

THE FIRST  THE ONLY

Verobeach

JULY 2024

Magazine[®]



McKee Botanical Garden's
new executive director,
Rochelle Wolberg, is

**BLOOMING
WHERE SHE'S
PLANTED**



PHILANTHROPY

On the Home Front

AFFORDABLE HOUSING CONTINUES TO BE AN ELUSIVE BUT ESSENTIAL REALITY

The statistics reported by the Treasure Coast Homeless Services Council in the recently released 2024 Point in Time (PIT) Report had me thinking a lot about the following quote attributed to Albert Einstein: “Not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted.”

If the number of homeless people in Martin, St. Lucie, and Indian River Counties

has decreased by 24 percent compared to 2023, it sure does not seem to align with what I have observed as a rather constant topic of conversation in our community. That topic is affordable housing.

In his 2024 State of the Union address, President Biden identified this problem as one of his administration’s top priorities. With a high-level review of many of the country’s newspapers, I found a full year’s worth

of headlines and columns covering this issue from California to New York and from Texas to Michigan.

In March 2023, Governor DeSantis signed Senate Bill 102, the Live Local Act, representing what his administration claims to be the largest investment for housing efforts in state history. For years, meeting minutes or recordings from Indian River County’s Board of County Commissioners, from each of our



BY JEFFREY R. PICKERING



Affordable housing is a regular topic of conversation in Indian River County.

50 percent of our county’s renters are paying more than 30 percent of their income for housing.

local municipalities, and from the Indian River Hospital District all include substantial references along the same lines.

In summary, you can hear onetime New York gubernatorial candidate Jimmy McMillan’s 2010 proclamation everywhere: “The rent is too damn high.”

If homelessness is the most adverse outcome of our nation’s affordable housing crisis, based on the pervasiveness of this topic, it seems to me that the number of home-

less people in this year’s count should be greater and not less than last year. I called Rayme Nuckles, executive director of the Treasure Coast Homeless Services Council (TCHSC), for some perspective. Overall, under Nuckles’s leadership, the system for serving the needs of our community’s homeless seems to be getting better, but is this what is accounting for the reduction in this year’s count?

“Some of the difference between this year’s PIT count and prior years is our

effectiveness in implementing a ‘housing first’ strategy that gets people off the street quickly and into stable housing before attending to the underlying causes of homelessness,” Nuckles tells me. “Differences in methodology and reporting standards in prior years may also factor in.”

For those who are not familiar, the TCHSC conducts the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) mandatory one-day PIT count as a condition of the government

Our Plans, Your Vision

ARHomesVeroBeach.com • 772-492-4018

©2024 All rights reserved. Beachland Homes Corp., LIC#CGC1506797, is an independently owned and operated franchise.



Indian River Community Foundation representatives Chiaka Nwosu, Brooke Sauserman, Pat Brier, and Jeff Pickering stand with The Source's Anthony Zorbaugh at Dignity Village.

funding issued to our community. Last year that equaled almost \$2.5 million from HUD for the Treasure Coast's continuum of care, almost half of which is designated for use in Indian River County. (For a full description of the methodology and other details, visit tchelpspot.org.)

In 2024, the PIT count was held January 25, with dozens of volunteers, accompanied by several TCHSC staff, participating. Together, they identified 701 homeless individuals living either in shelters or on the streets of the three-county area. In Indian River County, the total was 225, a 34 percent decrease from the 2023 report.

"They searched high and low, in the woods, in abandoned buildings, and even on the beach to find homeless people living and sleeping outdoors," says Nuckles. "Those we found and talked to all have difficult stories, so while the numbers may be going down, the problem is still bad at the individual level."

It's that "individual level" suffering that gets to me, regardless of how many total homeless people are counted in our community.

Of Indian River County's homeless people, 154 were adults and 71 were children; 75 were sheltered and 150 unsheltered. Twenty-three of the unsheltered homeless people were children.

I don't know about you, but to me, as a father of three, the idea of just one homeless child sleeping outside—in a tent, in a car, or on the sand underneath a beachside boardwalk—seems like too many.

Fortunately, there are several nonprofit charitable organizations in our community whose missions and resources are focused on helping. It's likely you have heard of, and maybe even donate to, better-known charities such as The Source, Camp Haven, Hope for Families Center, or Samaritan Center. There are others that are not as well known, more grassroots, but making an

LEADERSHIP DEDICATION THANK YOU COMPASSION SELFLESSNESS

TORCHBEARERS

Bernard A. Egan Foundation
Cleveland Clinic Indian River Hospital
Dean Mead Minton & Moore
Florida Floor Fashions
Florida Power & Light Company
Gould Cooksey Fennell
Indian River County
Indian River Sheriff's Office
Merrill Lynch
Northern Trust
Publix Super Markets
School District of Indian River County
Seacoast Bank
The Hill Group
Vero Beach Social Media

ELITE SPONSORS

AMAC | Alex MacWilliam Real Estate
Armfield Wagner, Inc. Appraisers
AYS Employee Leasing
Florida Power & Light Company
Graves Brothers Company
Kmetz, Elwell, Graham & Assoc., CPA's
Marine Bank
Schlitt Insurance Services, Inc.
SouthState Bank



United Way of
Indian River County
UnitedWayIRC.org

THANK YOU 2023-2024 SPONSORS



The Hope for Families Center recently broke ground for their facility's expansion. Once complete, the center will be twice the size of its original footprint, adding nine transitional apartments and 20 emergency shelter rooms.

impact just the same.

