

TODAY'S TOPIC

LOCAL CHARITIES

Hometown Civitan donated \$2,000 to five Florida nonprofits to help them continue supporting the community. It donated to Hand in Hand, Pace Center for Girls, Our Moment Cafe, Patriot Service Dogs and Voices for Children.

By **MADDIE CUTLER**

Daily Sun Senior Writer

Hometown Civitan is a small group that makes a big difference in the community — it recently donated \$10,000 across five local nonprofits.

The group raised the money through its Adopt-a-Precinct event, where members volunteer to work a voting site so the wages can go to charity. Members gave \$2,000 each on Sept. 5 to Hand in Hand, Pace Center for Girls, Our Moment Cafe, Patriot Service Dogs and Voices for Children.

Club president Laura McLaughlin, of the Village of Collier, said it is an exceptional thing for the group of 35 members to donate to those who support those in need.

Rebecca Randall, founder of the Ruth House at Hand in Hand in Umatilla, thanked the group for the donation.

“Hand in Hand works with men and women struggling with alcoholism and substance

abuse work towards recovery,” she said. “Our program is free to them until they move out and get a job, so we help them for about five to six months.”

Randall said the program teaches the basics of recovery and supports them during a difficult point in their life.

“We are so grateful for Civitan, which started helping us eight years ago. Civitan not only has given us dollars but encouragement,” Randall said. “Thanks to the support from Civitan, we are bringing husbands and wives back together and parents back to their children.”

Pace Center for Girls in Ocala helps girls heal from trauma and learn healthy coping skills.

“We are a program for middle and high school girls who are not seeing success in traditional public school settings,” said Carole Savage Hagans, executive director. “Sometimes things happen at home, or they are humiliated on social media and they are unable to function in school.”

Savage Hagans said the

program provides a much-needed safe space for the girls. They receive counseling and therapy, as well as academic support to get back on track. The donation from Civitan helps cover those expenses.

Savage Hagans said the girls in the program experience some of the worst trauma imaginable. She said 21% of them have at least one deceased parent, 65% have lived with a criminal, 45% live with a parent battling substance abuse and more than 20% experienced mental, physical or sexual abuse.

“I am so thankful to Hometown Civitan because of what the donations mean to the girls,” she said. “They often cannot believe anyone cares about them, especially someone who doesn’t know them. This donation gives them hope.”

Joan Bender and Richard Boyden, of the Village of Osceola Hills, are the founders of Our Moment Cafe, a memory cafe for people with memory loss, Alzheimer’s or dementia and their caregivers. The cafe is run by volunteers, and donations help fund things like entertainment groups and refreshments.

“Our club is designed for couples to socialize with each other as well as other couples,” Bender said. “They get a chance to reconnect and bond while having fun.”

Sandra Laing, of the Village Rio Ranchero, said donations are the only way Patriot Service Dogs can continue running.

The local nonprofit raises service dogs, a process that takes around two and a half years and thousands of dollars because of vet bills, food and much more.

“Thanks to donations like the one from Hometown Civitan, we were able to recently get six new puppies

local news



Arianna Bennett | Daily Sun

Beverlee Katsoulis, of the Village of Winifred, gives Patriot Service Dog in training, Richie, a command to pick up an object during his training session, in Lake Sumter Landing.

for training and have three that will be placed with people later this year," Laing said.

"We also have 21 dogs actively in training." Voices for Children is a

court-appointed special advocate program that serves Hernando, Citrus, Lake, Sumter and Marion counties. The program trains volunteers who advocate in court for abused and neglected children to ensure they end up in a safe and permanent home.

Sue Carpenter is a volunteer with Voices for Children, and she said volunteers do important work that matters to children.

Carpenter said the program once bought a grandmother to three children brand new beds.

"The kids were living with her and she loved them and provided them a safe environment, but she didn't have the beds for them," Carpenter said. "Voices for Children bought those beds because that is one of the places a child can feel safe in and have all to themselves."

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