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Salvation Army returns to North Port

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One of the Salvation Army's iconic red kettles was at the event for anyone who wanted to donate.

SUN PHOTO BY DANIEL FINTON

NORTH PORT — The Salvation Army is returning to North Port.

The local contingent of the world-wide nonprofit celebrated the start of a new North Port Social Services Center with the community Monday.

The new building, at 5400 Pan American Blvd., will be a replacement for its facility on Tamiami Trail destroyed by Hurricane Ian in 2022.

The Salvation Army moved into the 1960s-era building only weeks before it was destroyed by the winds of the Category 4 storm.

During that short time, the space allowed The Salvation Army to have a food pantry, classes for life skills and job training, holiday clothing and toy giveaways and more. There were plans for expanding that facility to allow more services.

Hurricane Ian delayed those ideas.

But The Salvation Army is not giving up on North Port.

The new project coming off Pan American, on an 11-acre parcel, is the first part “of a broader vision to expand support services in North Port,” Salvation Army officials said Monday.

Future plans, according to officials, include an emergency shelter and family transitional housing programs designed to help people and families move toward stability.

At an event celebrating the beginning of a new chapter, officials from The Salvation Army, the city of North Port and Sarasota County spoke.

Salvation Army Capt. Jim Curry led a prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance as traffic bustled by on Pan American.

Sarasota County Commissioner Ron Cutsinger spoke, noting he and others were celebrating North Port’s new Boys & Girls Club being up, running and ready to go just weeks ago.

It, too, was heavily damaged by Hurricane Ian and received funds from the county and others to rebuild.

Cutsinger said there was \$400 million in funds to allocate to the community after the storm. But for every \$1 they had available to allocate, there were \$8 in requests.

But like The Boys & Girls Club, Cutsinger said, it was an easy decision to give them recovery money to help build back and serve the community.

According to officials, \$3 million was given to The Salvation Army for its project from the Resilient SRQ fund.

“I love this organization,” Cutsinger said.

Custinger spoke about years he spent volunteering with The Salvation Army. He said he has seen people saved and reenter the community.

He said years back he could walk past like iconic red Salvation Army kettles, often seen outside of stores, without donating. Now, he can never pass them. Pointing to a kettle on display that day, he urged event attendees to donate. He said he would be pushing some of his money in through the slot up top.

“Having taught, having seen, having volunteered it is such a joy to be here. I know what it’s going to mean to south county and to North Port,” he said.

North Port Commissioner David Duval said people should look at the back of their programs offered by Salvation Army officials. Listed were a number of services The Salvation Army provides to the community.

The nonprofit still serves North Port without a building of its own at 3450 S. Biscayne Drive.

Some may not see The Salvation Army in the community due to the current lack of a building.

“The Salvation Army is this community,” Duval assured.

City Manager Jerome Fletcher thanked the nonprofit for their commitment to the city.

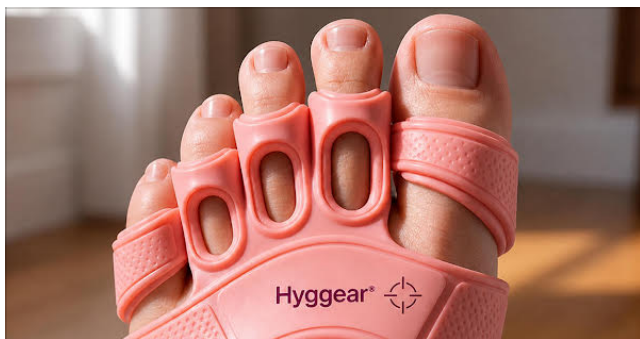
“Our local government can do a lot for this city, but we can’t do it all,” Fletcher said.

He said the city and The Salvation Army have both shown resilience bouncing back from Ian.

Salvation Army Sarasota Area Commander Maj. Caleb Prieto spoke about being excited for what’s to come before slicing the ribbon.

He said North Port is not the “nice little town” anymore that he saw it as when he worked in Charlotte County. It’s more now. It’s a fast growing community.

He thanked County officials for the Resilient SRQ funding, all of their supporters and said the future is bright for North Port.



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“The vision is huge. The plans are huge. And we have to start somewhere,” Prieto said