

A Story of Compassion

USDA Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

Catholic Charities Diocese of Venice Venice, Florida

In 2004, Hurricane Charley left behind a path of destruction in DeSoto County and wiped out much of the Farm Labor Housing. As a result, some farm-workers have been forced to live in broken down, moldy trailers that also took a beating from the storm.

Catholic Charities recognized the valuable asset that migrant farm workers bring to the economy of Southwest Florida. They also realized that many migrant workers spend long days in the fields working at minimum wages. Housing choices are restricted by time and money. The organization was awarded a grant of \$2,700,000 and loan of \$300,000 under the Farm Labor Housing program in June 2005. The grant/loan will be used to build a 28 Unit affordable farm worker housing complex in a severely poor area in

Florida. This area was also hard hit by the 4 hurricanes in 2004. The project will be built in DeSoto county Florida. DeSoto County is a designated Champion Community through the Federal Rural Empowerment Program. The project is called Casa San Juan Bosco, Phase I.

“This housing was needed even before the hurricanes!”, said Peter Routsis-Arroyo, President and CEO of Catholic Charities of Venice, Inc. when interviewed by the Sun-Herald in 2005. “I think the hurricanes and a crisis have opened a door for nonprofits and developers to really know that we need to work together. The exciting piece to all of this for us it that we’ve got the support of the growers”, Mr.

Routsis-Arroyo added. Our Lady of Mercy Parish, Boca Grande, Florida, partnered with Catholic Charities Housing by providing \$100,000 for funding of the project. Reverend Jerome Carosella, Pastor of the church said, “We will be actively pursuing additional funding that can go toward this worthy project. It is with our heartfelt prayers that this gift will work to make the vision of Casa San Juan Bosco a reality that will benefit thousands of farm workers and their families for many years to come.”

The Florida Fruit and Vegetable Research & Education Foundation, one of the state's largest trade groups for growers, has PLEDGED \$50,000 for the project. In a letter of support, Michael Stuart, President of the foundation stated, “The project targets a variety of critical needs for the area's migrant farm worker families. Of particular value, the Casa San Juan project goes beyond addressing the area's immediate housing necessities following this year's hurricanes by offering a framework for social service providers and promoting a culture of self-sufficiency and stability.” Ground breaking for the project is pending.

How the Initiative is Helping

USDA Rural Development outreach efforts through the Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and the Farm Labor Housing Grant Program were just what Catholic Charities Diocese of Venice, Incorporated needed to tackle the problem.



A Story of Compassion

USDA Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

About the Organization

Catholic Charities of Venice, Inc., founded in 1984, is certified as a non-profit, charitable, benevolent body within the State of Florida. Their mission is to provide direct services for, advocate on behalf of and to convene the people of Southwest Florida. They have a long history of providing community services, among them, after school tutoring, disaster response, early education, and housing assistance.

