



Responding to the Needs of the Community

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Homeless Coalition Expands Staff

New staff to focus on Taskforce recommendations

TAMPA, Fla. – (April 4, 2006) – The Homeless Coalition of Hillsborough County, responding to the recommendations of the Tampa/Hillsborough Citizens Taskforce on Homelessness, has added two staff members this year. Lesa Weikel joined the Coalition in January as the community relations manager and Robert Puricelli joined the staff in February as the capacity building manager. Both have experience working on homeless issues.

“Both positions grew out of the taskforce’s recommendations of focusing efforts on community awareness, finance development, service delivery development and community partnerships,” said Rayme Nuckles, chief executive officer of the Coalition. “We are excited to have two very-qualified individuals, both with experience working on homeless issues, to help our community move forward our vision to end homelessness in Hillsborough County.”

As community relations manager, Weikel’s role will be to raise community-wide education about homelessness in Hillsborough County through awareness events, developing a speakers bureau, the media, increasing communication among the Coalition members and advocacy efforts all aimed at securing long-term constructive solutions that address the underlying causes of homelessness and to meet the immediate needs of homeless people.

As capacity building manager, Puricelli will be responsible for coordinating the implementation of the taskforce recommendations, researching best practices related to

providing homeless services, collaborating with other service providers and agencies identify gaps in services and barriers that prevent people from accessing the services they need to become self-sufficient and expand the Coalition's ability to research and apply for funding to maintain and expand needed services.

Prior to join the Coalition, Weikel was the coordinator of community relations at Metropolitan Ministries where she worked for nearly five years. At the Ministries, Weikel coordinated all communication activities and served as the organization's media spokesperson, coordinated a speakers bureau which spoke to more than 100 organizations a year, managed the website content, including doubling site visits in 2005, and worked on various community education and fundraising projects to help homeless families served by the organization.

Puricelli comes to the Coalition with 10 years of experience working with homeless people. Most recently, Puricelli was the development director at the Homeless Emergency Project in Clearwater where he assisted with operational and strategic planning in addition to securing funding for the organization. Puricelli worked for Catholic Charities of St. Louis for 10 years before moving to Tampa. At Catholic Charities he served as director of development and community relations for seven years before he was promoted to the associate director of the organization's Queen of Peace Center. In the latter position as associate director, he was responsible for the operation of a non-profit 56-bed substance abuse treatment center that serves more than 2,000 low-income and homeless women, which included managing government and private funding, and overseeing a quality assurance program. As director of development he acquired funds needed to operate the social service agency and helped expand their annual operating budget from \$1.6 million to \$4.2 million.

The Homeless Coalition of Hillsborough County is a 501 (C) 3 organization responsible for establishing and maintaining concentrated strategic efforts to develop long-term constructive solutions that address the underlying causes of homelessness and meet the immediate needs of homeless people. Governed by coalition members, the Coalition promotes collaboration and coordination among social service providers, businesses, funding institutions, housing providers, state and federal agencies, faith-based communities and other supportive organizations and individuals to organize and deliver, without duplication, support services, emergency shelters, transitional housing and affordable housing to meet the specific needs of all homeless people. The Coalition also operates the UNITY Information Network that "virtually" links service providers in Hillsborough County. UNITY offers integrated referrals, creates a base of data to better understand homelessness to plan effective intervention, and shows "real-time" availability of services – all essential to securing funding to meet the level of need within the community. For more information visit www.homelessofhc.org.

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