

THE OBSERVER NEWS

Tuesday, 4 March 2010

A place to turn in times of trouble

By PENNY FLETCHER

penny@observernews.net

The last few years have certainly offered me enough opportunities to write about people who are down on their luck.

Lost jobs and foreclosed homes; businesses dying and shutting their doors; people having to learn new trades in midlife and even later life to be able to stay in the job market.

Yes, many have seen downturns in their lives. I've interviewed former managers who now work as store clerks and real estate agents and mortgage brokers turned hairstylists and convenience store labor.

But in my opinion the worst downward spiral is what is being faced by the agencies that help people in need. Just recently I've written that many of the men and women on the front lines fighting for our country aren't getting even the necessities they need - like toiletries and nourishing food- and about the gargantuan volunteer efforts being made to send boxes of supplies to those who need them most.

Earlier this year I wrote about the shortages in the four South County food pantries, and how desperately Daystar Faith Center in Gibsonton needs donations to continue to feed hot lunches to the homeless and send the poor home with bags and boxes of food.

But today's column can do a whole lot toward alleviating deplorable conditions if the right people get the information in their hands and act upon it.

I met with Spencer Faircloth and Evelyn Lunsford at the Golf Club at Cypress Creek last week and we talked for over an hour about a charitable organization for which they both volunteer; Evelyn as chairwoman and Spencer as one of its founders and former bank trust officer who now specializes in putting donors and charities together.

Both are proactive. They will send brochures and emails; speak at your organization, business or house of worship and tell groups and individuals how they can help them with their charitable efforts.

They want everybody in the area to know about the Community Foundation of Greater Sun City Center, the local arm of the Community Foundation of Tampa Bay.

The Community Foundation of Greater Sun City Center isn't just for Sun Citians, it's here for everybody in the area- both to donate and to receive and has given about \$8.6 million since its founding in 1993.

“We can only give to 501(c)3 charities,” Evelyn explained. “And that makes all gifts tax deductible.”

Spencer said that in his more than 20 years in banking he heard many people say they had never really helped anyone and wanted to do something either before they died, or through their wills.

“A lot of people around here don’t have any children,” he said. “Some may have an idea of the kind of help they want to give, like to education, or medicines and food. But others give unrestricted gifts, which allows us to put the money where it is most needed.”

Since its inception the Foundation has given money to schools after receiving grant applications from principals; to LifePath Hospice; the South Shore Arts Council; and in Sun City Center, to the Community Association, Emergency Squad, Performing Arts Center, and Security Patrol.

“We recently gave money to the South Shore Regional Library for a StoryTime and Imagination Library,” Evelyn said. “But lately we’ve been trying very hard to help feed the hungry.”

The Foundation has made \$30,000 in recent grants to the food pantries at Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Anne Catholic churches, Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church in Apollo Beach and the Beth-El Farmworker Ministry in Wimauma.



Since only the interest from principal is given, donations increase the principal which is never spent, Spencer explained. “As donations are made, the principal grows, and that gives us more interest to give out as grants.

People like this because it is a perpetual gift. Every time money is given to a cause from their fund, their name is mentioned again and again.”

There are many funds within the Foundation, he explained.

As examples, he cited the \$139,951.14 in requests for grants now pending to fund programs for literacy. “People who want their money to go specifically for education will be contributing to these,” he said. “\$98,000 of the money approved by the board in February will come from a fund set up by the late Hazel Bryson who wanted to stomp out illiteracy, but we still need more approved to satisfy the need.”

Evelyn Lunsford is the chairwoman of the Community Foundation of Greater Sun City Center which has given about \$8.6 million to tax exempt organizations since its inception in 1993. Not just for Sun City Center, charitable 501(c)3 organizations from all over South County may donate or apply to receive a grant. (Penny Fletcher photo)

The Bryson fund at the Foundation sponsored a PASS school, which stands for Partnership to Advance School Success. This is a three-year program at \$100,000 per school.

Spencer is certain the rest will be approved based on past grant approvals.

In 1995, for instance, The Durward and Janet Seville Fund was set up to commemorate their 20th year living in Sun City Center. Since then, they have both died, but grants from their fund have supported many Sun City Center programs as well as other charities including the Shriner's Hospital for Crippled Children and the Museum of Science and Industry in Tampa.

In these days of economic downturn, many people will need help that never needed help before and will be keeping charitable organizations very busy.

Volunteers or paid staffers in these charitable organizations who need to write grants but do not know how may receive a grant-writing instruction booklet from Foundation members as well, simply by asking them for it.



For information about donating or receiving assistance, contact The Community Foundation of Greater Sun City Center at P.O. Box 5914, Sun City Center, FL 33573 or call them at (813) 633-6677.

“Remember,” Spencer said as we ended our interview. “We take donations from anywhere but we concentrate on helping those right in our local area unless a donor wants to help some organization in his or her former hometown or has some other specific request.”

Spencer Faircloth, a trust officer at area banks for more than 20 years, now volunteers for the Community Foundation of Greater Sun City Center and helps put donors together with charities which he describes as one of the most rewarding things he has ever had the pleasure to do.

(Penny Fletcher photo)

*Perhaps you have something you'd like to share. Or maybe you'd rather tell the community about your favorite charity or cause: or sound off about something you think needs change. That's what "Over Coffee" is about. It really doesn't matter whether we actually drink any coffee or not (although I probably will). It's what you have to say that's important. E-mail me any time at penny@observernews.net and suggest a meeting place. No matter what's going on, I'm usually available to share just one more cup.