

See inside for ways you can support families.

BUCKNER TODAY

The magazine of Buckner International

Fall 2017

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BUCKNER TODAY

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LEADERSHIP

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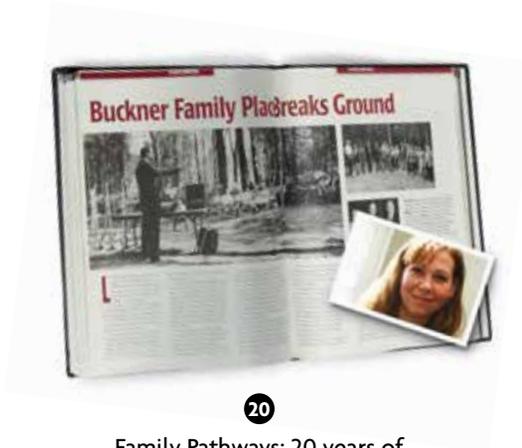
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Hope shines here.®

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Strength in the storm

Sometimes it takes a crisis to know how strong you really are. We've known the Buckner family is strong, but few of us knew how strong until Hurricane Harvey hit our ministries in Houston, Beaumont and throughout Southeast Texas.

When I visited our staff affected by the storm a few days afterward, I felt myself walking a little taller and bursting with pride at the way the Buckner family was responding. It was a reminder that we are in the people "business" and we are only as strong and successful as our people. That's good news, because our family is strong.

Staff who lost everything to flooding still showed up to take care of our children, families and senior adults. When I talked to them, it was obvious they never thought of doing anything else. Over and over, the response was the same: "They needed me. Of course I was going to be here."

The impact of the storm will continue for years and that includes its impact on our employees. It will take a long time for our co-workers to rebuild their lives, not to mention their homes.

At the same time, our fellow Buckner employees were assessing the devastation, other Buckner staff unaffected were asking how they could help. Offers of support poured into our Buckner International offices in Dallas, both from outside Buckner, but also from inside the organization.

Ruby, a staff member at the Buckner Family Hope Center at Houston/Aldine, saw her home flooded and at least two rooms destroyed. Even in the face of their personal tragedy, Ruby and her husband, Rigo, showed up at the Family Hope Center on Labor Day to volunteer, helping other families affected. You can read more about Ruby and Rigo on page 30 of this issue.

Ruby told me, "We know our things will be taken care of one way or another. We felt we needed to be here to serve others." Buckner staff who suffered great loss showed up to serve others. That's the Buckner way.

We also saw another strength of an organization like Buckner.

Programs in Houston sent aid and supplies to Beaumont. Staff from retirement communities in Longview and Austin went to Calder Woods in Beaumont to relieve staff who had worked several days without a break.

Buckner Children and Family Services employees relocated with children and families to Camp Buckner in Burnet. It was a camp for the kids, but a lot of work for staff. Some of the Beaumont staff at Camp Buckner fled floodwaters even as they watched their homes overtaken. And yet there they were, taking care of the children, hundreds of miles away from their own homes – or what was left of them.

Yet out of this we have seen the spirit of Buckner like never before. Our core values of being Christ-like, passion-driven and having a servant spirit were everywhere, proving they are more than words on a page or just good ideas.

As Ben Mazzara, our executive director of Calder Woods in Beaumont said, "Harvey knocked on our door, but we didn't let him in."

And just like we kept Harvey out, we didn't let him weaken Buckner. Instead, Harvey became a source of strength and community for the Buckner family.

If a person or an organization is defined by how we respond to a crisis, I can report that Buckner is well. Yes, we have staff whose lives were changed dramatically, but the strength of our staff and our organization was never more evident. And likewise, the support of friends like you was on display, as you gave thousands of dollars to Buckner for those affected.

Harvey helped us learn lessons for handling future disasters. But the greatest lesson was the strength and dedication of our Buckner family.



