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Four Cheers: Care for kids, keeping Florida scenic and good Samaritans

STORY UPDATED AT 5:49 AM ON MONDAY, DEC. 28, 2009

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Good news for young people with medical problems: A recent University of North Florida dance marathon raised more than \$16,000 for the Children's Miracle Network of Jacksonville/Brunswick. A couple hundred students danced 18 straight hours to raise the money, a news release says. These funds will be used at Shands Jacksonville and Wolfson Children's Hospital, which Children's Miracle Network supports. If past is prelude, these donations could make a dramatic difference. The Web site of the local Children's Miracle Network lists "case studies." One involves pregnancy complications involving twin boys. Jack Easter was expected to die in the womb, and brother Luke was given only a 50 percent chance of survival. They eventually were born prematurely — the biggest weighed only 2 pounds, 13 ounces — and were placed in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit transporter purchased with Children's Miracle Network money.

Both survived and, seven weeks later, were sent home with their happy parents. There are many good nonprofit groups in this area. But few are as important as the Children's Miracle Network. Keeping Florida scenic There's an old expression about turning lemons into lemonade, and it certainly applies to local developer Steve Cissel. About 18 acres of land has been set aside for development as housing, retail and office space along Philips Highway, near the downtown area. But the project stalled because of the bad economy. So, Cissel has planted a garden on a portion of the area, featuring "zinnias, crimson clovers, black-eyed Susans and California poppies that people can cut at no cost," according to The Times-Union. That's a nice touch. As Elizabeth Pate of Atlantic Beach recently wrote in an e-mail, "Kudos to Cissel for his beautification of Philips Highway." Pate is roadside beautification chairman of the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs. Her e-mail adds: "Florida native wildflower seed has recently been developed by the Florida Wildflower Growers Co-op. This seed is more Florida friendly. "Funding for this project was made possible by purchases of the State Wildflower License Plate, which is available to all citizens of Florida. "It was reported to me by the Department of Transportation that 7,000 pounds of this newly developed seed has been planted across Florida." A more scenic state, made possible by plants that adopt better to our environment. That's a winner

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A time for Samaritans

Robert A. Taylor of Jacksonville is a frequent letter writer to The Times-Union on national issues. Recently, however, he saw the good and bad in people illustrated at his own home. Here is what he wrote in an e-mail:

"At night, I was unlucky enough to have my pocket picked while in my garage. A desperate young man came up while I unloaded groceries from my car and snatched the wallet from my back pocket.

"Living in a fine Arlington neighborhood, it seemed unbelievable that this occurred. But as he ran like lightning across my front lawn, I could only holler 'Stop.' Like in a bad dream, I stood frozen for a moment. Any senior would have. The amount of money was small but the brazen act started me thinking of how desperate some people must be around us.

"My family was relieved that I wasn't injured and afterward we gave thanks to God that no confrontation occurred. However, replacing my cards and licenses was another matter. It could have been horrendous! I had a private theft company, and they patiently called all my card issuers until everything was cancelled.

"The police did a fine job when called.

"Two days later, some lovely Samaritan ladies called my home, having found my cards and license by a bus stop. They drove to my home and gave them to me seeking no reward.

"It reminded me that Jacksonville has great people who balance the bad, many times over. Maybe the thief will have a good meal and find time to give a little to the church. After all, it's Christmas time."

Help along the road

As often happens, people who help out aren't looking for recognition or even much of a thank you.

John Nettles of Jacksonville encountered such an experience recently. Here is what he wrote in an e-mail:

"I want to publicly thank the two gentlemen who stopped to help me when I dropped my motorcycle on State Road 17 south, just north of the County Road 220 turnoff.

"On Dec. 16, I was in the far left lane, when someone cut in front of me and hit their brakes hard. I braked and dropped my bike and slid into the center lane.

"Two guys in the far right turn lane, who wouldn't give me their names, stopped to make sure I was OK, righted and pushed the bike into the median and called 911.

"They both stayed until Clay County Sheriff's deputy arrived. One of the guys even stopped at the restaurant in Green Cove that I was on my way to and let them know what had happened but that I was OK.

"I just want to thank these two guys that stopped and helped me out. I really do appreciate what you did."

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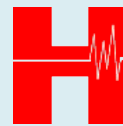
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