night men, women, teens — a little girl and a minister's wife — publicly proclaimed that they too wanted to follow Jesus.

The singing began with "We Need You, Jesus." The crowd sang "Amazing Grace" and "Hallelujah, Thine the glory. Revive us again."

I sang too, needing Jesus in my own life.

Max Wilkens, pastor of First United Methodist Church of Inverness, likened the assembled crowd that was from 52 local churches to a cake. "Separately, the ingredients might not taste like much, but put them together, add some power, and it comes out

tasting wonderful."

People clapped. Some shouted "Amen." I just watched.

Crusade evangelist Dr. Harold Hunter of Nashville, Tenn., spoke about hell. "You don't go to hell because you're bad," he said. "You go to hell because you've never been saved."

By his own admission he's an "old-fashioned fire and brimstone preacher." The previous nights he had spoken about repentance, holiness and heaven.

The choir sang again, "Just As I Am." Hunter invited those who wanted to make Jesus their savior to "come forward." He talked about trying to turn over a new leaf but it not working. "You need Jesus," he said.

Afterward, when those who had gone forward went off with counselors to pray and talk, I found my friend Janice Roth. She believes God can and will do big things. To illustrate that, she showed me two trees outside the tent: one deader than dead and the other one green and alive.

As the wind mussed up our hair she told me, "God is the only one who can take something like that dead tree and get the sap going through it and make the leaves grow again."

I thought about my life, my family, my friends, about Citrus County. Local pastors and ministers have been telling me for years that God can and will do something big right here. That he's

doing it right now.

Before the crusade even began, David Throckmorton, pastor of First Baptist Church in Crystal River, posed these questions to me: What if the churches in Citrus County put aside their differences and came together?

What if God's people invited their friends and neighbors to come to a field in Lecanto and hear about Jesus? And what if their lives were changed and they became better spouses, parents,

employees, friends? What would Citrus County be like?

Tonight is the last night of the crusade. It starts at 7 p.m. and is in the huge tent on State Road 44 just east of the intersection with County Road 491 in Lecanto.

You can dress casually. You can hear about Jesus and be changed. So can I.

I always know God can work wonders. I almost believe that he will.