



SPRING 2022

NEWS FROM THE DESC

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Mario and Sheena came to visit recently and brought Antoine, the youngest of their seven children.

Getting more than they asked for

As the new year was just starting, **Sheena** and **Mario** came to DESC looking for food and clothing for their family of nine. They found both and a whole lot more.

The volunteer helping them suggested the married couple consider the DESC Empowerment Program (DEP) for additional resources for their five boys and two girls (ranging in age from 18 months to college).

It turns out both Sheena and Mario had lost their jobs due to COVID. While searching for work and trying to make ends meet, things got even more difficult. One of their cars caught fire and was destroyed, and the other car required a new starter. Without transportation, getting a new job was just about hopeless.

Jan Carpenter, the couple's case manager, gave them recommendations for career advice, family counseling, financial literacy training and additional services – all of which will help Sheena and Mario create obtainable goals for their family.

And, thanks to generous donors, DESC helped the couple find a mechanic and covered the costs to fix the car. Sheena and Mario got right back to looking for jobs, and within a month or so, both were gainfully employed.

Additionally, DESC has partnered with **Jax Co Furniture and Mattress Store** who supplied the family with three new beds and mattresses. **Presbyterian Social Ministries** also provided new pillows and linens. "The boys love their new mattresses and actually just having a bed!" said Sheena. "And our mattress and bed are so comfortable."

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Double the grace

For a young mother of five children all under the age of 8, including two sets of twins, Cetoria keeps an upbeat, positive attitude.

It isn't easy, as Cetoria's been having a rough time since the COVID outbreak. Back then, she worked as a head cook at Sonny's BBQ, but her location closed. Eventually, she and her children were evicted from their apartment and forced to live with her sister. But the pressure of five additional little ones under one roof was too disruptive to the peace and quiet her sister had been enjoying.

So, Cetoria and the kids moved into a hotel for a short time but have recently moved into their own apartment again.

A proud single mom, Cetoria works part time at Fanatics, but it's a seasonal position and the work ebbs and flows. She recently added a job at Dollar General too! With her CNA classes behind her, Cetoria is eagerly waiting to take the State Boards.

Continued on Page 2

WORK BOOTS STORIES INSIDE

Details on pages 6-7





From Board Chair Pamela Prier

As I take over the reins as Board Chair of DESC, I follow in the footsteps of men and women who drew upon their passion of helping their fellow neighbor to build this fine organization. These extraordinary leaders laid the foundation to ensure DESC could bring people together to tackle some of our community's toughest obstacles. More specifically, I follow Chris Buckley who deftly led our organization through the worst health crisis in more than 100 years. She made sure DESC could make it through these challenging times and not just survive but thrive.

That spirit of determination and relentless pursuit to help families fight poverty remains at the core of what DESC is and shall be. As we emerge from the pandemic, we are stronger than ever and ready to continue our quest to build services that help families pull themselves out of poverty. It's a big job, but with God's guidance and grace as well as donors, volunteers and staff, we will succeed.

Speaking of volunteers, the week of April 17 – 23 is National Volunteer Week, a time to recognize volunteerism across our community. In all sincerity, I know without a doubt that DESC has the best volunteers ever! Our core group of volunteers is integral to our work. They help in all facets of the organization providing heartfelt and supportive time and talent. Our recent audit estimated the value of their work at more than \$300,000! I'd say their work is priceless! Thank you to all of the DESC volunteers. You're AWESOME!

Our volunteer Board continues to recruit new talent and perspectives. We highlighted new members in our last newsletter, and since then, we've added one more member – Juanita Senior, a community volunteer. We are pleased to improve our Board's diversity and continue to place an emphasis on bringing voices reflective of our community and our clients.



As the year moves on, we are looking forward to two exciting events. First up is Uptown Civitan Club's Tee Up event for DESC on August 7. The golf-themed event at Topgolf will benefit DESC. Read more on Page 4.

Then, in October, our DESC Defenders will once again join forces to wipeout poverty and will look to host another record-breaking fundraiser! The event will make a joyful return to the WJCT Studios as an in-person gathering. Sponsorships for both events are available and are the key to our fundraising success.

I am excited to work with all of you and look forward to doing amazing things together. Thank you for your continued support!



Cetoria and three of her children check out some new books and toys after a recent visit.

Grace (cont.)

When Cetoria came to DESC recently for clothing, she was hoping to get some much-needed items for her quickly growing children – boy and girl twins (4), twin girls (6) and the oldest daughter (8). The children received multiple bags of gently used and new clothing (with tags still on), as well as shoes, stuffed animals, toys, books and pullups.

