

# The Path to new way of life



BRIAN LaPETER/Chronicle

In the midst of her work as the manager of The Path's new thrift store in Homosassa, Sherry Knight relates how the charity's program has turned her life 'around.

# Local shelter for homeless and people in recovery relies on support from community

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*Chronicle*

Sherry Knight of Homosassa was arrested for the third time for driving under the influence last August. That's when she finally admitted she had a drinking problem that she couldn't handle on her own.

"When you've got nowhere to look but up," Knight said, "God is who you see."

With health insurance that limited her in-patient treatment options, she found a home and hope at The Path of Citrus County, a rescue mission and homeless shelter in Beverly Hills.

She started the program at The Path, which she described as "Bible boot camp" in September and stayed there for four months, attending Bible study or church five nights a week and working.

Now Knight is the store manager for The Path's new thrift store in

Nottingham Plaza in Homosassa.

She continues to attend Bible study regularly, and is working on the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

"I'll be in the program forever, probably," she said.

Her driver's license has been suspended for five years, but Knight said the home she lives in, which is provided by The Path, is within walking distance from the store.

DuWayne Sipper, executive director and founder of The Path, said Knight has graduated from The Path's program, but the shelter is still helping her and she is still helping The Path.

"She's been great," Sipper said.

Knight is one of about 300 people who have been helped at The Path since it opened in June 2001.

He said the shelter's budget has grown from about \$50,000 the first year to about \$270,000, thanks in large part to income generated by the thrift store.

■ **WHAT:** Citrus County Ball.

■ **WHEN:** 5:30 p.m. Saturday.

■ **WHERE:** Citrus Hills Golf and Country Club, 505 E. Hartford St., Hernando.

■ **COST:** \$45 each; \$80 per couple.

■ **INFO:** Kat Klyap, 302-6085 or Reyna Bell, 212-0372.

The five-year plan for the shelter includes finding a new location so that the shelter can increase its capacity to house more than 12 people at a time, offering transitional housing to those in the process of becoming self-sufficient and operating a community kitchen.

Sipper also plans to raise vegetables on 10 acres that a local church is allowing the shelter use for gardening. The goal: feeding the homeless.

"You can grow three crops a year in

Florida," Sipper said.

He said the shelter gets no government money, so all the fund-raising must be done privately.

Sipper said the shelter's goal is to help the shelter residents become self-sufficient so they don't return in a month or two.

This is more difficult for those with disabilities.

"These poor people, they have no place to go," he said. "The shelter, we strain to take them because they can't go to jobs and they need to work and yet they have no place to go while they're waiting for the disability to come in."

Joe Monroe, Citrus County's housing services director, said there is only one other homeless shelter in Citrus County, and it is also a small, nonprofit mission that gets no government funds; there is also a domestic abuse shelter.

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Monroe said that there are more than 400 homeless people on any given night in Citrus County and fewer than 50 beds available.

"It's not meeting the needs by any means, but they're there," Monroe said. "Anything is a godsend."

He is also the President of the Mid-Florida Homeless Coalition and he heads up the local homeless coalition.

While the group is working toward obtaining government grants, Monroe said it is difficult for rural areas such as Citrus County to compete with metropolitan areas for funding for the homeless.

"It's one of the hardest things I've ever worked on, trying to get funding for the homeless," Monroe said.

"It will eventually pay off. I'm not willing to give up yet."

The Path and The Pregnancy and Family Life Center, another local nonprofit organization, will receive proceeds from the Citrus County Ball on Saturday at Citrus Hills Golf and Country Club.

Tickets are \$45 per person or \$80 per couple.

Social hour starts at 5:30 p.m.

The evening will include dinner, entertainment, dancing and a silent auction. Reservation deadline is 5 p.m. today. For tickets or more information, call Kat Klyap, 302-6085 or Reyna Bell, 212-0372.