Albert Reyes

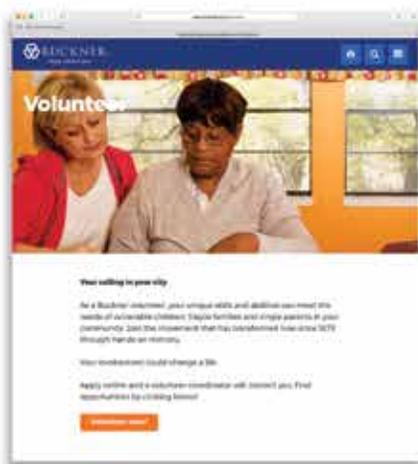
Albert L. Reyes, President and CEO
Buckner International

Visit my blog at www.bucknerprez.com



This year, Family Pathways celebrates the thousands of lives it has changed across Texas and multitudes of families strengthened in 20 years since the launch of its first location in Lufkin, Texas. **Learn more at buckner.org/BucknerToday**

Visit buckner.org/volunteer to find volunteer opportunities in the United States and around the world. Help organize fun activities for foster children, prepare boxes of aid or deliver shoes to vulnerable children around the world!



Letters to the Editor
If you have any questions or comments about the articles you've read in *Buckner Today*, e-mail us at communications@buckner.org

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Humbled

Let's be honest – we all think we're hard-working and dedicated to what we do. At the very least, we'd never admit it if we weren't.

I've been at Buckner 23 years and I'm proud of the work I do. Our team has won a lot of awards over the years and there are days I work long hours. Sometimes I'm so proud of what we do that I think it's the most important work at Buckner.

And then God drops a hammer on my pride and smashes it. That's what happened right after Hurricane Harvey hit Houston, Beaumont and Southeast Texas.

I spent a couple of days with Albert Reyes and a group visiting our Buckner ministries affected by the storm. I was humbled by their dedication. I talked to several who had just lost everything they owned; I mean everything.

They were still caring for children, families and seniors. And not just for a few hours, but for days without a break.

What I saw and heard wasn't new. The hard work and dedication of these co-workers is something that is constant. It just took a crisis – the costliest natural disaster in the history of the United States – for me to see the depth of their dedication.

It was humbling and yet at the same time, it made me proud; proud of Buckner and proud of my co-workers who would ignore their own pain and loss because they knew there were children and seniors who needed them.

My journey those two days also helped me see that as much as our staff love Buckner, they do their work for the children and seniors. Buckner is just the place that enables their calling. That's OK. In fact, that's a good thing.

I'm still proud of what I do and where I do it. But seeing my co-workers' response to Harvey and their commitment humbled me – and made me proud – for all the right reasons.



Scott Collins is Vice President of Communications at Buckner International.

3 REASONS WE'RE EX

Safety!



We're excited to announce that all the children, families and seniors Buckner serves are safe in the wake of Hurricane Harvey devastating Southeast Texas. Some within the Buckner family have lost possessions and even homes and cars, but they are safe. **Thank you for your prayers and continued support of the families we serve!**



Thank
you
for
your
prayers
and
support

CITED AT BUCKNER!

Volunteers!



From Amarillo to Peñitas and Lubbock to Longview, volunteers are investing in the vulnerable children we serve. They're leading classes. They're helping with after-school programs. They're even improving Buckner facilities so we can better serve others.

Because groups, companies, churches and individuals volunteer, hope is multiplied throughout Texas and beyond.

Are you volunteering through Buckner yet? If not, visit buckner.org/volunteer to see where you can change the life of a child or family.



