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JACKIE PILCHER

HELPING THE HOMELESS

BY TRACEY C. Velt



It's always gratifying to see a previously homeless person off the streets, says Jackie Pilcher, an agent with ResortQuest Real Estate in Destin. "I recently saw one of the vets I've been working with through the Okaloosa Walton Homeless Continuum of Care," says Pilcher. "He is in his late 60s, and he was riding his bike while I was on my way to a showing. He told me he was off the streets. We have a lot of older veterans in our area, and it makes you feel like you're making a difference." The Continuum of Care is a nonprofit that offers housing, rental assistance and shelter for the very low income homeless.

Pilcher has been making a difference in the lives of homeless people within her community since 2008, when she started volunteering at a local church's meal program. "That evolved into helping people, specifically homeless veterans, with Social Security, food stamps, anything they might need to use a computer to apply for," she says. But, the real aha moment happened when the executive director of the Okaloosa Walton Homeless Continuum of Care spoke to a woman's group. "She spoke about the group of homeless women who live in the woods surrounded by tin cans hung by strings to warn them of danger. It prompted me to help them find and open a place where these women can shower and receive care."

Opportunity Place, a short-term shelter for homeless women, men and families, has now been around for about 10 years. "It allows people to get off the streets. They're usually exhausted, so they need a few days to sleep, then we get

**"I feel like I'm
doing something
that matters."**

them focused on a job, getting their GED and setting them up for later success," says Pilcher. While Pilcher is quick to note that she isn't a social worker, she does help them fill out paperwork. "Many of them don't know how to use the computer, so I help them apply for housing, Social Security and more," she says.

Pilcher says her father was instrumental in setting the example of giving back to the community. "My father was always that way. His parents were missionaries in Cuba, so I was inspired by the work his side of the family did. For me, I get so much out of it. I feel like I'm doing something that matters."

Realtors are the backbone of our communities, says Pilcher. "There is a big need to help the homeless and get them off the street. I encourage everyone to volunteer. There are so many ways to help."

Tracey C. Velt is a contributing editor for Florida Realtor magazine.