Hundreds Enjoyed Festive Retirement Celebration to Honor Sister Gail Grimes

“That was so much fun, I might have to retire again!”
— Sister Gail, after the party

Butterflies, clowns, hundreds of well-wishers, and a rainbow...what an amazing day it was at the Highland Manor on September 28, 2014, as more than 300 people gathered to honor Sister Gail Grimes at the culmination of her nearly four decades of service in the Apopka community.

Guests were greeted by members of the Sin Fronteras youth group, dressed as clowns, and by little girls in butterfly costumes, who represented the beautiful future that is possible when we join in community. Sister Ann Kendrick and Master of Ceremonies Scott Maxwell, Orlando Sentinel columnist, provided a warm welcome and words of tribute and humor as the community showed its support and love through ritual, procession, gifts, and plenty of hugs and laughter. A highlight was the impromptu dance of Scott Maxwell and Sister Gail during the “Rock Around the Clock” dance performance by youth group alumnae. The crowd went wild with appreciation!

Thanks to all the friends, supporters, and members of the community who attended, and a special thanks to those who brought or sent contributions to the Sister Gail Legacy Fund. The Legacy Fund is still accepting donations by mail or on our website at www.hcc-offm.org.

(more about Gail on page 3)
HCC Welcomes New Faces

Mariela Delgado is the program assistant of Youth Services, working with Nilka Melendez, Director of Youth Services and Roxana Martel, Parenting Program. Already a familiar face around Hope, Mariela was part of our NDA AmeriCorps team for two years, working at Apopka High. Mariela is from Guadalajara, Mexico.

Beth Riebel is also a familiar face. Beth spent two years developing the citizenship and immigration services at HCC as an AmeriCorps member. As our new Director of Immigrant Education, she heads up our growing citizenship education program as well as our work with unaccompanied youth. Beth is from Manizales, Colombia.

Teresa Young is our new Director of College and Career Access. Originally from Ohio, Teresa spent two years in Argentina teaching English on a Fulbright fellowship. She is fluent in Spanish, with an intriguing Argentinian accent! Teresa’s warm, friendly manner has quickly endeared her to the youth she works with and to all of us here at Hope.

Lauren McLellan is the Director of Adult Education. Lauren, a Florida native, comes to us after teaching for four years in Honduras, taking the helm of our GED and ESL programs. Her fluent Honduran-influenced Spanish especially endears her to our many adult students from Central America. We love the visits from her two-year-old, Gianna!

Ely Castillo, Roxana Martel, and Marlene Rodriguez Join Part-Time Staff

Ely Castillo, a Sin Fronteras alumna and Hope volunteer, has joined us to provide and coordinate child care services during GED and ESL classes. Ely is great with the kids and a pleasure to have around, so we are thrilled to have her on staff.

Roxana Martel worked with our youth and parenting program for the past two years with AmeriCorps. A proud Salvadoreña, Roxana brings rich life experiences from her work as a university professor studying gangs in El Salvador.

Marlene Rodriguez teaches English and life skills to our Moms Literacy Group and creates a supportive and fun community among the participants. A mother of four, Marlene has already been teaching this class for two years as a volunteer. Welcome!
Sister Gail: A Look Back

After nearly 40 years serving our community, Sister Gail Grimes is stepping down from the leadership team of Hope CommUnity Center in November. It’s a big change, but Gail is ready to trade her full schedule for a more leisurely life.

“I feel comfortable stepping away,” she says. “Hope Community Center is in good shape. We’ve got great staff and great programs going.” Sister Gail’s administrative responsibilities are being passed to David Crump, our new Director of Operations.

As much as we will miss Gail, all of us here at Hope are supportive as she makes the transition that she says will be a smooth one “from staff member to enthusiastic volunteer.” To honor the impact that she’s made in the Central Florida community over the years, we recall some of the ways Sister Gail shaped the world around her.

As soon as Gail arrived in Apopka in 1975, she started creating connections with the Black farmworker community around the Sisters’ home in South Apopka. Calling themselves the Concerned Citizens of Apopka, the group pressured city and state government to put resources into the underserved South Apopka area. They succeeded in bringing about the opening of a food stamp office, the construction of the John H. Bridges Community Center, the expansion and improvement of water and sewer services, and the building of farmworker housing in South Apopka.