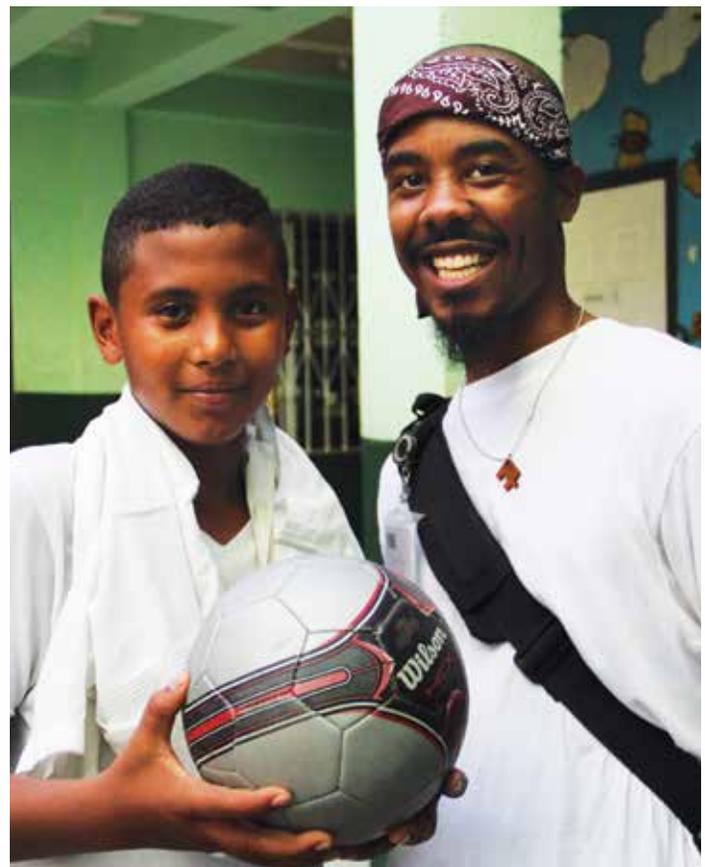
Churches!



Buckner International founder R.C. Buckner was a pastor, and the organization he started in 1879 has a long history of working with churches to serve the vulnerable. The ministry's relationship with churches is as strong as ever.

Congregations are serving through mission trips in Peñitas as well as internationally through Buckner. Sunday schools are adopting Buckner Family Pathways apartments to strengthen single-parent families. Church members are volunteering to teach classes.

Does your church want to serve vulnerable children and families? Find out how at buckner.org/churches.



Want to know the latest news at Buckner?

Go to buckner.org/blog for the latest news, stories, photos and videos for all Buckner ministries.



HOPE

Unprecedented rain. Unfathomable flooding. Uncertainty abounding throughout Southeast Texas.

Hurricane Harvey certainly was a storm unlike any other. It dropped more than 50 inches of rain across

in the midst of Harvey

the region, flooding homes, forcing evacuations and leaving thousands of families facing unknown futures.

But in the wake of the devastation, hope shines brightly through the outpouring of resources and love from the Buckner family.





‘This is what it means to be part of an organization that is Christ-like’

Shirley Campbell has served Parkway Place for 33 years. The Houston senior living community, she says, is her second home and the residents she serves there are like family.

On Friday afternoon, Aug. 25, Campbell, a certified nursing assistant in assisted living, drove to her normal evening shift. When she left Parkway Place later that night, she had no idea she would be unable to return to the residents in her care for four full days.

Campbell and her husband were stranded inside their Houston home. They had no power and no air conditioning. Their neighborhood was surrounded by overflowing creek waters. Police barricades blocked cars from getting in or out. Helicopters circled the area monitoring the rising waters.

By Wednesday, Campbell couldn't take it anymore. She had to get back to Parkway Place and the residents there. She was willing to do

whatever it took — even putting herself in danger — to get back to Parkway Place.

“You’ve got to do what you’ve got to do,” she said.

She and her husband loaded their vehicle onto a stranger's trailer, crossed the flooded streets to dry ground, and carefully drove around backstreets until they finally made it to Parkway Place three hours later.

“My heart was there with the residents,” Campbell said tearfully. “If we couldn't get there, who would be there for them?”

When she arrived at the senior living community, she embraced the residents, all of whom were safe. She pitched in to help her co-workers, some of whom worked more than five straight days, sleeping

at Parkway Place during the storm to ensure the safety of the residents.

The community weathered the storm without issues. The floodwaters moved within a half-mile of Parkway Place, then receded.

“We had to make sure our residents were safe and had regular meals,” said Derone Martin, food service director at Parkway Place.

