



SPRING 2024

NEWS FROM THE DESC

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Roderick showing off his new boots.

An unexpected job offer

Roderick, a U.S. Army veteran, is so excited to be starting his new job as a maintenance tech working with generators, especially since the company made sure there was a position just for him.

A job offer isn't what Roderick was expecting after his interview. In fact, he was told he wasn't a good fit for the position he applied for. He said he understood the decision.

However, while Roderick was waiting outside for his son to pick him up, he was approached by one of the

members of the leadership team at the company. He had a good conversation with her, so much so that "by the grace of God, a new job was created for me.

"Nobody but God did that for me," Roderick said.

The position required some prerequisite courses that Roderick completed, and he was ready to get to work. But there was one more thing he needed – a pair of steel toe work boots.

Roderick's caseworker at the Department of Veteran Affairs made the connection to DESC, and he came to get fitted in the right footwear so he could start on time.

It's been a long, sometimes turbulent, journey for Roderick to get to this stage in his life. After he served our country in the armed forces, he spent more than 20 years in property maintenance.

And while he was born and raised in Jacksonville, he hadn't lived here in more than 30 years. But he was glad to come back where he had family, including his adult son and grandchildren.

Roderick said the re-entry into civilian life from military life has had its hurdles. Although it has been a while since he's been discharged, it remains something to work on. He said he has leaned on God during this journey of transition in his life.

Roderick hopes that in the next five years, he'll own a home and have plenty of time to enjoy all of his grandchildren.

Excited to work

Johnny was so excited about his new hire as a driver for Mayo Clinic's laundry service when he came to DESC recently, but he was also anxious to find the specific uniform items the health provider required.

Johnny was eager to start the new job where he could make enough money and get benefits in "a secure environment." He intends to stay loyal and committed, and if all goes well, he hopes to pursue a nursing degree at night.

So, drawing on his past experiences, Johnny came back to DESC where he received the proper clothing and shoes so he would be ready to transport Mayo's laundry back and forth between buildings.

This isn't Johnny's first visit to DESC. In fact, Johnny has been helped with food and clothing from DESC several times over the years. Johnny has been in and out of different housing situations and even unhoused. He also was a single father for a while. Johnny says he only comes to DESC when necessary.

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VOLUNTEERS!

Details on pages 6-7



From Board Chair Claude Moulton

In my new role as Board Chair, I am grateful for the leadership of those who precede me. I humbly assume responsibility from a fine past chair, **Pam Prier**, who guided DESC to unparalleled success. She, and those before her, fully and personally embraced a desire to help their neighbors.

The Board and I carry that spirit of relentless pursuit to help those in need. DESC is stronger than ever thanks to our incredible donors, volunteers and staff. Together, we build services that help families pull themselves out of poverty. It's a big job, but collectively, and with God's guidance and grace, we will succeed.

Our Board welcomes our officers too. **Debbie Peirson** has assumed the role of Vice Chair, **Trista Carraher** continues as Treasurer and **Jesse James** becomes Secretary. We are glad that Pam remains active as Immediate Past Chair.

At the same time, we had four outstanding Board members reach their term limits and have rolled off

the Board. **Alex Benavides, Theresa Bennett Hill, Julie Handley** and **Clay Meux** all served faithfully and will be missed, though they remain active and provide help in other valuable ways. More about them is on page 6.

There is a volunteer core ready and willing to help each time DESC opens for our clients. Another volunteer army that supports each fund-raising and friend-raising event. Another that works independently hosting drives, rallying family and friends and spreading the word about DESC far and wide. And then there's the Board of Directors which assumes the governance and fiduciary responsibilities all year long.

Our volunteers are essential to this important work. They provide time and talent in abundance. In fact, our recent audit estimated the value of their 11,000 volunteer hours at more than \$330,000!

So, to all of you who volunteer to serve clients, plan events, help in the broader community or serve on the Board, THANK YOU for your service to those in need!

Our Board continues to recruit new talent. If you or someone you know is interested in volunteering on our Board or other volunteer positions, please let me know.



Speaking of volunteers, the week of April 21 - 27 is National Volunteer Week, a time to recognize volunteerism across our community.

I would be remiss in not thanking our talented staff without whose dedicated efforts we couldn't continue to thrive.

I am excited about DESC's future and look forward to more amazing work.

Work (cont.)

Johnny admits to being in "a bad place" for a time when homeless and out of work, but he knew he needed to pull things together for his children, knowing he needed to have a productive life and a job.

He remembers on two different occasions coming to DESC to get ready for work. One time he was driving a delivery truck for a paper company. The other time he needed steel toe boots for a warehouse job. He said that both times the DESC atmosphere was calm, friendly and caring and that he got everything he needed.

Johnny makes it clear that he appreciates all of DESC's help through the years.

