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NANCY KENNEDY/Chronicle

On Monday night, The Path of Citrus County presented its inaugural fund- and awareness-raising dinner at Seven Rivers Presbyterian Church in Lecanto. DuWayne Sipper, executive director of The Path, is shown with Circuit Court Judge Patricia Thomas, who was Mistress of Ceremonies, and James P. Gills, M.D., guest speaker.

# Dying, but waking up

## *Man's salvation starts shelter*

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As The Path of Citrus County's executive director DuWayne Sipper took the stage at Monday's fund-raising dinner, he struggled to control the emotion in his voice. "Seven and a half years ago, I came to Citrus County to die, but I kept waking up," he said.

He then went on to tell the more than 300 people present his story of drugs and homelessness and loss of soul — and of a dream.

After he had found a local church

and found salvation in Christ, he had an "overpowering urge" to donate his time at a local homeless shelter, but discovered Citrus County didn't have one. For the next five years, he "chased people all over with my crazy ideas," he said. At one time he had even wanted to purchase the old jail in Inverness.

He met other like-minded people who also wanted to help families in need and formed The Path as a rescue mission, but still with nowhere to house clients.

"Then we took out a three-line ad in the newspaper: 'The Path of Citrus County is now accepting land donations,'" he said.

From there, The Path took ownership of the Pirate's Cove in Ozello, which the ministry sold after seven days for \$150,000.

Sipper also told about opening a thrift store, "which didn't raise money, but sure raised awareness."

Then two and a half years ago, The Path purchased two houses in Beverly Hills, which are currently used as shelters. The dinner was to raise money to hire staff to handle the abundance of needs the Christian ministry receives daily. They raised \$10,500, which fell short of the \$40,000 goal, but Sipper said that's just the amount from one night. He also received "tremendous amounts" of encouragement and interest in people becoming regular donors.

Circuit Judge Patricia Thomas served as Mistress of Ceremonies for the event. Also, The Path's new commercial, which will be shown on WYKE, debuted at the dinner.

The guest speaker of the evening

was James P. Gills, M.D., founder of St. Luke's Cataract and Laser Institute in Tarpon Springs and world-renowned ophthalmologist, cataract surgeon and philanthropist, who personally supports nearly 50 Christian ministries from his foundation.

He is also a published author. His books include "Darwinism Under the Microscope" and "Love Fulfilling the Ultimate Quest." He spoke about love being the motivating factor to giving and he encouraged the audience not to give out of a sense of duty, but of a response to first receiving God's love.

"Don't give — don't be a part of this organization until you feel God's love," he said, "then you're ready to give."

For information about The Path, call Sipper at 527-6500.

## Special donation



WALTER CARLSON/ For the Chronicle

DuWayne Sipper (right) executive director for The Path of Citrus County homeless shelter, receives a donation from Warren Chase of the Presbyterian Men's Fellowship, during a July 15 breakfast at the First Presbyterian Church in Inverness.

# Path hosts dinner to feed coffers

## Board member will cater event

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Helping those in need find the path to wholeness takes people and money.

On Monday, Nov. 3, The Path gospel rescue shelter in Beverly Hills will host a fund-raising banquet at Seven Rivers Presbyterian Church. Guest speaker for the event will be James P. Gills, M.D., the founder of St. Luke's Cataract and Laser Institute in Tarpon Springs.

Gills is currently one of only a few men who have completed six Double Iron Man triathlons within 36 hours. In 2003, Gov. Jeb Bush appointed Gills to the Florida Sports Foundation Board of Directors, and his charitable foundation regularly contributes to nearly 50 Christian ministries.

DuWayne Sipper, executive director of The Path, said this year's budget will exceed \$100,000, and the goal for the fund-raiser is \$40,000.

"We don't get state or federal funding," he said, yet the ministry needs money to be able to meet the needs of the people it serves. He said they are con-

### IMMEDIATE AND LONG-TERM PATH NEEDS:



**DuWayne Sipper**  
executive director of The Path said they expect this year's budget to exceed \$100,000 and fund-raiser goal is \$40,000.

- Meat, milk and cheese.
- Bibles with tabs and footnotes for study.
- Christian counselors.
- GED teachers.
- Motor oil and transmission fluid.
- Diapers. ■ Laundry detergent.
- Volunteers to answer the phone.
- Personal hygiene items.
- A tractor with implements.
- Box fans. ■ A generator. ■ Brochure rack.

“ We don't get state or federal funding. ”

centrating on hiring and keeping staff members, since lives change when people work one-on-one with people.

The dinner will bring together community, business and church leaders and their friends and co-workers. Sipper said he would like to see 400 people attend. To cut down on cost, Brian Press, a member of The Path's board of directors, will cater the turkey dinner, and each table host will be responsible for table decorations and place settings.

Donations will be received at the dinner. Sipper said they are foregoing the pledge card

route because \$40,000 in pledges may only net \$11,000 actual dollars.

Sipper said the rescue shelter, which serves homeless individuals and families, hopes to offer a variety of programs and counseling to its clients, to minister to the whole person and not just treat symptoms. "A lot of organizations give out services," he said, "but unless you deal with the root causes, you can't fix the problems. Otherwise, people just become dependent on services."

For information about The Path or the Nov. 3 fund-raising dinner, call Sipper at 527-6500.