The family also went home with dairy products including milk, fresh meats and vegetables as well as canned food and dry goods.

They were excited about all the clothing and food and grateful for the help.

"Each day's patience is by the grace of God," said Cetoria. She says her dream is "not to live any kind of lavish lifestyle, but just to be comfortable with the kids and not have to worry and struggle every month."



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 amazing donors to thank for helping families fight poverty! Here are some awesome grants received since our last newsletter—**The City of Jacksonville (American Rescue Plan Act), Cavan Family Foundation, Hall-Halliburton Foundation, Herb and Ann Rowe Charitable Foundation, Krause Family Foundation, Lucy Gooding Charitable Foundation Trust, The Lord's Foundation, The Olive Tree Foundation, THE PLAYERS Red Coats, Edna Sproull Williams Foundation** and **The Thomas M. and Irene B. Kirbo Charitable Foundation.**

♥ In addition to providing our awesome facilities, parking and utilities, the **First Presbyterian Church of Jacksonville** finds ways all year long to help those in need including Thanksgiving baskets with gift cards, blankets, coats, Evening Circle donations and Pathfinders Sunday School Class donations.

♥ We are excited about a new partnership with **First Coast No More Homeless Pets!** Thanks to generous sharing, we now provide cat and dog food to those coming for help. How wonderful to support the four-legged family members too.

♥ **OnPay Solutions** held a drive and purchased food to give families delicious Christmas dinners including turkeys, hams and all the fixings!

♥ **Gardner Davis Jr.** led another amazing November fundraiser. This year's theme was "DeVitovember" and it proved to be a huge success.

♥ Families in need won "Souper Bowl Sunday!" **Riverside Avenue Christian Church** and **Lake Shore Presbyterian Church** held separate events, but both delivered large amounts of soup, cereal, peanut butter and canned goods. We even received some great clothing and cash gifts!



Christi Veleta from Lake Shore Presbyterian Church brought the church's "Souper Bowl Sunday" donation and Chris Buckley and Beth Wilson gratefully accepted!

♥ We are so grateful for the latest incredible gifts from **WeeTRADE!** We received another huge donation of children's clothing after the recent bi-annual sale.

♥ **Sewing Hope** has a brand new serger to help create professional, smooth seams! **Sharon Meehan** was on the search for a new unit when she connected with **Dion** at **Sew Vac Direct** and not too long into the conversation, Dion offered this awesome donation! Sharon has been using it to hem

a stack of men's pants and more and says she "loves, loves, loves working with the new machine!"



Sew Vac Direct generously donated a new serger to Sewing Hope.

♥ In our Fall 2021 "News from the DESC" edition, we asked for help with collecting canned goods. The response was fantastic! Thanks to all of those who pitched in!

- **Gate Precast Company** donated Christmas bags of food and clothing.
- **Larry Roziers** coordinated numerous high school collections of food.
- **Riverside Park Methodist Circle of Hope** collected and donated cereal.
- **Riverside Presbyterian Day School** brought in a horse trailer full of food, clothing and coats.
- **Jordan Lorenzo** with **The Learning Experience Academy of Early Education** hosted a collection for food and diapers.
- **Uptown Civitan Jacksonville** also collected food, clothing and cash.

Getting more (cont.)

"I am so glad we could give the family a better night's sleep," said Jan. "Helping this family in multiple ways is so rewarding. Just knowing they're all happier and closer to long-term success, means everything. It's why this program exists in the first place."

Sheena recently started an online Grow with Google certificate class to build on her interest in the IT field. **Family Promise Jacksonville** provided her with a free Android tablet for classes.

It turns out, education is a core value for the family. Sheena and Mario ensure their children keep up

with their schoolwork before enjoying extracurricular activities. Football has been a big part of the fun outside of school. In fact, the oldest son plays football at St. Thomas University in Miami.

"Sheena and Mario are a young-at-heart, loving couple," said Jan. "They're both very determined to help their family discover the best opportunities available."

"I am so thankful for everything DESC has done for my family," Sheena said. "I am excited about moving forward!"

Race shoes find new life

For the twentieth year in a row, **Carey Hepler** finished the Gate River Run and kept on running eventually stopping at DESC with hundreds of shoes and bags of clothes!

Well, he really drove a U-Haul truck, but it did indeed have hundreds and hundreds of shoes and bags and bags of clothes. Carey, his wife **Ruth Ann** and his brother **Brian** started collecting the used running shoes and T-shirts as they realized that many runners won't wear the same pair of shoes in more than one race.

The shoe drive took off as many racers have embraced the idea of sharing what they no longer need and knowing that those who are unhoused would love to have better shoes.