The commitment to serve children, families and seniors during one of the most devastating storms in U.S. history ran throughout Buckner ministries in Southeast Texas. Staff members pushed aside personal loss to put the needs of those they serve first.

As a result of that commitment, all seniors, children and families are safe in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey.

“It was both heartbreaking and yet inspiring to visit with our Buckner family,” said Albert Reyes, Buckner president and CEO. “Several of our staff have suffered complete personal loss and devastation and yet they are still caring for the children and senior residents. I’ve never been prouder of Buckner.”

Floodwaters were closest to Calder Woods in Beaumont, where they encroached on the parking lot but never entered the buildings. The community was prepared with cases upon cases of drinking water as well as weeks of food, which helped when potable water became an issue in the city.

Seven Calder Woods employees lost everything in the flooding. Many of them were serving nonetheless.

“This is just an incredible demonstration of Buckner's spirit,” said Calder Woods executive director Ben Mazzara, who worked nine straight days through the storm. “We have staff who lost everything and yet they're here today, caring for residents and their fellow employees.”

One of those employees is Chelsey Musick, assistant director of nursing at Calder Woods. Floodwaters reached the roofline of her home. She is living in a hotel with her husband and children as she continues caring for Calder Woods residents.

“This is what it means to be part of an organization that is Christ-like and mission-driven,” Musick said. ■

Change a life

You and your church or organization can still help a family affected by Hurricane Harvey. Rebuilding is still happening and you can be part of it.

Visit buckner.org/volunteer to see how you can empower a family.



**SHIRLEY
CAMPBELL**

Certified Nursing Assistant
*Parkway Place,
Houston*

**CHELSEY
MUSICK**

Assistant Director
of Nursing
Calder Woods, Beaumont

**DERONE
MARTIN**

Food Services Director
*Parkway Place,
Houston*

**BEN
MAZZARA**

Executive Director
*Calder Woods,
Beaumont*

An outpouring across the nation upon Southeast

An abundance of support, love and prayer

As Hurricane Harvey approached Southeast Texas, individuals, churches and groups across the country gathered resources and supplies to help the Buckner families and staff affected by the flooding.



of love from ion descends st Texas

The Buckner International family nationwide didn't wait for Hurricane Harvey to make landfall to jump into action.

Buckner President and CEO Albert Reyes issued a call for prayer for the children, families and seniors the ministry serves in

Southeast Texas as the storm approached the Texas coast, and churches, groups and individuals began asking God for protection.



While the storm was hovering over the region, The Church of Eleven22 in Jacksonville, Fla. was collecting supplies. As soon as the church felt it could get the supplies into Houston, church members drove 15 hours straight to deliver three truckloads of items and return home to prepare for Hurricane Irma as it approached their home state.

“This is an incredible example of what it means for the church to be the presence of Christ,” said Buckner Development Officer



Adam McKinney. “For a church to show this level of compassion and care from that distance is a testimony to all of us and an incredible blessing to our families.”

Once the storm dissipated, volunteers were serving through Buckner ministries, particularly the Buckner Family Hope Center at Houston/Aldine. Neighborhoods around the Family Hope Center flooded significantly, leaving families with little.

The first day, the Family Hope Center served nearly 1,700 people in 385 families affected by the storm. As a well-known source of help and hope in the community, families continued coming to the Family Hope Center for the next week. About 100 volunteers helped sort and distribute donations at the center.

Groups and individuals also helped clean out debris and help with needed demolition in homes of Buckner families. The assistance helped families move toward rebuilding.

“It’s been some very dark times,” said Shawna Roy, director of the Buckner Family Hope Center at Houston/Aldine. “People are lost and don’t know where to turn. I’m so glad we’re here to shine hope in this situation. We’re here to let people know we’re here for you today and throughout this journey of recovery.”

For families who are struggling after the storm, the volunteers were a breath of fresh air.

“That helped us a lot,” Miriam Aguilar said. “They had a lot of people come over. They even brought us lunch because they know



we’re working 11-12 hours a day.”