One that touched my heart is Little Birthday Angels. Founded by Angel Pietsch, the organization provides a birthday celebration for every homeless child living in our community. They use donations to provide every homeless student in the School District of Indian River County with "birthday bags of hope" filled with gifts to make a homeless child's birthday special in a discreet way.

Another that moved me and reminded me of the difference simple acts of kindness can make is the All Aboard Fund, started by a client of Indian River Community Foundation initially to cover the cost of academic field trips for students who could not afford

to attend otherwise. When the client learned that there were hundreds of homeless children served by SDIRC schools each year, he narrowed his focus and is now working with the Homeless Children's Foundation to carry out this mission.

Beyond these grassroots initiatives, there are also new efforts underway to address the local affordable housing and homelessness problems at the systems level. With grant funding from Indian River Community Foundation and the United Way of Indian River County, the Coalition for Attainable Homes is going through the process of becoming accredited by the Florida Housing Coalition as a community land trust.

Founded by local housing advocate Julianne Price, and now under the leadership of new executive director Valerie Kines, the organization will work with local government to use surplus land for affordable housing.

“They searched high and low ... to find homeless people.”

– RAYME NUCKLES

Housing affordability is a long-term problem. However, with 50 percent of our county's renters paying more than 30 percent of their income for housing, and with eviction rates at the highest they have ever been, good ideas that lead to solutions are needed now. Some are obvious, others less so.

One less-than-obvious idea that is delivering real results by preventing housing condemnations and the resulting evictions of residents is a collaboration among the Clean Water Coalition, the Economic Opportunities Council, the Indian River Land Trust, and the City of Vero Beach called the "Septic to Sewer Project." It is funded in part by a grant from Community Foundation.

Currently, 750 homes within the Vero Beach city



Local nonprofits collaborating with the City of Vero Beach aim to transition 75 homes at a reduced cost through its "Septic to Sewer Project."

Right: Kristina Berryman, Lynn Kiefer, Heather Burns, Angel Pietsch, and Holly Martel gather gifts for Little Birthday Angels celebrations. Far right: Loretta Kaul joins in on the gift-wrapping fun.



limits still rely on septic systems. Many are owned by residents who are either in poverty or one paycheck away and who do not have the necessary resources to fix a failed septic system. This project aims to connect up to 75 homes to the sewer system at a significantly reduced cost, keeping homeowners housed while preventing an environmental disaster.

On a recent fishing trip, my guide pointed out an osprey nest as we drifted along the shoreline. He reminded me that this species of raptor mates for life and often returns to the same nest for multiple years. The birds and their nests are protected, and when the nests become inactive, they still require a permit to be removed.

I find it ironic that while

there are more than 1,000 species of birds protected by the U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act, along with their “homes,” there is only one species of human and no similar guarantee of a safe, stable, protected home. While it is unlikely that anyone would be able to count all the protected birds and nests in Indian River County in one day, it might take me only a few hours to track down the

23 unsheltered homeless children from this year’s PIT count.

Now, I’m no Einstein, but something does not seem to add up when federal funding flows with abandon toward protecting the “homes” of birds, while attaining affordable housing is still a stretch for so many of our neighbors in need. For them, everything counts. 🌱



4119 INDIAN RIVER DRIVE EAST \$5,250,000

3 BR/3.5 BA/4,548 sq ft
Panoramic views of Indian River Lagoon from this 2-story, 4,548 square foot home. Features detailed interior millwork, mahogany doors, vaulted ceilings in owner’s suite, and guest suites on both floors.



309 LADY PALM TERRACE \$2,495,000

3 BR/3.5 BA/2,968 sq ft
Rarely on the market 2019 constructed home blends casual elegance with outstanding craftsmanship, soaring ceilings and split floor plan. Residents can enjoy a short walk to the dock, fitness center, and private beach club.

CHARLOTTE TERRY GROUP
ALEX MACWILLIAM REAL ESTATE

When *Distinction & Location*
Are Your Top Priorities ...



Charlotte Terry 772.538.2388
charlotte@charlotteterry.com

Patty Valdes 772.473.8810
patty@charlotteterry.com

Maria Calderone 772.713.7139
maria@charlotteterry.com



544 LIVE OAK ROAD \$4,900,000

5 BR/5.5 BA/4,831 sq ft
Luxurious and spacious Central Beach estate, comprising a 3/3.5 main house and 2/2 guest house, with vaulted ceilings and custom molding. Has fenced yard, heated pool, summer kitchen and fireplace.



1120 SAINT GEORGES LANE \$649,000

2 BR/2 BA/1,889 sq ft
Light and charming cottage with a fenced yard, perfect for your pets! Open floor plan and glassed-in porch with extended screened area is perfect for entertaining.