



Stories of Triumph

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Business Development Board of Martin County

"Don't let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do." – John R. Wooden, legendary collegiate basketball coach

House of Hope

From fresh food to fresh futures, Martin County nonprofit provides light -- and lifeline -- during darkest hour



STUART—Karina's autistic son is 11 years old. She's raised him entirely on her own for the last 10 years.

"I'm a single mom with no child support, no family," says the 48-year-old Stuart resident. "It's just me and my son."

Industrious and devoted, Karina always finds a way to make ends meet. And

2020 was to be her big breakthrough. She earned her real estate license and started with a local firm...in February.

"March 13," she recalls, "everything changed."

The stopped economy made listing homes—particularly for a new agent with no established base of clients—all-but-impossible. Unable to keep the job, she had to give up her car and was soon running behind on rent. So she turned to where she'd received help—and hope—once before.

"Most people who come to us are looking at some kind of crisis," says Rob Ranieri, CEO of House of Hope, "whether it's financial or hunger."

Anyone seeking help from House of Hope is assigned a case worker, who addresses their immediate needs as well as assesses their skills and abilities. Although no one is timed out of the assistance process, the intent is to put them back on a path to independence.



“The goal for us is empowerment,” says Rob. “We’re always trying to figure out how we can elevate somebody’s household so they don’t need us and can do it on their own.”

With 36 full- and part-time employees and up to 800 volunteers, House of Hope offers the infrastructure and comprehensive programming necessary to



usher individuals through dire circumstances. Usually, that starts by making sure they have something to eat—a need that’s drastically increased during the crisis.

Normally, the food pantry and food bank directly feed about 5,500 people a month. Now, they’re serving more than 7,000 people a month. They also indirectly help feed another 3,000 to 4,000 people monthly through the charities and churches they support.

“We’re already over 1 million pounds of food for the year.”—Rob Ranieri, CEO of House of Hope.

Once fed, people learn to fish, too. While providing assistance with rent, mortgage, utility bills, even finding a car, House of Hope offers classes such as Career Coaching, Early Learning, English as a Second Language, Computers, Financial Literacy, Smoking Cessation, Gardening and Living with Diabetes.



Operating two hydroponic farms at Palm City Farms Produce & Market, House of Hope is producing about 800 heads of lettuce a week. Some 4,000 plants fill out its 76 towers, growing kale, spinach, peppers, cucumbers and Bok choy.

The homegrown vegetables comprise key ingredients of recipes shared in the Living with Diabetes classes.

“In a recent class,” says Rob, “six out of seven clients lost weight.”

Assessing the depth of poverty in Martin County, which Rob describes as easily overlooked, House of Hope puts about 20,000 residents as living below the poverty level and 20,000 more as ALICE (Asset

Limited, Income Constrained, Employed). That’s under normal circumstances. Lately, House of Hope is serving people “who I don’t think in their wildest nightmares ever thought they’d be coming to us,” says Rob.

Fortunately, House of Hope is working with United Way of Martin County and other nonprofit agencies to help distribute federal CARES dollars to households able to show negative impacts from COVID. The relief dollars complement the generosity of the local philanthropic community.

That’s an invaluable resource that we have as a community,” says Rob.

“That’s kept the entire structure functioning at a strong level.”

The true strength of that structure occurs with the relationship between individual and House of Hope case worker, who remain sensitive and committing to honoring the dignity of those they serve.



Karina attests to the kindness of her caseworker, who called one day with great news.

“She said, ‘Karina, do you want a car?’” Karina remembers. “I was, ‘Yeah!’ They paid the registration and insurance for six months. I was really happy—so blessed.”

Now putting her real-estate license to use, Karina looks to the future with excitement—and looks back only long enough to appreciate how far she’s come with House of Hope’s help.

“Without them, I don’t know what I would do,” she says, “or if I’d even be talking to you.”

Martin County CARES Act Funding Available for Businesses and Individuals

The **Martin County Board of County Commissioners** is currently distributing Federal CARES Act funding to help individuals, families and businesses impacted by the pandemic.

[Click here to learn more](#) about Business and Individual Assistance.

Small (Business) Centric and Mighty



The Business Development Board of Martin County is showcasing these inspiring efforts of local business leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs in a reoccurring feature called “Stories of Triumph.”

If you or someone you know is using their business to do something innovative and inspiring to help our community through this crisis, please [email](#) me so we can share their Story of Triumph.

Have a Happy Labor Day!

Joan

Joan K. Goodrich
Executive Director
Business Development Board of Martin County



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The Business Development Board of Martin County, a public-private partnership for economic development, is dedicated to championing and strengthening Martin County's economy. The team

provides complimentary site selection assistance, business assistance, entrepreneur support, business intelligence and market research, community connections and workforce development programs. To learn more, visit www.bdbmc.org or call 772.221.1380.