

# Farm fresh food: The Path offers homeless place to rehabilitate while working on produce farm

By Julianne Munn

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Soul food might be a perfect way to describe how The Path of Citrus County feeds its clients, spiritually and literally.



MATTHEW BECK/Chronicle

Farm manager Shaun Seedeem loads the baskets full of freshly picked vegetables for his customers.

DuWayne Sipper is the founder of The Path, a Beverly Hills-based program providing the homeless with shelter, rehabilitation and a chance to work with its burgeoning farm co-operative in Hernando.

Sipper started The Path 11 years ago “because God told me to.” He runs the organization with his wife, Kathryn. They met through a Christian Internet dating site shortly after Sept. 11, 2001, and married six years ago.

Sipper recalled his years as an “Army brat” who survived a rough teen-to-adult transition in Miami. He was a limousine driver for the famous Breakers Hotel in South Florida when poor health changed his life.

“I thought I was coming to Citrus County to die,” he said.

Instead, he found friendship and peace at Hernando Church of the Nazarene, along with the inspiration to start his Christian help program with the church’s assistance.

Though the original intent of The Path — which now owns five shelter homes for people beset by a wide variety of problems — was housing, Sipper said he awoke one morning visualizing plans to add farming to the mix. The vision led to The Path’s 15-acre farm behind the Church of the Nazarene on U.S. 41 in Hernando, now lush with sprouts and ripe seasonal produce supervised by Shaun Seedeem, a fellow Nazarene church member and former Path volunteer.

Because of the requests, Kathryn Sipper began posting recipes she gathered for her blog on the farm/co-op website [www.thepathcommunity.org](http://www.thepathcommunity.org). Some of those recipes are shared today with Flair for Food readers. They include baked crispy kale chips, smothered collard greens and cabbage,

and roasted garlic mashed cauliflower.

The Sippers believe providing clients — who amount to six residents in each of the five homes — with the opportunity to work on a farm is good therapy.

“The farm project began in the backyard of one of the Path houses in 2002,” said Kathryn Sipper, a New Jersey native. “In 2005, Hernando Church of the Nazarene loaned DuWayne 10 acres to farm. In 2011, they loaned us five more acres.”

This is how the farm-to-citizen co-op works:

After purchasing a \$300 membership for six months, the member is entitled to a huge harvest basket filled with seasonal produce ready and waiting for pick-up every Friday morning at Hernando Farmer’s Market on U.S. 41 across from the Nazarene Church.

“The farm co-op was started in the fall of 2010 to help with sustainability with 26 members that fall,” Kathryn Sipper said. “In 2011, there were 40 members; in the fall and winter of this year, 58 members; in the spring, 65 members, and currently, 40 members.”

Memberships range from April to September and October to March. Other recipients have included local organizations involved with feeding people, churches and WTI.

On a recent Friday, the baskets were filled with fall greens such as broccoli, cabbages, kale and more. It was typical autumn produce, freshly picked by Seedeem and volunteers across the road from the Hernando Farmer’s Market.

“Our winter crop is mostly greens (lettuces, collards, kale, mustard greens), broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, bok choy, kohlrabi. In spring and summer are varieties of peppers, squash, zucchini, cherry tomatoes, varieties of eggplant, okra and a few other veggies,” Kathryn Sipper said.

Chrissy Burns is owner of the Hernando Farmer’s Market and helps support The Path in many ways.

“She’s our business partner and has her own business, but has been a huge help with allowing us to use her location and refrigerator storage, and a great help with the basket distribution and customer service to our co-op members. When we have surplus vegetables, she also sells those exclusively for The Path,” Sipper said.

The Path’s program also includes basic nutrition classes weekly, and the produce is used for hands-on demonstrations to incorporate in recipes. Two cook-off competitions between the houses were also held.

The Sippers are quick to acknowledge they are not farmers. They said they were grateful when Seedeem became part of The Path farming program. Seedeem said he learned farming near his home in Mastic, Long Island.

Additional farming expertise came through research, talking to farmers, using local resources such as IFAS and the Agriculture Alliance, and trial and error. Sprouting machines a seedling grower was gradually acquired, along with other equipment.