There's a lot to look forward to. In addition to his new job, Johnny will be a first-time grandfather later this year. He says that after all the ups and downs, things are finally coming together for him, and he is "ready to go!"

Johnny's long-term dream is to eventually buy a piece of property for a house, become a nurse, delight in his grandchildren (he's counting on more) and write children's books.



Johnny revisits DESC on a new path.



DESC's long-term vision is for individuals and families to achieve and sustain financial stability and independence. By answering Jesus' call for us to assist the poor and homeless, DESC uplifts families and individuals in real-time crisis.

Families receive care with dignity.

Thanks to extremely generous donors and amazing volunteers and staff, our neighbors struggling with hardships receive a helping hand with emergency financial assistance, groceries, clothing and case management.

Special Thanks for Special Donors

♥ There are so many incredible donors to thank for helping families fight poverty! Here are a few generous grants received since our last newsletter—

Cavan Family Foundation, The Clinton Family Fund, Edna Sproull Williams Foundation, Herb and Ann Rowe Charitable Foundation, Feeding Northeast Florida, Krause Family Foundation, The Lord's Foundation, Lucy Gooding Charitable Foundation Trust, MaryEllen Willis Charitable Trust, The Olive Tree Foundation, PLAYERS Red Coats, Terry Family Foundation, Thomas M. and Irene B. Kirbo Charitable Foundation and United Way of Northeast Florida.

♥ **Larry Roziers, the Mitch22 Foundation and Sandalwood High School** were extremely giving, hosting three huge food drives. For World Homeless Day, alongside **Duval County ESS and Jean Ribault High School**, they collected canned and boxed goods. They also hosted a Thanksgiving drive.

♥ We're grateful to have received many holiday pantry donations. The **First Presbyterian Church of Jacksonville Ladies Circle Impact Church** put together Thanksgiving Kits with turkeys, pies and canned goods. **Von Fuller** organized a Holiday Luncheon Collection of canned and boxed

goods at **JEA**. The **Habijax** staff holiday party collected soup and diapers. The **Gate PreCast Company** assembled 24 Advent bags of canned and boxed goods.

♥ **South Jacksonville Presbyterian Church, Hump Day Ladies Group, the PEO Chapter, and First Presbyterian Church of Jacksonville** each donated toiletries, diapers, wipes, feminine hygiene and blankets.

♥ **Salli Solow** held a Hoodies for the Homeless Drive for her 77th birthday. She also started a Children's Artist Wall in the DESC lobby by donating clipboards, crayons and paper.

♥ We're grateful to have stocked up on winter coats too. **Cassie Buckner, Riverside Presbyterian Church and Five Points Merchants** collected coats and other clothing items. And, **Jennifer Higgins** at **Bank of America** hosted the One Warm Coat Drive, collecting six boxes of coats.

♥ **John Stockton Elementary School** hosted a "Soctober" Drive, collecting 1900 pairs of new socks.

♥ Thank you to **Debbie Pierson and Prudence Baldwin** for organizing a food drive at the **Riverside Presbyterian Day School**.

♥ The **Cecil Pines Adult Living Community** hosted a Christmas toy collection, plus books, bikes and games.

♥ **Soles4Souls** donated 6 boxes of men's shoes.

♥ **The Alpha Beta Eta Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.** donated clothing, diapers, shoes and nonperishables for Martin Luther King, Jr. Service Day.



♥ Thank you to **Cindy Livings** for knitting and donating hats and scarves. Also to **First United Methodist Church** for hats, socks and a scarf tree.

♥ We're so thankful for the huge donation of children's clothing from **WeeTRADE's** most recent bi-annual sale, and **Rick and Patty Renstrom** for bagging, transporting and unloading.

♥ **Riverside Avenue Christian Church and Bank of America, Southside Office** hosted clothing drives.

♥ We're grateful to **United Way of Northeast Florida** for donating welcome home kits, reading buddy kits, books, feminine products, antibacterial spray, hygiene products, and socks.

♥ **The Garden Club of Jacksonville Annual Flea Market** donated leftover items and **Oceanside Cleaners** donated unclaimed clothing.

New Gate River Run volunteers

After 21 years of collecting shoes for the Gate River Run, **Carey and Ruth Ann Hepler** passed the torch to new leadership after their move to Spain. This year, **Bucky Devereaux** and **Dean Hollinsworth** from the **Evangel Temple** took over.

They collected a U-Haul FULL of shoes and even sorted them at the Expo site with the help of **Sherry Cason** and **Janet Burch**. The shoes will provide a much needed resource for our clients, especially those who are unhoused.

"We are so grateful to have another generous group of people to continue doing this for people in need," said **Beth Wilson**, DESC Program Director. "It can be hard to keep shoes stocked, so this helps so much."

We owe a special thanks to Bucky and Dean for organizing this for us, and to the race participants for their shoes!



