

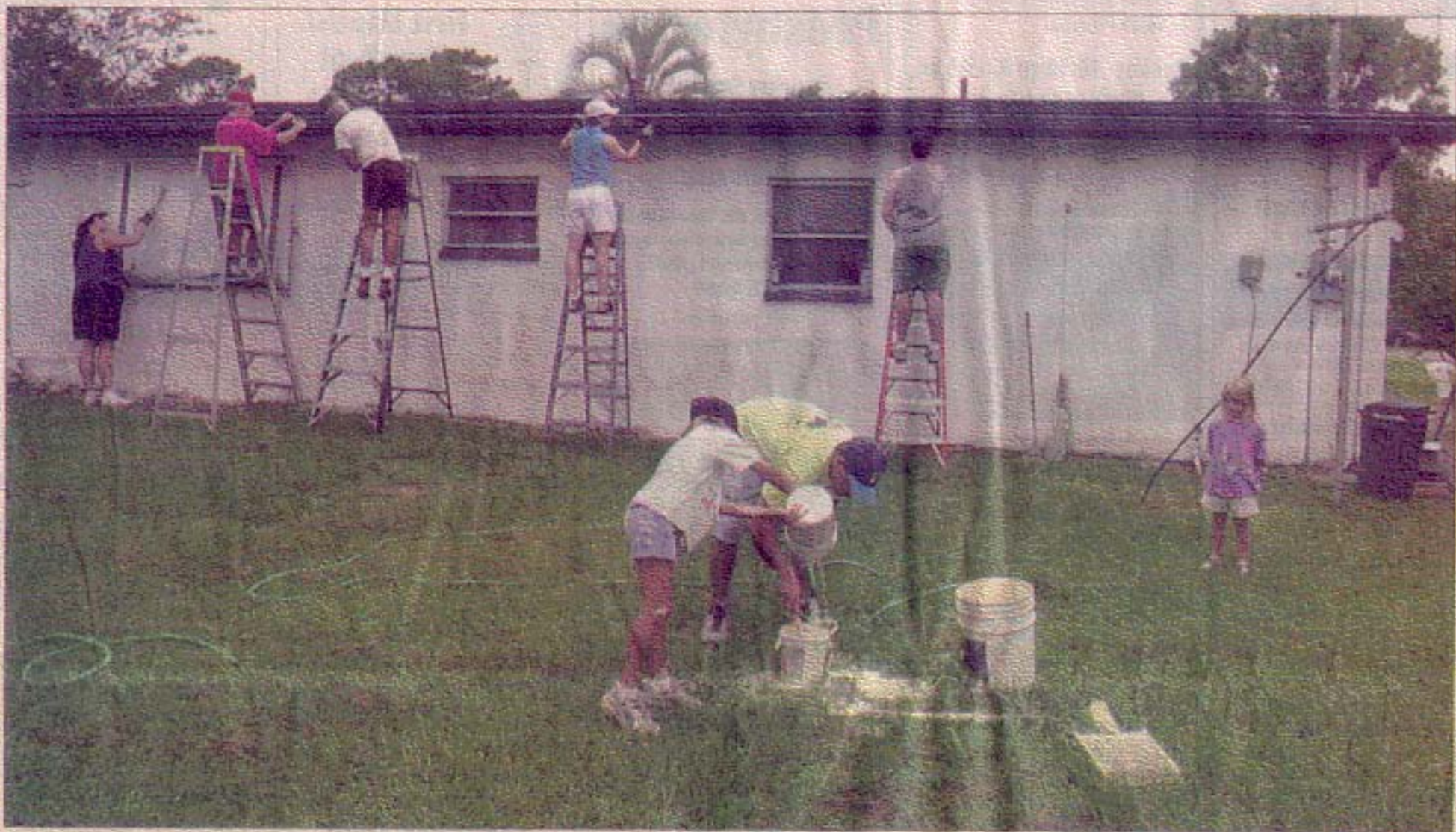
Rotary donation



BRIAN LaPETER/Chronicle

The Rotary Club of Inverness recently donated a check to The Path of Citrus County. DuWayne Slipper, executive director of The Path accepts the check from Rotary Club members Mary-Ann and Arnold Virgilio.