Gail served as one of the first board members of Homes in Partnership, helping to secure FmHA funding for this nonprofit that helped build more than 4,000 single-family homes in our area since its 1975 inception. In those early years, she established the Sojourner Truth Learning Institute in response to the need for mission and skill training of small community organizations in the Central Florida black community. Starting in 1979, Sister Gail has provided leadership for our annual Christmas Toy sale, which gives low-income parents the opportunity to buy new Christmas gifts at greatly reduced prices. And these are just a few of her many involvements.

Although Sister Gail started out on the front lines of community building, her strength as an administrator became vital to the growing organization then known as the Office for Farmworker Ministry and the newly-founded Farm Worker Association of Florida (FWAF). After years helping organize in the Black and Haitian communities, Gail helped FWAF write its first grant and guided the group’s financial decisions. Over the next 25 years, she wrote grants, administered and reported on funds, and did the bookkeeping for both organizations.

In 2005, Sister Gail took responsibility for administration at Hope CommUnity Center, managing the budget, building, and much more. Although Gail will no longer be administering from her desk, she has trained us well in good stewardship of our resources.

When Sister Gail thinks of her impact on the community, her pride comes not from her own accomplishments, but from seeing her community succeed. “I think one of the best things I was able to do was help people see themselves as leaders and see their ability to make a difference,” she says. “It just makes me feel good that people see the work we are all doing and recognize that we are all trying to live the Gospel message in practical ways.”

Major Citizenship Grant Awarded to Hope

On September 18, Hope CommUnity Center got some great news! We have been selected as one of 40 organizations in the country sharing a pool of $10 million in two-year grants from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. The purpose of this USCIS grant is to support programs that help permanent, legal residents to prepare and apply for citizenship.

Here at Hope, we have more than 10 years of experience providing citizenship classes. With this funding over the next two years, HCC will be able to offer more classroom instruction, individual tutoring sessions, and mock naturalization interview practice. Catholic Charities of Central Florida, our partner in the grant application, will be involved in the more procedural, application-related aspects of the path to citizenship.

All of us at Hope are grateful for this grant and excited to be able to offer more opportunities for low-income and low-literacy residents to work toward citizenship.
New AmeriCorps Team Arrives

The new AmeriCorps team is here! With six returning members from last year and 24 new members, the 2014-15 Notre Dame AmeriCorps team gathered at Hope CommUnity Center in early September for a week of orientation and team building. This diverse group includes speakers of four languages in addition to English, people in their twenties to their fifties, and skills and experiences including military leadership, graduate level math studies, and fearless skateboarding!

Hope CommUnity Center’s partnership with the national Notre Dame AmeriCorps program enables our hearts and hands to extend Hope’s mission into many parts of the community. Members serve full time at challenging and varied worksites such as elementary, middle and high schools, Harbor House, Help Now, Grace Medical Home, the Farm Workers Association of Florida, and the Orlando Neighborhood Approval Corporation.

As the national AmeriCorps program celebrates its 20th anniversary this fall, we at Hope are proud to be one of the few organizations to have participated for the entire 20 years. Our Apopka team is the largest of the 22 Notre Dame AmeriCorps programs across the country. For more information about Notre Dame AmeriCorps, contact Laura Firtel, Director, at Hope CommUnity Center.

Six AmeriCorps Members Join HCC Staff

This year, we have a record number of AmeriCorps members serving as full-time staff here at the Hope CommUnity Center. Stop by and say hello next time you’re at the center!

Erin Davison
Adult Education

Courtney Freese
Tutoring Programs

Chris Furino
Immigration & Citizenship

Sandy Lipten
Media & Marketing

John Parrell
Immigration & Citizenship

Stailey Styles
College & Career Access
Community Volunteer Excellence Awards

It was a proud night for Hope CommUnity Center on July 15, 2014 at the inaugural presentation of the Community Volunteer Excellence Awards, a new initiative of Heart of Florida United Way. Of the eight awards presented at the ceremony, Hope received two! Our Lynn Devanie accepted the award for Outstanding Volunteer Manager, and Mary Carroll accepted the award for Professional Volunteer of the Year.