Leaders of Buckner and South Main Baptist Church in Houston jointly agreed to distribute locally the roughly 10,000 pairs of shoes the congregation collected for Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls®, knowing many people’s footwear was ruined by the flooding. Shoes for Orphan Souls also donated another 1,500 pairs of shoes collected through its Dallas-Fort Worth shoe drive to help victims of the storm.

Friends and supporters of Buckner donated money and supplies to the relief effort, including cleaning supplies and hygiene kits as well as more than \$30,000. Additionally, Parkway Place residents raised about \$17,000 for employees affected by the storm.

“The Buckner family is once again showing how incredible it is,” Reyes said. “Thank you for giving so generously to minister to those who have been affected by Hurricane Harvey. Your gifts will continue to bless families for weeks to come.” ■

Halliburton transports children to safety

When Hurricane Harvey tore through Beaumont, Texas, it left significant parts of the city underwater and without power. Then the city lost water after flooding near a pump station along the Neches River.

In the middle of it all was the Buckner Assessment Center, which provides temporary care for children removed from their homes as a result of abuse or neglect as well as Buckner foster families who had lost everything.

Buckner International leaders surveyed the situation and decided to evacuate the children and families if at all possible.

Buckner sought help from the military and the Coast Guard. Neither could help provide safe transportation for that large of a group. But one long-time friend was determined to find a solution: Halliburton.

The Houston-based company leveraged its influence and finances to find a bus company that would safely transport the children through standing water from Beaumont to Camp Buckner near Burnet. When the children arrived, they streamed off the bus, relieved to be in the safety and serenity of the Texas Hill Country where they stayed until it was safe to return.

“Children come to the Buckner Assessment Center as a result of abuse and neglect,” said

Buckner Development Officer Adam McKinney. “They’ve already suffered through trauma. Then the hurricane came, creating more anxiety. Halliburton went above and beyond the call of duty to get these children to safety. We will forever be grateful for what they did.”

The assistance is part of Halliburton’s continued support of Buckner efforts to protect children and strengthen families. The company has been particularly supportive of the Buckner Family Hope Center at Houston/Aldine

“Halliburton employees have it in their blood to help each other, help their neighbors, help their community,” said Emily Mir, director of Halliburton public relations. “Halliburton supports the Buckner Family Hope Center at Houston/Aldine because it’s less than three miles from the Halliburton corporate headquarters. It’s a neighbor. We see the needs to our immediate community being met through the Buckner Family Hope Center through our donations, through our contributions, through our efforts.”

McKinney is grateful Halliburton is part of the Buckner family.

“During the most difficult times, families pull together,” McKinney said. “That’s exactly what the Buckner family did during Hurricane Harvey and continues to do after. Halliburton is a crucial part of those efforts to shine hope throughout Southeast Texas.” ■





Working together, for the good of all

Buckner Retirement Services staff from Longview and Austin came to help Calder Woods in Beaumont and Parkway Place in Houston in the wake of Hurricane Harvey so residents could continue to be cared for while local staff could look after their families who had been affected by the storm



Hurricane Harvey victim finds **new life** at Parkway Place

Story by Elizabeth Arnold • Photography by Russ Dilday

Joan Haggard's weathered tan journal sits unassumingly atop the kitchen table in her new Parkway Place apartment, next to a neat stack of papers, files and phone numbers — the essentials salvaged from her flooded Houston home. In black ink and perfect cursive, the journal tells pieces of the 86-year-old widow's Hurricane Harvey experience.

Like many, Haggard lost nearly everything in the historic storm. Family mementos, tokens from her 62-year marriage and items locked inside a "waterproof" safe — all ruined by the four feet of water that sat in her home for more than a week. If Haggard were to stand at the front of her home today, she could see all the way through the back door.

"It's different," Haggard said. "You never think of this happening to you."

