

Grace Family Church Changing The Community And Abroad

By Karen McBride

Grace Family Church (GFC) has been part of the community since 1994. Pastor Craig Altman and 100 other people, first began the church in a small leased space in a Jazzercise facility with 25 families, then moved to the Seventh Day Adventist Church building, and finally found its home on Van Dyke Road in 2000. It began in what is now the Gym with 600 people at Sunday services. The church continued to grow and eventually opened the state-of-the-art Youth Center where teenagers gather on Wednesdays and Fridays to learn God's word, listen to Christian music and have fun with their friends. The church now has over 5,000 members with services at 5 pm and 7 pm on Saturdays and 9:30 am and 11:45 am on Sundays.

From its humble beginnings in a leased space, to the vast Van Dyke Campus, one of the reasons for their success is their involvement in the community. GFC encourages its members to volunteer with programs like the soup kitchen on Monday nights and Second Saturday. The soup kitchen volunteers meet at the church and then car pool to the parking lot of Florida Irrigation Supply on Fletcher Avenue. It is an outdoor soup kitchen and after feeding the homeless and teaching a short bible study, the volunteers return to GFC to clean up. Once a month, hundreds of members of all ages meet in the Gym for prayer, breakfast and then to go out into the Tampa Bay area to help others. Car pools, vans and even large school buses take GFC members to places like Christian Social Services in Land O' Lakes to sort through donations, organize racks of clothes, books and food. Christian Social Services opened in 1987 and works with churches in the area to provide gently used clothing, appliances, food, and support to people in the

community in need. The store is located at 5514 Land O' Lakes Blvd. in Land O' Lakes. It is open Tuesday - Friday 9am - 4pm, Saturday 10am - 2pm, and is closed Sunday and Monday.

GFC members, both adults

Difference, Jed Kirby & Urban Young Life, and area businesses, such as Cornerstone Construction, Simpson Environmental, KB Partner Foods, Aaron's Incorporated, Mandy's Electric, KDS Interiors, Hugh MacDonald

Services offered will include after school care, computer access and tutoring, mentoring and family counseling, job and skills training. Sports activities will include volleyball and basketball, and in the future, football, kickball, and karate.

When the Dream Center is fully functional, it will be open Monday 3-8 pm; Tuesday 3-10 pm; Wednesday 3-8 pm; Thursday 3 - 11 pm; Friday 3-11 pm; Saturday 8 am - 11pm.

Parents or caregivers will need to sign up the children in advance. This is required in order to secure the children's safety. The center will have two full time employees and will depend upon volunteers for the rest of the support needed. Thad Smith, Executive Director of the Dream Center, says "We currently have about forty coaches and assistant coaches signed up. We have almost 600 people that have expressed an interest in helping."

In addition to the Dream Center, GFC will be starting a mentoring program in Hillsborough County Schools in the fall. After completing the school system's application, and passing a background check, mentors will go through training by the Dream Center and the school system. "Mentors should understand that perseverance, kindness, love, acceptance and patience is critical in developing relationships with



The Dream Center is located at 2806 N. 15th Street in Tampa

and children, may choose to go to Metropolitan Ministries to setup for the monthly birthday parties for the children and their families that live there. Picnic tables are decorated, arts and crafts prepared, and games setup in the playground, where the families with birthdays in the current month are invited to join in on the fun. Metropolitan Ministries is located at 2002 N. Florida Avenue, in Tampa, and provides food, shelter and support services for homeless people in the area.

The church's vision to reach youth and families in need led it to build the Dream Center of Tampa. It is located at 2806 North 15th Street, in Tampa. Renovations on the 19,000 square foot facility, formerly the Boys and Girls Club, began in November, 2010. With the help of hundreds of volunteers from Grace Family Church, Open Arms Church, Sisters Making a

Roofing, and Total Solutions, the building will complete its transformation and is scheduled to begin registration on August 13, 2011, and plans to open two weeks later.

Government cutbacks have diminished access to programs and resources for people in East Tampa, and families are anxiously awaiting the opening of the Dream Center.

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students. These relationships are critical to the success of the student.” says Smith.

If you are interested in volunteering or mentoring, please contact Thad Smith, Doctoral Candidate Business Administration, Executive Director, Dream Center of Tampa Bay, Grace Family Church, 5101 Van Dyke Road, Lutz, FL 33558-4830, Office: 813-265-4151, Cell 813-997-4054, email: tsmith@gracefamilychurch.org.

Grace Family Church volunteers are not only making a difference in our neighborhood, but are also impacting communities abroad. Mission trips to Mexico, Russia, Alaska and Africa give members an opportunity to spread God’s word to people in less fortunate countries. In Mexico, the volunteers completed a house for a man confined to a wheelchair and began building a home for a young mother and her two children.

In 2008, GFC went to Uganda,



The Gym at The Dream Center, a work in progress

Africa, and the team worked with Watt, a children’s orphanage/school. They laid bricks for the second story of a teacher’s house and the foundation for a high school. The church is just returning from another trip to Uganda where they

helped men, women and families to become healthy and strong at a marriage and family conference and ministered to people at the local churches.

Liz Martin-Culet has been on four mission trips with Grace

Family. In 2009, the team painted a school’s exterior and a pastor’s house; put a floor in a small one bedroom house for a family of fifteen. The house was so small, that some of the children had to live with relatives. The team cleaned it out and painted it. There was no electricity or water in the tiny home.

“When we first got there, a little boy of age 4 was eating a plate of white rice. He got so excited to see the visitors; he dropped his plate and cried. That was the only food he had for that day”, says Martin-Culet. Luckily, the team had bought food for the family.

Whether it is in the Tampa Bay area or half-way across the world, Grace Family Church wants to make a difference in people’s lives. It is achieving this goal by encouraging its members to volunteer, both young and old alike, and to help others.

For more information, go to www.gracefamilychurch.org.

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