The Community Volunteer Excellence Awards recognize contributions that impact nonprofit, government, faith-based and educational organizations across Orange, Seminole and Osceola counties. An independent panel selected winners from 59 nominations submitted by more than 35 organizations.

The awards were announced at a festive event on July 15 at the Orlando Shakespeare Theatre. A cheering section representing Hope board members, staff, and families of our winners joined the celebration. Congratulations, ladies!

UCF Intern Starts “Girls Only” Group

Paola Saenz

Hope is fortunate to have social work intern Paola Saenz working with us two days each week for the next year. Paola, a warm and gracious native of Colombia, is in the second half of the Masters in Social Work program at UCF. Her internship supervisor is Betsy Swart, professor and Hope board member.

One of Paola’s contributions to Hope this year is the launch of our new Girls Only program at the Chalet North community. Girls Only is a safe place for middle school girls to strengthen their self esteem and gain understanding of how the environment, family members, friends, and other groups affect them. The weekly meetings also inspire girls to identify and use their strengths to become leaders and supporters in their communities and their own lives through creative means: reading, writing, poetry, yoga, other arts and activities. (And if we know Paola, the group is surely doing a lot of laughing and hugging, too!) Welcome, Paola. We are glad you’re here!

DAYTIME VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Can you help with some super cute kids while their parents are in our daytime GED and English classes? Morning classes are from 10 a.m. to noon, and afternoon classes are from noon to 2 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays at HCC and at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church. Volunteers always have at least one partner working alongside to make for fun teamwork keeping the kids safe and happy.

If you can help for at least one 2-hour shift a week, please contact Lynn Devanie, volunteer coordinator at 407-880-4673 or ldevanie@hcc-offm.org.
Seminole State College has provided full scholarships and tuition waivers for twelve immigrant students who recently gained legal residency status through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. These scholarships are offered in partnership with Hope CommUnity Center, which helped identify the recipients.

Launched in the fall of 2013, the scholarship program has already shown successes. In July, Agostini Bellini graduated magna cum laude from Seminole and is attending UCF, and Eli Garcia will complete her AA degree in December. The DACA scholarship students at Seminole have a combined average of 3.43. HCC is proud of our students and grateful to Seminole State for its partnership and support.

### Annual Backpack Giveaway

Hope CommUnity Center gave out 256 backpacks to kids in our community in our annual backpack giveaway. What fun it was to watch these kids excitedly model their new backpacks as they got ready to go back to school in August!

We are thankful to I.C. International and other donors, and to Hope’s always amazing Minerva Colon, who coordinates this giveaway every year.

### Book Donation Inspires Book Club at Hope

Authors Trish and Ray Arredondo made a generous donation of 34 copies of their book, *Maria’s Journey*, to Hope CommUnity Center in honor of Sr. Gail’s retirement. The book tells the story of the arranged marriage and life of Maria Perez and Michael Arredondo, who immigrated from Mexico to the U.S. in the 1920’s. Our Wednesday book club is enjoying the book together, and copies are available for staff, volunteers, and members of the community to borrow.

### Hope Received Two Generous Grants

Hope CommUnity Center is grateful for two generous grants received in July of 2014.

We were awarded a Heart of Florida United Way grant for $94,777 per year for three years, as long we meet program goals. This grant supports our “Me, You, We: Waging Love, Building Hope” parent engagement programs for families who live in the Lovell Elementary area, and includes educational services for their children of any age.

We also received $40,000 from the Orlando Sentinel Family Fund, A McCormick Foundation Fund. This “Strong Families, Strong Futures” grant helps support our adult education and parenting programs and our youth programs.
Sister Maureen White Called to International Leadership

Hope Community Center is proud to announce that Sister Maureen White, Director of Educational Services at Hope, has been elected to the leadership team of the worldwide Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, headquartered in Rome. She was elected to a six-year term during the Sisterhood’s general meeting in July and will leave us at the end of October. Her address will be in Rome, but Maureen says she will mostly be living out of a suitcase, traveling to visit and provide support to Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in service sites all over the world.