During the storm, Haggard stayed with her son's family in Bellaire. The 40-year-old house had never flooded before, but a few days into Harvey it began taking in water. The water, which rose to more than a foot, forced Haggard and her family to move to a neighbor's second story garage. There, she slept several nights on the floor, underneath the pool table.

"It's not so easy for an 86-year-old to get off the floor!" she laughed.

Haggard, who grew up in West Texas, has lived in Houston for 48 years. She's raised three children, buried one son to Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS), and for 47 years was the sole caregiver for her husband after a plane crash left him paralyzed.

Still, most would characterize Haggard by her unwavering faith and gentle optimism.

"Life is OK," Haggard said. "You go on. You survive, and here in Houston I think we all come out better. We can choose to."

Haggard was the first of more than 15 residents to move to Parkway Place as a direct result of Hurricane Harvey. Some stayed at the Houston senior living community temporarily; others made plans to call it home permanently. Haggard said they share a unique bond.

"When I walked in, I knew it was OK," she said. "I felt like I was family, like I was right where I belonged."

Fellow residents, Haggard remembered, joked that living at Parkway Place during Harvey was like living on an island: all the surrounding areas were covered in water.

"They said it must have something to do with the retired missionaries who live at Parkway Place," laughed Haggard.

Already, Haggard has made herself at home at Parkway Place, jumping into ongoing Bible studies and activities like Bingo, which she regrettably didn't win. Her longtime friend, Betty Beard, moved to Parkway Place shortly after Haggard. The two live just two doors down from each other.

"I feel comfortable here," Haggard said. "I feel loved."

Since the flood, Haggard has only visited her home once. Even then she had to wear a surgical mask to keep from inhaling dust and debris.

Around her wrist, Haggard wears a white rubber bracelet with the word "hesychia" printed in blue. The word is Greek for stillness. It's a practice, Haggard said, she clings to now more than ever.

"I'm learning to be still and listen to God," she said. "We talk to him so much in our prayers, but he says to just be still and know that he is God. I lost things, but they're just things. I'm very blessed."

The one thing she made sure to take with her to Parkway Place? A framed photo of her husband that was hanging in their bedroom. She wanted him to be with her.

"I think he would like it here," she smiled. ■

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\$1,180

strengthens 10 families for a year through Buckner Family Hope Centers.