"Most runners go through a pair of shoes every 3-6 months. The cushioning gets compacted and worn, but they're still great for walking around," said Carey. "Most runners have boxes and closets full of shoes they're not sure what to do with. We love being the middleman to connect runners with DESC."

The Heplers have set up a Facebook page to help promote the effort but being a mainstay at the race for years has yielded the best results. With a tent set up outside of the River Run Expo, race participants drop off their



Carey and Ruth Ann Hepler and volunteers unload hundreds of bags of shoes and clothes.

items and get a high five, handshake or fist bump.

Once at DESC, teen volunteers help unload the shoes and then go about sorting them by size and gender. They sterilize them with disinfectant spray, tie the pair together and get them ready for distribution.

The men's shoes will run out in just a few months, but the women's shoes will last most of the year. In total, the Heplers have collected and donated more than 12,000 shoes and 10,000 T-shirts.

"We couldn't give shoes to everyone who comes in if it weren't for the race shoes Carey collects," said **Beth Wilson**, Program Director at DESC. "They're an amazing resource, and we thank the Heplers for being so helpful for all these years!"



The U-Haul truck was practically full with this year's donations!

Tee Up Update



The members of the Uptown Civitan Club are excited to announce the annual Tee Up event is back on the calendar for 2022.

The COVID-19 delayed event is officially slated for Sunday, August 7. It's still at Topgolf and runs from 1:30 to 5:30 p.m. And, the event still benefits DESC!

This event promises to be a fun outing featuring exciting golfing options along with an incredible silent auction and wonderful food.

Sponsorships directly help those struggling to make ends meet week after week and start at only \$500. Sponsors receive event recognition, lunch and two and one-half hours of golf. Individual tickets are \$80 each and children's tickets are \$40.

For more information, email info@uptowncivitanjacksonville.org or call DESC at 358-7955.

Uptown Civitan's mission is to provide civic-minded women the opportunity for fellowship, knowledge, enhancement of leadership skills and community involvement as part of an unsurpassable service club.

Uptown Civitan's **Sandy Jones** is co-chairing the event with **Nancy Chamblin** who recently retired from DESC.

New leadership for DESC board

We are excited to announce that the DESC Board of Directors elected new officers at the annual meeting in January naming **Pam Prier** as the new Board Chair. The remaining slate of officers includes **Claude Moulton**, Vice Chair, **Trista Carraher**, Treasurer, **Debbie Pierson**, Secretary, and **Chris Buckley**, is the Immediate Past Chair.

Juanita Senior, a community volunteer and master gardener, was approved to join the Board. Additionally, DESC is pleased to partner with the **Nonprofit Center of Northeast Florida's** Board Service Fellow program. We welcome **Jesse James** who works at **Habitat for Humanity** and **Daniel Mahfood** who works at **Holland and Knight** to the DESC Board of Directors throughout the year-long program.

Julie Handley will chair the Fundraising Committee and **Tim Hedrick** will chair the Governance Committee.

Thank you to these Board members and all on the Board for your dedication to fulfill the DESC mission to proclaim the love of Jesus Christ by meeting the needs of people in emergency situations or experiencing poverty.

Determined to secure future

Kenneth is determined to secure a solid future for him and his partner, **Tina**, and knows a full-time job is the way to do it.

Over the years, DESC has provided Kenneth and Tina with clothing, food, toiletries and steel-toed work boots and skid resistant shoes for various jobs. Like so many in the community over the past two years, the couple has been subjected to the ups and downs in the job market because of COVID stops and starts. Getting, and then keeping, a job has been particularly difficult.

One of DESC's priorities remains helping people in any way possible to help them enter or remain in the work force. Kenneth has gotten by over the last six months by landing temporary jobs through various labor pools. Prior to that, he worked in property maintenance and has driven a taxicab.

On their recent visit, Kenneth was very excited about his new position at one of the local fisheries. He was starting the next day!

The job is in the fresh fish freezer and is 40 hours a week. The pay is



Kenneth came to DESC to prepare for his new job.

decent, and Kenneth will receive full benefits. But, Kenneth didn't have the right clothes for the job.

Thanks to DESC donors, we could give him the necessary sturdy pants, long underwear, sweatshirts, warm outerwear, skull cap, gloves and proper footwear to endure his shift in the cold temperatures.

Kenneth is one of a dozen or so recently hired in this type of work who have come for similar clothing. They have all been extremely appreciative of the clothing and accessories as they start their new ventures.

When Kenneth was asked where he saw himself one year from now, he answered without hesitation, "I'll be managing the Fishery!" Go Kenneth! We're rooting for you!