Evangel Temple volunteers with some of the race shoes.

Renewing Hope

As a single mother, Daisy's primary goal is taking care of her three children. Nothing is more important than that.

That's why the challenges Daisy faced at the end of last year were so scary.

First, Daisy lost her job. Then, she was diagnosed with a heart condition.

With no incoming revenue, and her doctor saying she couldn't go back to work, Daisy sought disability funds to take care of her family.

While waiting for benefits, Daisy received a 3-day notice for late rent, meaning she had little time to rectify the situation or face eviction. Her last ounce of hope was crushed when she got word that she was denied disability benefits.

Daisy was desperate for a resolution. A close friend suggested she contact United Way 211, and she figured it was worth a try. Daisy reached out to the information and referral service and was connected to DESC.

Through DESC's Emergency Financial Assistance program (EFA), Daisy received the funds needed to catch up on her rent. She also learned of other DESC resources such as food, clothing and financial literacy literature.

"DESC was a Godsend in my situation because, I had tried every other option I knew to keep me and my children off the streets," said Daisy.

She also received a Target gift card to assist with household essentials and has been approved for disability through the appeals process.

"Receiving financial assistance has given me more than just rent. It has given me peace of mind and has lifted a heavy burden off my shoulders," she said.

"With your help, I have overcome the difficult situation of becoming homeless. Thanks to your generosity, I can sleep soundly at night knowing that I and my children still have a home."



David Clark and Pam Prier accept the grant award from Bank of America's Martha Barrett.

Neighborhood Builders

Last fall, the Bank of America announced the recipients of their Neighborhood Builder Grant, and DESC was one of them! Alongside the Literacy Alliance of Northeast Florida, we'll receive funds to enhance our services, especially case management programs, over the next two years.

This competitive grant provides financial aid and leadership training to local nonprofits. By investing in local organizations, Bank of America aims to help build stronger, more resilient neighborhoods.

"We are so grateful to have been recognized with this grant," said **David Clark**, Executive Director. "This \$200,000 grant will allow DESC to increase services for families struggling with financial shortages. Thank you to Bank of America for your incredible generosity."

Sewing Hope for DESC



Sewing Hope began in August of 2014 when three friends were looking for a way to both help DESC and refine their sewing skills.

Now, almost 10 years later, those ladies and (more) have produced more than 10,000 sewn goods for the children and families DESC serves including dresses, skirts, grocery totes and more.

What was supposed to be an eight-week project, became hundreds of hours dedicated to helping those in need. Over the last 10 years, the ladies of Sewing Hope have met once a week, at times, with up to 20 volunteers involved. "They sew their love into everything, especially those adorable handmade dresses. This is such an amazing milestone," said **Pam Prier**, Board Member.

We are grateful for this thoughtful and caring group, and we know the clients are too. Thank you for your dedication.

A mother's brave face



Laquandra would do anything for her daughter.

This past Christmas was particularly challenging for **Laquandra** whose life was disrupted when her landlord forced her out of her rental property.

The unexpected notice caught Laquandra off guard and left her scrambling to find a solution for her 4-year-old daughter and her epileptic brother who was living with them. On

top of that, Laquandra's truck had just broken down.

All of this meant that despite being gainfully employed, Laquandra was facing homelessness.

Laquandra's other siblings had full families living with them and/or other medical issues, so they couldn't house them. She ended up in a weekly hotel room with her daughter, and her brother moved elsewhere.

Because the room was so small, Laquandra had to dispose of her belongings that wouldn't fit in the hotel.

Laquandra tried to make each day feel like an "adventure" in some way to make it through the trials and to distract her daughter from their situation. But she was quickly going through her money.

As Christmas Day came, and her daughter's birthday too, Laquandra managed a little party with a few gifts. She wanted to put a smile on her daughter's face and not let her feel left out.

Things started to turn around, when in January, Laquandra got a referral to DESC where she received emergency financial assistance for a security deposit and rent. In short order, she and her daughter moved into their new apartment, but they still needed furniture and household items while also needing to get the truck repaired.

All these challenges meant it was hard to buy groceries and clothing. So, again Laquandra came to DESC for help.

Laquandra is grateful for all the assistance she's received! She said the food and clothes were helpful, especially the fruits, vegetables and meats.

Having a full kitchen with fresh groceries has "lifted their spirits," and Laquandra knows they'll get settled again.

"A mommy's got to do what a mommy's got to do to make it work," she said thanking staff and volunteers on her way home.

Jags and Tide team up to help DESC

Jacksonville proved once again that we're a tight-knit community when the Jacksonville Jaguars partnered with TIDE to host a city-wide clothing drive to help those in need.

It was incredible to see the huge pile of clothes displayed in front of the stadium during the home game.