Home sweet home



BRIAN LAPETER/Chronicle

While a lot of churches plan weeklong mission trips to foreign countries or other states, a group from Seven Rivers Presbyterian Church in Lecanto and Nature Coast Community Church in Homosassa is spending the summer renovating The Path of Citrus County's homeless shelter in Beverly Hills. David Iwanlek and his daughter, Alexandra, 9, wash paintbrushes July 13, while other volunteers scrape paint off the exterior of the women's shelter.

Missions field extends to community's back yard

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It's the season for church groups to send their people on short-term missions trips. While some local churches are taking trips to eastern Europe, Mexico — even Tennessee — to work in poor areas and share the gospel, one group decided to take its missions trip home.

Seven Rivers Presbyterian Church in Lecanto and Nature Coast Community Church in Homosassa chose to spend their missions week working at The Path of Citrus County in Beverly Hills, particularly, working at the women's shelter.

Under the direction of the Rev. Ryan Jeffes, assistant pastor at Seven Rivers, 20 people, ranging in age from toddler to senior citizens, met each morning for breakfast, Saturday through Wednesday, at the church, then traveled as a group to the work site. They broke for lunch at noon, worked some more, then returned back to the church for dinner and to participate in the church's family bible conference.

"The concept — it's designed like a missions trip," Jeffes said. He is himself a vet-

eran of several short-term missions trips, having recently returned to Citrus County from a trip to inner-city Chattanooga, Tenn.

"If we were going away, we would seek to pack everything we could into five days. From morning to night, you hit the ground running. The only difference (with a "home" mission) is that you would sleep in your own bed rather than in a dorm or a cabin."

“ The concept — it's designed like a missions trip. ”

The Rev. Ryan Jeffes about the work in Beverly Hills.

He said that takes something away from the missions-trip experience — no late-night talk fests or practical jokes. "But we're doing our best to build a 'team sense' of people working together to accomplish a goal."

He said the three main ingredients for a well-rounded missions trip are the opportunities to work, play and worship together.

Their work involved cleaning up the outside of the women's shelter at The Path, doing some repair work inside and cleaning out the men's shelter garage to turn it into a workshop.

Play on a missions trip involves anything from organized games to squirting each other with water pistols. On this trip, the team spent Sunday afternoon enjoying a picnic on the church grounds, tossing Frisbees and playing on an inflatable waterslide.

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Jack Brown and other volunteers prepare the women's shelter for a fresh coat of paint.

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Jeffes said the Bible conference fulfilled the worship aspect of the trip.

"Usually on a missions trip, there's preaching or a Bible study," he said.

Most missions trips also include ministry opportunities for the team, such as vacation

Bible schools for neighborhood children or street evangelism. Jeffes said this trip was "strictly housing rehab, mercy ministry to help this ministry in our county."

Each person or family on the trip paid to participate, with the money used for building supplies and food. The church subsidized part of the cost.

Jeffes said that the people who go on missions trips generally go because they want to

impact the people they will be serving. However, it's usually the people who go who benefit more.

"Not that we go for that reason, but it seems to work that way," he said. "Your heart is softened. Like the week we were in Tennessee: You go into these projects, and out of 200 households, 195 of them have no (adult) male in the house — and there are all these children. It breaks your heart, and

you're affected by that. You never forget those sorts of things.

"The impact on the people who go is that their eyes are opened to how some people live who are really struggling. You get a glimpse of people's suffering."

He said local mercy ministry has the same impact — not that one five-day, organized trip will change people's lives forever, but that it stirs an inner desire

in a person to go out and "do" mercy wherever there's a need.

"Hopefully, through organized mercy ministry, you're casting a vision," he said. "That's what we really want from people, that they will do ministry in their own neighborhoods and in their workplaces."

"Organized (missions) helps people work in teams, and we can accomplish more in that sense than with just one or two people.

"But where people are just living their lives as Christians, they're so much more effective — because the people around them and who see them everyday are able to sense. 'These people are different — what makes them different?' So they ask questions and they come to church and hear the gospel. Then, as Christ changes their lives, they cycle into a life of service and do mercy ministry."