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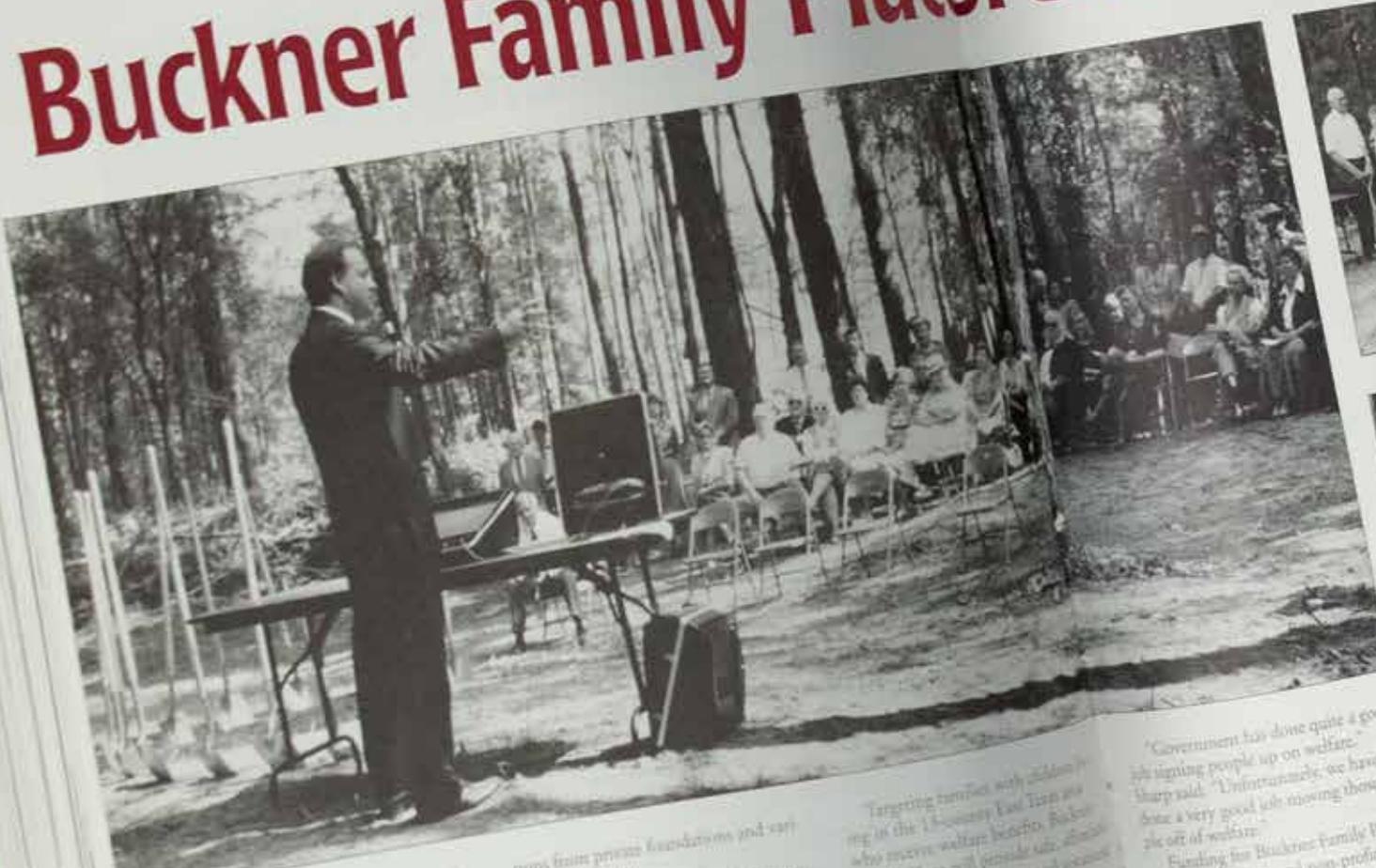


Family

STATEWIDE

STATEWIDE

Buckner Family Place Breaks Ground



Local and state officials broke ground Aug. 19 for the \$1.6 million Buckner Family Place transitional housing program in Lufkin which is designed to move families from the work force.

Texas State Commissioner John Sharp, who is presiding over the ground-breaking ceremony, said the program is a "win-win" for everyone involved.

Sharp, whose Family Pathfinders program has called on local civic clubs, organizations and businesses to adopt and support welfare facilities, applauded the development of Buckner Family Place, saying the facility and its corresponding programs "will not only assist in creating welfare, but are essential to the development of the state."

Targeting families with children in the 13-county East Texas area who receive welfare benefits, Buckner Family Place will provide site, office building, on-site day care and vocational training through Angelina College.

Buckner's Children and Family Services, which will operate the facility, will also offer services such as parenting and nurturing classes, substance abuse counseling and job training.

"Government has done quite a good job of signing people up on welfare," Sharp said. "Unfortunately, we have not done a very good job of moving those people out of welfare."

Funding for Buckner Family Place has come from several non-profit foundations, including a \$1 million gift from the T.L.L. Temple Foundation of Lufkin, \$250,000 from the Dallas-based Meadows Foundation, a \$200,000 challenge gift from the Mober Foundation of Tulsa, Okla., \$50,000 from the Temple Island Foundation and \$4,000 from the Texas State Foundation.

helped bring the total raised for the project to more than \$1.6 million, according to Buckner officials.

"There are several resources of state products which diminish the national scene," Sharp said. "We need oil and gas resources created by wealth for our state and our most natural resources we are left with for the future: are the children being saved through Buckner to be protected?" Sharp said.

"The children being born here are the single most important economic development product of the state of Texas. Through this program, we are helping to ensure that every child has a pretty good future."

