



SHADOW WOOD CHARITABLE FOUNDATION GIVES BIG

By D.K. Christi

Five million dollars makes a difference. That's how much the residents of Shadow Wood at The Brooks have given to nonprofits in Southwest Florida through the Shadow Wood Charitable Foundation (SWCF) since its start in 2012.

Each year, nearly 25,000 neighbors are recipients of benefits funded by this local community foundation.

After Hurricane Ian hit, a benefit concert raised \$100,000 for SWCF emergency grants to help 10 local organizations providing disaster relief. Shadow Wood residents donated an additional \$12,500 in relief supplies shipped to local charities through an Amazon wishlist established by the foundation.

“When my wife and I decided to live at Shadow Wood, we found that for a small community of around 1,800 souls, Shadow Wood’s residents are not only friendly but also compassionate and generous, with an abundance of energy and philanthropic will to help neighbors,” said SWCF President Stephen Zentz.

The foundation started 10 years ago when a team of Shadow Wood residents raised money and volunteered to help build houses with Habitat for Humanity.

Today, 14 families live in new Habitat for Humanity homes supported by SWCF. The foundation also has handed out \$525,000 in higher education scholarships for 37 local students.

Shadow Wood Charitable Foundation representative Clark Bell, new homeowner Patricia and Shadow Wood Volunteer Sue Hulten





Feeding the 5000 check presentation from SWCF

“When a catastrophic event or life-altering event like Hurricane Ian occurs, everyone struggles. But grief compounds those challenges,” said Amy Strom, vice president of partnerships and operations.

Valerie’s House created a Family Assistance Fund to help the families they serve with home repairs and temporary housing.

“Families rebuilding will require help for some time to come –there’s so much grief and loss in the whole community, wherever we turn,” Strom said.

Hurricane Ian also impacted those served by Habitat for Humanity, which had to relocate its Fort Myers operations, including the Habitat ReStore outlet, due to storm damage. Although loss of volunteers may affect the home build program, SWCF remains committed to helping Habitat build homes for families in need.

“Keys were handed over to the owners for a completed home in Bonita Springs this summer,” said Rachel West, director of donor relations for Habitat for Humanity of Lee and Hendry Counties. “For the upcoming year, SWCF will sponsor the cost for one home completely, and residents will volunteer their carpenter services for two homes, one funded by another charity without volunteers.”

Last month, Shadow Wood volunteers stepped up to support Feeding the 5000, the annual Thanksgiving outreach at Lamb of God Church. Rather than doing a traditional Thanksgiving meal this year, organizers decided to pack and deliver boxes filled with the ingredients for several meals. About 10,000 meals were delivered to local families with assistance from about 20 partner organizations, including SWCF.

In 2022, the foundation provided \$1.1 million in grants, plus willing volunteers, for 20 philanthropic endeavors addressing needs in housing, food, education and health and human services. The board hopes to raise another \$1.3 million by March 31, 2023, to help neighbors in need.

On November 7, SWCF hosted its annual “Rockin’ on the Range” benefit concert at the Shadow Wood Country Club driving range. Entertainment by the Mega Motown Revue, a live auction, corporate sponsorship support and private donations contributed to the event’s success, raising more than \$100,00 in emergency support for the Alliance for Period Supplies, Bonita Springs Assistance Office, Friends of the Salvation Army, Guardian Ad Litem, Habitat for Humanity, Hearts and Homes for Veterans, Literacy Council Gulf Coast, New Horizons of Southwest Florida, St. Matthews House and Valerie’s House.

The foundation adds new organizations to its list of supported charities each year.

“SWCF now vets multiple community needs thoroughly and selects those in which Shadow Wood residents have a personal interest and wish to help,” explained Zentz. “This year, we added three organizations to the recipients list – Valerie’s House, The Lions Club Eye Clinic and Alliance for Period Needs. You would be surprised at how unaware we can be about unique needs that are unmet.”

HURRICANE IAN INCREASED NEED

Valerie’s House helps children who are grieving the loss of a loved one. According to Valerie’s House data, the number of local children experiencing loss was already climbing before Hurricane Ian, which claimed at least 61 lives in Lee County and 130 throughout the southwest coast of Florida.



OTHER NEEDS HAVE EMERGED

A newly supported organization, Alliance for Period Supplies (APS), is meeting the needs of women and girls who do not have the means to afford feminine products when the priority is food, shelter and family. Shortages due to the supply chain crisis, inflation, confines of the pandemic and Hurricane Ian contribute to lost school and work days for girls and women without products.

APS of SWFL provides monthly period products to 32 nonprofit partners including food pantries, learning centers, shelters and Lee and Collier County public schools. Since January 2019, they have provided almost three million period products to at-risk women and girls.

“This is a need not at the forefront of thinking in terms of philanthropic ideas, and SWCF funding is appreciated,” said APS President Dusti Beaubien.

Meeting another critical need, the Florida Lions Eye Clinic in Bonita Springs held a special clinic for children when school started and another one-day clinic following Hurricane Ian to help those who lost their glasses during the storm. Services are for working persons who don't have sufficient funds or insurance to pay for eye care, glasses and some surgeries which can be done at the clinic.

Executive Director Robin Goldstone Garcia praises the support of the Shadow Wood liaison for consistent personal interest and SWCF support, which helped the clinic hire physicians to fill in when volunteer clinicians are not available.

Shadow Wood volunteers also aid the Literacy Council-Gulf Coast. The effort started by teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to Shadow Wood employees, said Sue Holman Schad, President and CEO. Now many residents volunteer wherever needed.



“SWCF not only provides funding support but also caring volunteers who understand the win-win for English language instruction,” she said.

A list of all charities supported by SWCF may be found at Shadowwoodcharitablefoundation.org.

While SWCF carefully vets each organization it supports, the foundation is also able to help quickly during a crisis like Hurricane Ian. According to Zentz, “98 percent of all donations go directly to the recipients.”

He encourages every Shadow Wood resident to participate in SWCF and to volunteer in some way.

“The rewards are immeasurable,” said Zentz.

Like ripples in a pond, the community foundation's generosity grows to reach more organizations and individuals each year on its mission to ensure all Southwest Florida residents have a decent place to live, adequate provisions to sustain them, and an opportunity to fulfill their life goals.

