

2010, A Winter to Remember

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This past winter will be one to remember for many. Volusia and Flagler Counties had record number of days with temperatures dipping under forty degrees at night. For many of us, it was a time to sit by our fireplace sipping a piping hot beverage, warming ourselves by a crackling log. Having grown up in Florida, four years in Key West and seventeen years in Central Florida, I watched as the so called orange belt moved south. In the early eighties I even helped a friend and his family fire up smudge pots in an attempt to save their orange grove. The winters in Florida still never impressed me. Despite the damage the cold was causing, I was too young to understand the impact on those depending on the citrus for their livelihood. I grew up hearing about winters in Iowa. The fourteen years of my adult life in Maryland did not help me appreciate the Florida winters either. A real cold day in Maryland was when the horserace tracks were closed. Horserace tracks in Maryland are “winterized”. They never freeze! They only close them when the horseplayer can’t get to the track! I have never been impressed by the Florida winter, until now.

The Volusia/Flagler County Continuum of Care opens Cold Weather Shelters from November 1 through March 31 on nights when air temperatures reach 40 degrees or colder. This year, shelters were open for 32 nights! Approximately 125-185 homeless guests were sheltered each night with warmed accommodations and a hot meal. We are not the only Continuum of Care that does this. All 28 Continuums of Care in Florida serving the homeless use the same guideline. A Continuum of Care addresses the needs the needs of the homeless from prevention to housing. Without fanfare and with dispatch that any ROTC drill team would envy, thousands of homeless across Florida were warmed. This silent course of action and display is unknown to most to most.

Halifax Urban Ministries (HUM) is the primary coordinator of this event. Their staff coordinates local churches to volunteer for this duty. This year they had six churches participating. In addition, there are three groups that operate independently; AGAPE Clubhouse in Deland organized by the InterFaith Caregivers and housed at the First United Methodist Church, First Methodist Church in Bunnell and the Salvation Army in Daytona Beach (the Salvation Army policy has them opening on nights of 50 degrees or colder).

The accommodations might not seem five-star, but then, it is all relative. There is something that stirs the emotion of a man when he looks into the eyes of another and sees a glimpse of what standing on the precipice of an abyss must be like; nowhere to go; nowhere to get warm; no place for respite, all the while shivering from the cold. In the cold weather shelter a hot meal, a personal hygiene bag, a warm blanket, a nice mat, a spot on the floor, and a private bathroom is standard fare. For some, they might even get to see a borrowed movie from someone’s personal collection. Though the accommodations might not meet five star requirements for the hotel industry, the volunteers sure are five star and make up for any difference. To the cynic who might

suggest this kind of behavior only enables the homeless? I can only offer a response of Herman Melville, "Of all the preposterous assumptions of humanity, nothing exceeds the criticisms of the habits of the poor, by the well housed, the well warmed and the well fed."

Hopefully, March will go out like it is supposed too; a lamb. But it is not over. There is next year's winter and even this year's tropical rain season. We need your help. We need more churches and organizations to volunteer and staff a shelter. Cold weather shelters are not opened nor operated by local governments. If they were, every City Hall might have been opened, offering comfort to its most disadvantaged. That would have been "cool". Not necessarily the solution. We cannot rely on government to address this great need. We must continue to rely on the local citizens and churches. I do not know much about "faith". I will leave that to those ordained and to people's personal relationship with their Higher Power. I do know about "works". And if I may be so bold, the "works" in this community are alive and well.

The real gold medalists of the 2010 winter can be found at the following locations:

Bunnell:

First United Methodist Church of Bunnell
205 Pine Tree Lane
Bunnell, FL 32110

Daytona Beach:

STAR Family Center
316 North Street
Daytona Beach, Florida 32114

Salvation Army
560 Ballough Road
Daytona Beach, FL

Deland:

First United Methodist Church of Deland
InterFaith CareGivers
AGAPE
115 East Howry Avenue
Deland, Florida

Deltona:

Pine Ridge Fellowship
935 Howland Boulevard
Deltona, FL

Pierson:

Tabernacle of Praise

242 Little Brown Church Road
Pierson, FL

Orange City:

Living Waters Free Methodist Church
1595 E. Graves Avenue
Orange City, FL 32763

Port Orange:

Church of the Epiphany
201 Lafayette Street
Port Orange, FL

First United Methodist Church of Port Orange
305 Dunlawton Avenue
Port Orange, FL 32127