



NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Heart of Florida United Way & VFW Post 4305 Partner to Bring Holiday Spirit to Puerto Rican Evacuees Living in Hotels

More than 50 Gather for a Lively Holiday Celebration

ORLANDO, Fla. (Dec. 22, 2017) – On Dec. 21, Heart of Florida United Way and VFW Post 4305 in Winter Garden partnered to bring the joy of the holiday spirit to nearly 50 evacuees from Puerto Rico who were displaced by Hurricane Maria and are currently living in hotels.

Since September, more than 200,000 Puerto Ricans residents have fled to Florida and many of those are without permanent housing.

“We don’t have a Christmas tree to put up, we can’t do our family traditions, and I’m not sure I’ll be able to give my children any presents because of the financial strain,” said Rosy, one attendee of the event who brought her three children. “The fact that we’re able to celebrate tonight with others in the same situation gives me such joy. This is bringing a little normalcy to my children’s Christmas this year and I’m so grateful for that.”

VFW Post 4305, led by Commander Dan Kalagian, distributed toys, clothing and household goods for attendees. Dinner was catered by Sonny’s BBQ. The traditional Puerto Rican performance of Paranda, dancing, holiday photos and video games for kids was all included.

“It was our pleasure to do something to help make these citizens feel a little more at home in our community this year,” said Kalagian. “Service members are often deployed and away from home for the holidays, so we understand what that feels like. I’m glad we were able to bring some holiday joy to these families.”

About Heart of Florida United Way

Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW) is Central Florida’s most comprehensive health and human services charity and the largest provider of funds to the region’s most critical health and human service programs. Last year, it raised and managed \$24.4 million throughout Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties. HFUW is working to advance the common good by focusing on education, income, health and basic needs. It operates United Way 2-1-1, Central Florida’s information and assistance, crisis, suicide and referral helpline; Volunteer Resource Center; Gifts In Kind Center; Emergency Homelessness Services; and the Ryan White Part B program, which administers more than \$2 million to provide HIV/AIDS services and referrals. HFUW impacts more than 650,000 individuals annually through its direct service and funded programs. United Way partners with local businesses, government, other charities to increase awareness of local health and human service issues and to inspire hope, provide options and create possibilities for people in need. Visit www.HFUW.org for more information, or call (407) 835-0900.

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