

A Cycle of Giving

Sandi Vidal volunteers to help the unemployed get the support they need and eventually leads the non-profit she volunteered with.

BY TARRE BEACH

We all know it's tough to get a job in this economy. Sandi Vidal, executive director of **CHRISTIAN HELP** (Hope Encourage Love Prayer), a non-profit organization headquartered in Casselberry that helps job seekers throughout Seminole, Orange, Lake and Osceola counties navigate the waters of unemployment including feeding their families and brushing up their resumes, sometimes calls on a higher authority to help clients get the job.

"Prayer is a powerful tool. I don't believe it will magically get someone a job, but I have seen some amazing things happen through prayer," Vidal says. As part of a unique ministry like Christian HELP, Vidal happily gives the community her human resources expertise and, when asked for, her spiritual support.

Vidal, who is a member of a small Baptist church in Orange County, says she was lead to her current position, which is not just a job, but a passion for her. Vidal started her journey as a volunteer. She helped at Central Florida Employment Council (CFEC), an affiliate employment network of Christian HELP, and taught job-preparedness classes at high schools. She says the volunteer work left her with a sense that she was fulfilling a deeper purpose. "After

volunteering with Christian HELP, I felt this shift," Vidal says. "I'm not saying I felt I fixed the problem, but by connecting with even just one person I felt I was able to be part of a cycle of giving that really mattered."

And apparently that shift has been felt throughout Seminole county because Vidal was honored by America's Charities as the Regional Community Leader of the Year for 2009. Humble as she is, Vidal doesn't say much about her accolades. But a Christian HELP staff member says she is great to work with and a real angel to the community.

With a degree and 15 years experience in the human resources field, Vidal was thrilled she found a way to use her talents to help her fellow Central Floridians. After serving on the board of directors for four years, the executive director position opened up at Christian HELP and she was encouraged to apply by the organization's co-founder Dick Wilson. Now in the position for three and a half years, Vidal says she feels so blessed.

Naturally, faith plays a central part in Vidal's story. Sometimes the secular sector fails to help when people need it the most. By working for a faith-based company Vidal feels she has more resources at her disposal. Obviously the stress that



comes with not having a job or losing one's job is difficult. Sometimes job referrals, employment seminars and meeting material needs—all things Christian HELP offers—just isn't enough. Prayer and making a connection can make the difference. That's what makes this job so special for Vidal. Not one to shout her faith from the rooftops, Vidal enjoys being able to quietly offer spiritual support to those in need.

In the 18 years since Christian HELP opened, it has connected 71,746 people throughout Central Florida to jobs, gave out nearly 7 million pounds of food, gave away nearly \$18 million and saved taxpayers \$172 million. Those are just the physical accomplishments. There are even more spiritual gifts clients and the community have received: families staying together, communities sharing, hopelessness replaced by self-esteem and best of all, continuing the cycle of giving.

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