

## Culture of giving



Times photo — STEPHEN J. CODDINGTON

At the Path of Citrus County, night administrator Catherine Allen reads a bedtime Bible story to sleepy Grace Hensley, 5. Grace has been at the shelter with her mother for about six weeks. The faith-based charity offers not just hot meals and warm beds. The people there also try to guide the needy to their next path.

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## Retired educators give



RUTH LEVINS/Special to the Chronicle

Wayne Sipper, founder and director of The Path of Citrus County, a shelter for the homeless, was the speaker at the Citrus County Retired Educators meeting held at the Withlacoochee Technical Institute. Sipper (left) is shown accepting Path shelter donations from the Citrus County Retired Educators.

# Shelter to soon feel the love

## *The Path in line for group's support funds*

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A faith-based homeless shelter that has been squeaking by financially since it opened in June 2001 is about to get support from a church women's group.

Leaders of Women of the Evangelical Church in America (ELCA) in Florida and the Bahamas selected The Path of Citrus County to receive the organization's love offering in 2003 and 2004.

Sharon Koelsch, president of the Florida-Bahamas Synodical Women's Organization, stated in an e-mail that the group's executive board selected The Path from 16 ministries.

Nora Susser of Crystal River, president of the ELCA women's group for the Pinelands Conference, which includes

## **ELCA agrees to provide love offerings this year and next.**

Citrus County, submitted The Path for consideration.

Susser said she learned about The Path through reading the *Chronicle*. The stories sparked her interest.

"I know there must be a lot of homeless people in the Citrus County area, and also over Florida. In this area, to me, they're hidden," Susser said. "I

don't know where they are."

Then Susser discovered that the church she attends, St. Timothy's Lutheran Church in Crystal River, had supported The Path as a benevolence project.

"When she attended a Women of the ELCA executive board meeting in February 2002, she learned that the organization was looking for another charity to support with a love offering.

"I thought, well, maybe The Path will

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## **SHELTER**

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work," Susser said.

She contacted Path director DuWayne Sipper and requested information about the Beverly Hills shelter. He supplied and she recommended The Path to the executive board.

"I was so excited when they called and let me know," Susser said.

Koelsch said the goal for the Love Offering is \$12,000 in 2003 and \$2,000 in 2004. The organization also asks Love Offering recipients if there are any items that could be collected for them.

Koelsch said the board favored the ministry because the national women's ELCA

organization has emphasized issues relating to women and children in poverty and women and children in crisis.

Receiving the love offering will make a huge difference to The Path.

Last year, Sipper said, he operated the ministry for less than \$50,000.

"I'm really, like, overwhelmed, because of all the missions they could have cho-

sen in Florida, they chose us," Sipper said. "And it's for two years running, so it will really be a staple of our funding for the next two years."

While Sipper is grateful for the support from the Women's ELCA, he said he doesn't consider the shelter he opened in June 2001 to be over the hump.

The Path currently has two staff members. Sipper lives at the men's shelter, and Tracey

Duncan works from the women's shelter as a case manager.

"We need support staff," Sipper said. We've got to get people underneath us so we can make this thing grow, and we're not going to do it without the funding."

In 2002, Sipper said, The Path housed 60 people—fewer than he would like, but a more manageable number.

Shelter residents receive assistance in finding employment, obtaining job training if necessary and applying for government aid.

Residents are all required to attend church services and Bible studies.

"Last year we slowed way down, and concentrated on the ones who were willing to work and get back on their feet," Sipper said.