Long-time DESC staff member retires



Nancy Chamblin and Julie Handley at Nancy's farewell party.

It's bittersweet to report that **Nancy Chamblin** has retired from DESC after more than 15 years on the staff.

A constant source of compassion and dedication to those in need, Nancy has been a key member of the DESC team. She's worked in every aspect of the organization over the years but spent most of her time working with Emergency Financial Assistance.

"Nancy had the ability to put the clients at ease despite all of the anxiety of their desperate situations," **David Clark**, Executive Director, said. "She could turn the tears from fear into tears of relief."

Nancy will be spending more time with her family, but she will continue her community work with the Woman's Club of Jacksonville and the Uptown Civitan Club. She's already volunteered to help DESC's Fundraising Committee and promised she will be visiting regularly. We sure hope so.

"We owe Nancy a lot of appreciation for all she's done over the years," said **Julie Handley**, who spoke on behalf of the Board of Directors at Nancy's retirement celebration February 24. "She's been a great advocate for DESC in the community spreading the good news about the work we do."

Stepping Into Work

A few years ago, **Salli Solow** asked friends and family to celebrate a milestone birthday by donating \$25 to purchase work boots for the homeless coming to DESC. When **Linda Ferrigno** saw the idea, she decided to do the same for her milestone birthday. And that's how "Lindarella" became our work boots angel.

Since then, Linda has raised and donated funds for thousands and thousands of work boots (and now restaurant shoes). Not surprisingly, the costs for the shoes have gone up to \$30, but that hasn't slowed down donations.

Here are a few stories of people helped. These stories are also featured on Facebook. If you haven't liked DESC yet or aren't following our page, please do so at www.facebook.com/descjax.



Dwane
Dwane says he's been blessed with opportunity. It's rare to meet someone as optimistic as Dwane. When he visited DESC he was just three days out after a lengthy prison sentence. Since then, he's been living with Operation New Hope and attending employment courses. He needed work boots so he could get to work as soon as he is able. Dwane hopes to open his own auto repair shop in the future.

Stephanie
Stephanie recently started EMT training and needed new work shoes. She enjoys working in the medical field, having been a certified nursing assistant in the past. On the job or during free time, Stephanie loves to sing. You might find her singing some soul to an Aretha Franklin song or crooning to "Strawberry Wine," by Deana Carter.





DESC Defenders prepping for return

Captain Underwear, Princess Pantaloons, Queen Appétit and Commander Current continue the epic battle against poverty and are joining forces again to prepare for another edition of DESC DEFENDERS: Journey Through Time in October.

While having to modify the event over the last two years into virtual events was disappointing, each event broke all records for most funds raised for DESC. In fact, last year's event broke \$200,000 for the first time ever! This year, the DESC Defenders are planning to meet in person but keep some virtual options for those unable to attend in person.

The superheroes are developing plans to collect the incredible power of Jacksonville citizens and wipeout poverty.

Honorary Chairs are **Carey and Ruth Ann Hepler** long-time supporters (see article on page 4 for one example). Event chair is **Alex Benavides** and Fundraising Chair is **Julie Handley**. The two have recruited **Lesley Roberts, Natalie Schoof, Christian Abrahamson** and more. Work is ongoing to ensure it's the best DESC event ever!

Keep an eye out for more details. To sponsor, please reach out to david.clark@descjax.org.

Clarissa

Clarissa is a mother of 10 beautiful children. In her free time, she homeschools her youngest son who is autistic and has Down Syndrome. She says he's extremely talented, especially with numbers. Receiving these boots, Clarissa says, will help her tremendously as they will allow her to work, protect her feet and prevent her from getting a foot fungus.



Raymon

Raymon is on the hunt for a job and thinks the boots and clothes he received from DESC will really help. He had already applied to two jobs before coming in. "I just need boots and my hands and I'll be ok," says Raymon.





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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
- ♥ Men's pants (sizes 30-36), T-shirts and jeans
- ♥ Women's shirts and pants in larger sizes
- ♥ Men's shoes
- ♥ Work gloves
- ♥ Children's clothing for all elementary school age sizes
- ♥ Toiletries like deodorant, toothbrushes, toothpaste, razors, bar soap, shampoos and conditioners

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



DO YOU WANT TO VOLUNTEER?

DESC could not exist without our wonderful volunteers! And, we could use some more! Are you interested in helping families fight poverty? Then maybe you could be a Food Pantry coordinator, a member of the Food Acquisition Team, a Clothing Center coordinator or volunteer fundraiser.

If you're interested in learning more, please email clothing@descjax.org.