Sister Maureen has been with us in Apopka since 2007. Her expertise in all aspects of education, her loving presence, and her unfailable demeanor have been a great blessing to students, volunteers and staff, and she will be in our hearts and prayers as she begins this new adventure.

Maureen has these words for us: “Gently and carefully, I am packing the many wonderful stories I have been told, the lessons I have learned, and the abundance of love I have received from this incredible community.” Thank you, Sister Maureen. May the goodness of God accompany you always. Que te acompañe el buen Dios por siempre.

Sin Fronteras Kicks Off Another Fun Year!

The halls of Hope were full of life and laughter on Wednesday, September 24, 2014, as more than a hundred high schoolers showed up to register for the new year of Sin Fronteras and happily meet up with old friends and make new ones. Every Wednesday afternoon during the school year, these teens have an opportunity to learn about self, others, and how to become leaders in the community. The program is led by Nilka Melendez, Director of Youth Services, along with a number of staff, Americorps members, and Sin Fronteras alumnus who help facilitate these fun and energizing meetings.

The youth of Sin Fronteras continue to be an inspiration to all of us here at Hope. Mostly from immigrant families, these young people show such heart and determination as they find their way in a culture that is not always welcoming. Several Sin Fronteras alumni have given talks to Hope staff, AmeriCorps gatherings, and other groups, and they never fail to give their listeners a new, deeper understanding of the immigrant experience. For more information about youth programs at Hope, contact Nilka Melendez at nmelendez@hcc-offm.org or 407-880-4673, ext. 241.

Future U.S. Citizens Begin Studies at Hope

The new Citizenship program has begun! Staff, Americorps members, and seven volunteer teachers welcomed nearly adult students to the inaugural semester of our new citizenship curriculum. Classes began October 4, 2014.

Prior to starting the program, all students were administered the federally-approved CASAS assessments of reading and listening comprehension, then assigned to class levels based on their test results. Hope provides classes for these future citizens every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. For more information, contact Beth Riebel at eriebel@hcc-offm.org or 407-880-4673, ext. 226.
Hope CommUnity Center is a service learning community dedicated to the empowerment of Central Florida’s immigrant and working poor communities through education, advocacy and spiritual growth.

Michael Cantillo Returns

Michael Cantillo, our Director of Development at Hope, was thrilled to be able to attend Sister Gail’s Retirement Celebration on September 28. Six weeks before the event, our Michael had quintuple bypass heart surgery.

Michael has been recovering well, and happily plans to return to work at Hope on October 27. He is excited to return so he can continue planning our February Hearts for Hope Luncheon and be with staff again.

Holiday Toy and Food Drives Are Just Around the Corner!

Thanksgiving Food Drive

On Saturday, November 22, Hope CommUnity Center will distribute turkeys and Thanksgiving Bags of food to families. You can help by filling a bag or writing a check to Hope CommUnity Center. Here are the non-perishable items for the bags:

- 2 boxes of instant mashed potatoes
- 2 bags of instant stuffing
- 1 box cake mix and frosting
- 1 canister of dry lemonade or tea
- 1 bag of rice
- 1 bag of dried beans
- 2 cans of green beans
- 2 cans of yams
- 2 cans of fruit cocktail

Toy Sale Donation Drive Begins November 10!

Through our Christmas Store, working poor families are able to provide gifts to their children at a significantly reduced price. In this way, the dignity of the parents and their desire to help themselves is respected.

If you can help, we ask that you donate only new, unwrapped items, with price still on. For gift donations, please call between Nov. 10 and Dec. 12 and we’ll meet you to receive your donation at our storage room at St. Francis of Assisi Church. Financial donations are also welcome. Call Nilka or Mariela at 407-880-4673, ext. 241.

Disney Executive Joins HCC’s Board of Directors

Hope CommUnity Center’s Board is happy to welcome its newest member, Michael Almeida, Director of Human Resources at Disney Cruise Lines. In February 2014, Michael attended Hope’s annual Hearts for Hope luncheon. After the luncheon, he commented, “While my career and personal relationships have been very successful and fulfilling, I was missing an opportunity to serve and give back to the community. After learning about the critical work that HCC does and the impact it has on community, I am inspired to be a part of this team.” Welcome, Michael!