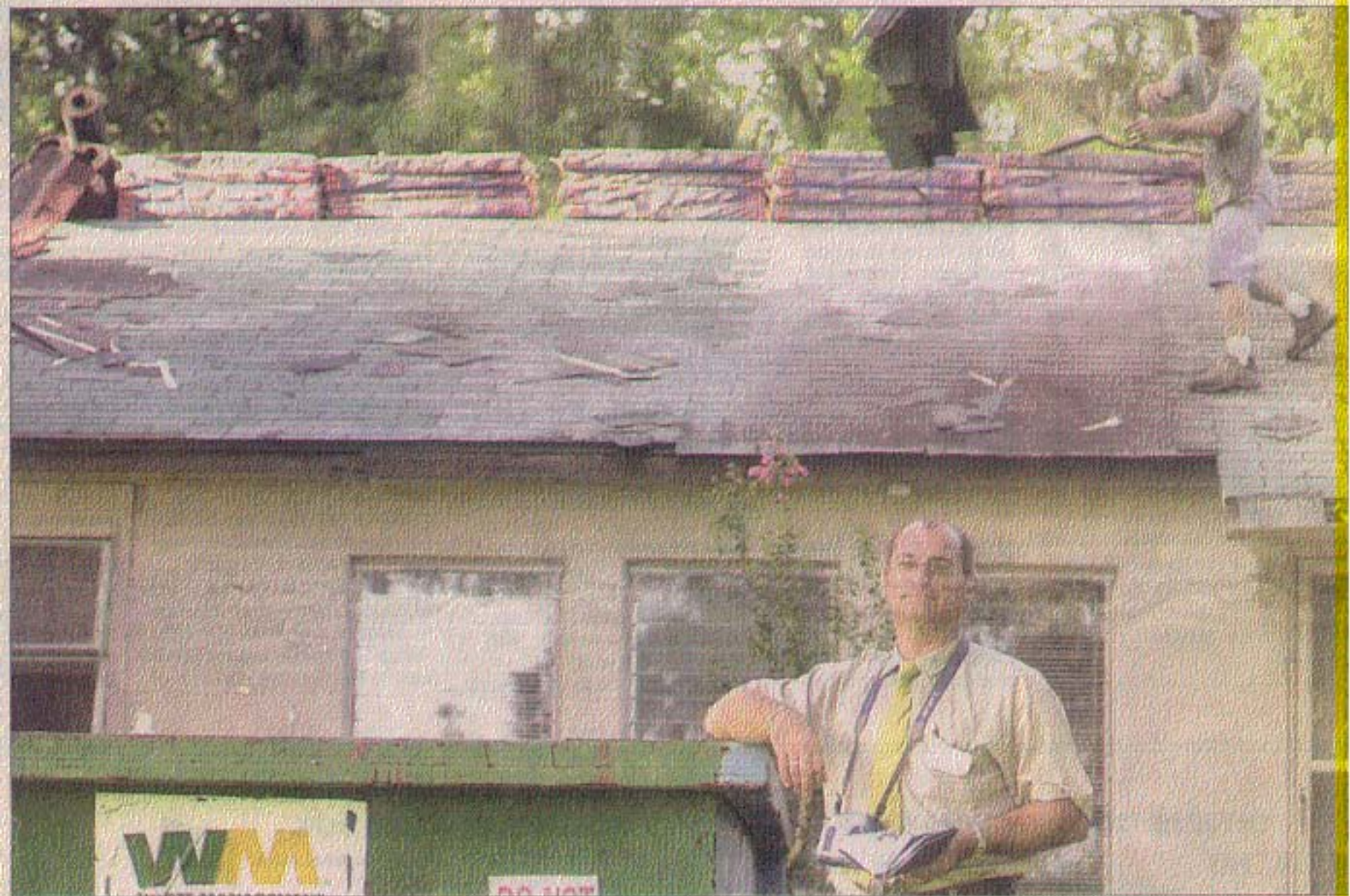


Not your average Joe



MATTHEW BECK/Chronicle

County Housing Services Director Joe Monroe is responsible for overseeing all of Citrus County's housing programs. One of these programs offers assistance to eligible homeowners, including the family living in the Floral City home above. The home is in need of a new roof.

Housing services director seeks to help all, including homeless, with home ownership

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As Citrus County's new housing services director, Joe Monroe is familiar with paperwork and routine.

But he also sees his job as a calling.

That's one of the reasons he left a career in banking in 1996 to become Citrus County's assistant

housing director.

After the county's former housing director left the position, Monroe stepped in, first as interim director. In October, he became director.

The new job put Monroe at the helm of Citrus County's housing programs, responsible for steering them and securing the government-funded grants that keep them going.

Though Monroe wasn't an

expert at writing grants before the promotion, he said he learned quickly by looking at the previous grant applications, looking at grant applications submitted by other counties, "and just doing it."

He monitors the Internet regularly for other grant opportunities and also gets grant information from professional organizations.

For Monroe, writing grants is a means to an end. The reward of the job comes by seeing how the

money he helps to secure, helps people.

"I enjoy seeing individuals' lives changed by becoming homeowners," Monroe said, "because home ownership does that, and pride in ownership does that."

Right now, his primary goal is to improve the community's ability to help the local homeless population.

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"This is an area that we really need to work on," Monroe said.

In Citrus County, the homeless don't usually sleep on a park bench.

Monroe said the homeless in this community often live with family members, in their vehicles, in the woods, or simply go through an endless cycle of renting, falling behind and, ultimately, getting evicted.

He believes that the lack of options for the homeless is a major void in county services because all the local shelters are faith-based and are only equipped to deal with short-term needs.

In hopes of improving the situation, Monroe is currently working with the Citrus County Shared Services Alliance to write a continuum of care plan for the homeless.

Once the plan is done, Citrus County can apply for government funds to pay for homeless services and for funds to build a shelter or some sort of transitional housing to help get the homeless back on their feet and integrated into society.

The plan should be finished by the end of the year, just in time to apply next year for a grant.

DuWayne Sipper, director of The Path of Citrus County, a homeless shelter in Beverly Hills, praised Monroe for his efforts in helping the homeless.

"He is so important," Sipper said. "He is so vital, and he is doing that work so quietly over there."

Sipper explained that Monroe is an asset because he knows how to write grants. He

has also become involved with the alliance's homeless committee and Department of Children & Families' homeless coalition for District 13, which includes Citrus County.

"To see Joe show up at the table was like, 'Yes!' I just can't describe it," Sipper said. "He is an integral part of what we're doing now."

Besides working to improve services to Citrus County's homeless population, as housing services director, Monroe also helps eligible Citrus County residents improve the homes they have or become homeowners through local, state, local and federal programs.

He said he is continually looking for ways to tailor these programs to meet the needs of Citrus County residents.

Monroe was born in Oneonta, N.Y., and moved at age 14 with his family to Frankfurt, Germany. He stayed there until he was 26 years old and completed a two-year business degree while he worked for a large construction contractor as a site administrator. That job also took him to Saudi Arabia and Libya.

He later went to work with a Frankfurt bank.

When he returned to the United States in 1983, he moved to Ocala and went into banking. He moved to Citrus County in 1984, and stayed in banking for 13 years.

He worked as a loan officer, a branch manager and vice president.

However, his favorite job in a bank was working as a mortgage loan originator because he saw how much ownership changed his customers' lives.

Maybe that's why his new job suits him so well.

"I do what I enjoy," he said, "and I get paid for it."