Building Community, One Relationship At A Time

Deirdre Rivera-Martin and Rebecca Hayes place cheerful holiday touches while decorating villas at Give Kids The World in Kissimmee, Florida.

Billed as America’s new hometown, Celebration, Florida, has all the ingredients of friendly, neighborhood living which make memories of yesteryear so fond. Seventh-day Adventist Christians living and working there are adding their special relational ingredients as well: small groups, service, and Sabbath. Various groups gather in the community to build relationships and search the Scriptures.

Des and Mary Lou Cummings, charter members of Celebration Health Spiritual Community (a mission group of the Florida Conference sponsored by Florida Hospital church), host weekly small group studies in their home. These informal get-togethers, such as Friday Night Group, intentionally create the opportunity for members to invite neighbors and friends, search Scripture, and build relationships.

Service opportunities are also part of the range of activities coordinated by Celebration Health Spiritual Community.

Members, like Dick and Brenda Duerksen, are also actively involved in serving in the community. The Duerksens are regular volunteers at Give Kids The World, a “home away from home” for terminally ill children and their families who come to visit Central Florida theme parks. They serve meals or clean “adopted” villas while being with these families, an experience they find enriching.

Sabbath Celebrations are hosted on the second Saturday of every month in the atrium of Florida Hospital’s, Celebration Health. These inspirational times of worship and spiritual focus give members, like Rebecca Hayes, R.N., another opportunity to invite neighbors and friends to experience Christian lifestyle and relationships.

In simple, personal ways, Celebration Health Spiritual Community members are creatively involved in church planting and building community, one relationship at a time.

You’re Invited To Camp Meeting—Live Via Satellite, May 26-June 3, 2000

Members in the Southern Union Conference and across North America are invited to the 106th Annual Florida Conference Camp Meeting, live via satellite over the Adventist Communication Network (ACN).

Sabbath school and church will be televised, plus the Sabbath afternoon health care mission features; global mission highlights; and every evening meeting from the main auditorium. It will also be translated into Spanish.

“ACN wants to foster a “family” environment for the 900,000 Adventist members in North America,” says Kermit Netteburg, assistant to the president for North America for communication. “One of the ways this happens is to have a part of the family, like Florida Conference, create a great program like Camp Meeting, and share it with the rest of the North American family.”
Elian Gonzalez Receives Books From LEs

It was Thanksgiving day and our hearts ached as we heard the story of Elian Gonzalez, the five-year-old Cuban boy rescued at sea by two American fishermen. With his mother, stepfather, and eight others, Elian left Cuba on a rustic raft to seek freedom in the United States.

Their raft sank, yet before perishing, the heroic mother tied her son on a small inner tube and gave him the last bottle of water. Elian was found and rescued two days later, surrounded by dolphins as if these creatures were sent by God to protect him from shark attacks. Following a 2-day hospitalization, Elian was taken to the home of an uncle in Miami.

With the desire to share the love of Jesus with Elian, Miami Literature Evangelist Gilberto Borges and I went to the uncle’s home hoping to give Elian the books, My Bible Friends. We were met by heavy security and a crowd of reporters.

We asked the uncle if we could present the books to Elian. He hesitated at first. As we unfolded the sales prospectus, showing the covers of each book in the My Bible Friends set, the uncle was drawn to the picture of Jesus in a small boat calming the stormy sea. We looked at him and said, “Without a doubt, Jesus took care of Elian.” Tears began to form in the uncle’s eyes and he replied, “Without a doubt that is so.”

He invited us to come into the backyard where Elian was playing. We walked past security guards and reporters as Elian came to meet us. He was very happy to receive the books about Jesus, the great Savior and friend of children.

Elian is still making headline news and we don’t know if he will be sent back to Cuba or stay in the United States. One thing is certain though, My Bible Friends can help Elian know about Jesus who saved him.

First Fruits of Jewish Ministry in St. Petersburg, New Port Richey

Beth-El Shalom congregations in Florida Conference witnessed the first fruits of their work when Raymond Lush, left, was baptized in the Gulf of Mexico by Jeff Zaremsky, evangelist with Florida Conference Jewish Ministries. The November 20 baptism was held in front of the Jefferson Motel Apartments owned by Mark Schiefer, head elder of the St. Petersburg Adventist church. St. Petersburg is the parent church of Beth-El Shalom. One week later, Zaremsky baptized Sandy Wiese of the New Port Richey Beth-El Shalom group, also in the Gulf.

Zaremsky reports that mid-week studies continue in four nonmember homes, where 20 visitors are taking the Jewish Heritage Bible lessons. Beth-El Shalom’s celebration of Hanukkah, with the impressive lighting of the nine oil candlesticks on the giant 10 foot menorah, was attended by more than 100 visitors and covered by Fox cable television news.
Church & Hospital Partner To Open Health Center

Florida Hospital church member Bill Wilson was considering ways to be involved in the community when he heard about Shepherd’s Hope, Inc., a non-profit health care ministry inspired by Dr. William Barnes, pastor of St. Luke’s United Methodist Church in Windermere, Florida. The organization opened its first free neighborhood health care center in 1997 and was currently looking for other faith groups to sponsor additional facilities in Central Florida’s Orange County. When leadership at Florida Hospital and the Florida Hospital church learned about this, they asked Wilson to organize a taskforce. This led to the church’s sponsorship and opening of the Evans Shepherd’s Hope Health Center in June, 1999.

Located at Evans High School in Orlando, the Center provides free non-emergency medical care to qualified patients every Wednesday from 6-9 p.m. The Center treats individuals and their families who cannot afford health insurance, are not eligible for government assistance programs, whose income is less than 150% of the poverty level, or who are recently unemployed.

“Our church provides volunteer staff and Florida Hospital covers laboratory and radiology services,” says Andy McDonald, pastor of the Florida Hospital church. Thirty-one medical professionals and 24 general volunteers donate their time.

During the first seven months of operation, there were 424 visits by 280 people, according to Donna Roberts, volunteer case manager/coordinator for the Center, a Florida Hospital church member, and associate treasurer for the Florida Conference Association. Twenty patients are seen on average each night.

“Words of appreciation from those who visit the Center are the blessing we receive,” says Roberts. “An over-booked schedule each night tells us we’re meeting a need in the community.”

In addition to helping people needing medical attention, plans are currently underway to bring spiritual-care volunteers on board. “We must keep in mind that we are the hands and feet of Jesus,” says McDonald, “and serving the community has its roots in our mission as Christians.”

Phil Younts Receives Distinguished Award

Phil Younts, Florida Conference camp ministries administrative director, received the 1999 Distinguished Service Award in Camp Ministries for the North American Division. The award “for outstanding contributions to camp ministries” was presented in November during the Association of Adventist Camping Professionals (AACP) Annual Convention at Tall Timbers Retreat Center in Woodruff, Louisiana.

“Phil is recognized as a pioneer of new methods and trends and his leadership has been a tremendous benefit to Adventist camp ministries,” says Allan Williamson, Southern Union Conference youth and camp ministries director.

“Phil is a passionate advocate for camp ministries and a watchdog of policies that positively impact our camps and camp personnel across the Division,” says Willie Oliver, Pathfinder and camp ministries director for North America.

Younts has served on the North American Division Camp Advisory Board since it began in the late 1980s.