Even better, Jaxon DeVille, the ROAR cheerleaders and other staff washed and folded the loads during the game. Members from the team then personally delivered the collection to DESC along with a \$25,000 donation!

There was more than 700 lbs. of clothing. WOW! "This was the gift that kept giving," said **Beth Wilson**, Program Director. "The quality was great and the items were just what we needed."

It was so amazing to see our community come together to help those in need. We are grateful to have been chosen for this partnership as clothing is crucial for the clients we see. Go Jaguars!



The donated clothes, cleaned and folded, outside of EverBank Stadium.

We love our volunteers!

DESC has the BEST VOLUNTEERS EVER!

We are blessed with the most selfless and caring volunteers who want the best for each client. These amazing volunteers contributed almost 11,000 hours last year at an estimated value of more than \$330,000!

DESC simply couldn't have provided 15,000 services without this incredible group of dedicated people.

The week of April 21 is officially National Volunteer Appreciation Week, and we want the world to know that WE LOVE OUR VOLUNTEERS! DESC would not be the same without each and every one of you.

Thank you for all you do!

If you would like to join this group of dedicated volunteers, please let us know. You can reach out via beth.wilson@descjax.org.

Remote receptionists

While the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic were very hard, it pushed many businesses and organizations to change the way they operate. One thing that changed for DESC, and stuck, was having remote receptionists.

Allowing our switchboard operators to stay home opened up the possibilities immensely. We were able to expand our phone coverage from a couple times a week to eight shifts a week!

For the last four years, our remote receptionists have helped so many people facing hardships.

We are so grateful for the wonderful volunteers who answer so many desperate calls and provide a reassuring presence, loving attitude and even prayers.



Janie Jones, a long-time DESC volunteer, operating the switchboard from home.



Alex Benavides, Julie Handley, Theresa Bennett Hill and Clay Meux.

Board members roll off

Four of DESC's amazing Board members recently reached their term limits and rotated off the Board of Directors. **Alex Benavides, Theresa Bennett Hill, Julie Handley** and **Clay Meux** have all provided phenomenal service to DESC through their talents and time.

Through their many years of dedicated volunteering, this distinguished group gave their all to help, including chairing the Board, leading our fundraising efforts, chairing our fundraisers, setting up our computers, helping in the food pantry and so much more.

While they won't be on the Board, we know we can count on them for their continued support. Thanks Alex, Theresa, Julie and Clay for the incredible work you've done to help those in need!

UNF interns

For many years, DESC has been lucky to host students from the University of North Florida (UNF) for internships. While we help them prepare for their careers, they help us even more!

We have had both social work and communications interns. From helping clients with work boots and career guidance, to interviewing clients for Facebook, our interns see it all.

This past fall and this spring, we've had **Alisia Collins**, a social work intern. "My experience as an intern at DESC has been very educational and inspiring," Alisia said. "The work boots program is insight into the needs of the community. Hearing client's stories and the perseverance through life is a reminder to keep pushing."

While at DESC, interns gain insight into their careers while preparing for the future.

"This internship is confirmation that social work is the place for me," said Alisia. "Being a front-line resource has allowed me to contribute to mending the bridge between the community and social service institutions."

We are so thankful to have Alisia and know she'll do great things in her career!



Alisia Collins, DESC's UNF social work intern.



Karen Joyce, Robert Barzler, Malissa Ruhé, Brian Snow, Chris Buckley and Carmen Baselice enjoyed social time after Brian's presentation.

In-service day

DESC volunteers and staff gathered for an in-service meeting to learn more ways to help DESC clients. We were graciously joined by Janice Kiernan, past chair of the Board for BEAM, and Brian Snow, President of Sulzbacher's Housing Division.

Janice spoke about "caring communications" and taught the group how to engage in respectful and effective communications.

Brian shared the latest about Sulzbacher and those who are unhoused.

It was a great time of learning and fellowship.



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NEEDS LIST

Families always need
the items below.

- ♥ New socks and underwear (all sizes)
- ♥ Backpacks, totes and suitcases
- ♥ Men's, women's and children's shorts (all sizes)
- ♥ Men's pants (sizes 30-36), T-shirts and jeans
- ♥ Women's shirts and pants in larger sizes
- ♥ Men' shoes
- ♥ Work gloves
- ♥ Children's clothing for all elementary age sizes
- ♥ Bug spray, "Skin So Soft" and sunscreen
- ♥ Toiletries like deodorant, toothbrushes, toothpaste, razors, bar soap, shampoos and conditioners
- ♥ Diapers and wipes
- ♥ Bibles

You can see the updated
Current Needs List online
at descjax.org/current_needs/

DESC DEFENDERS: GENERATIONS

This September, don't miss DESC DEFENDERS: Generations!
Join Honorary Chairs, Hank and Mary Coxe, in a fun night
while learning more about the importance of giving and why
so many people are in need. We hope you can help again!