Pathways:

20 years of
'a perfect partnership'

In the mid-1990s, roughly 800 of the 4,000 students at Angelina College in Lufkin, Texas, were single parents. Many of them had come back to school to improve themselves so they could better provide for their families.



College administrators and Buckner leaders identified three roadblocks to their success: Transportation, child care and confidence. In other words, these parents and families needed a path they could follow to succeed, a route that would help them overcome any obstacles they'd face.

That avenue became Buckner Family Pathways, and this year the program celebrates the thousands of lives it has changed across Texas and multitudes of families strengthened in 20 years since the launch of its first location in Lufkin.

"I think from the inception it was a perfect partnership: A community college, which is supposed to do things like this for their community, and an international organization with the reputation and the success rate of Buckner, just a perfect partnership coming together, and the community embraced it from the beginning," said Larry Phillips, former president of Angelina College.

Phillips knew the Family Pathways program would work before the first location opened. He was observing the construction of the facility on the Angelina College campus when Linda Smelley, the first director of the program, introduced him to a single mother and her children who were going to live there in a few months.

The family had been living at a local women's shelter safe house.

Even though the bus dropped her elementary-school-age son off a couple of blocks away from the safe house, word had spread around school that the boy didn't have a home, and he was teased.

The mother asked her son if he'd like living at what was then called Buckner Family Place. His reply was as clear as the program's future: "Oh yeah, they won't make fun of us now."

"The story of Jake* stayed with me, so even before we opened, I saw that it was going to make a multigenerational impact on kids," Phillips said.

Single mothers quickly sought out the Lufkin program as a way to achieve their educational goals. As a result, the program has grown significantly.

"It was really going to be a small pilot program," said Randy Daniels, Buckner vice president of international resource and program development. "It's exploded into a full-blown opportunity for these moms with the first 20 apartments, then 40 apartments, a significant college putting the program on its property and major funders in Lufkin falling in love with it underwriting it from day one."

Growth happened far beyond Lufkin. In 2005, Buckner opened Family Pathways locations in Amarillo, Dallas and Midland. During the next several years, Buckner started Family Pathways locations in Lubbock, Conroe and Houston. Last year, Buckner launched its latest location in Longview.

As a result of the expansion, Buckner was able to equip and empower more single parents and strengthen more families each year. In the past two decades, Family Pathways has impacted more than 5,800 lives from nearly 1,950 families.

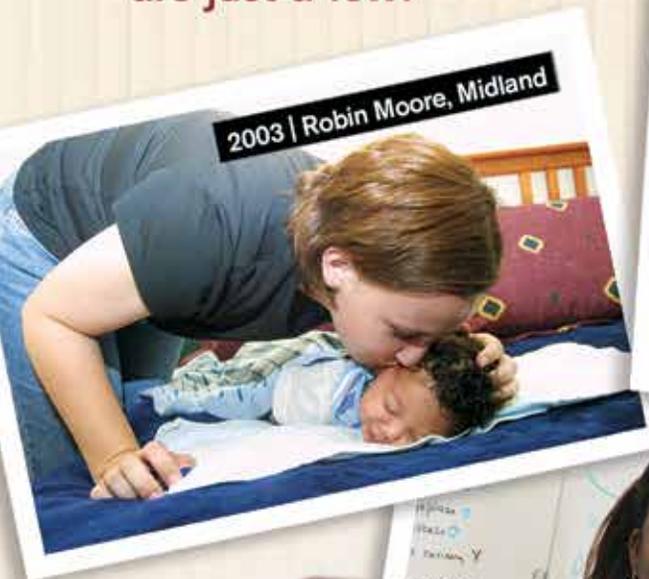
The evolution of the program has included more than geographical expansion; Family Pathways is a holistic effort that attempts to help single parents in a variety of ways, including counseling, parenting classes, lessons on conflict resolution, communication, support, tutoring, child care and housing.

"We tell them up front: You're going to do a lot of things while you're here, but you're going to be a different person when you leave. We want them to yes have an education and career and pay their own bills but we also want them to feel confident parenting successfully and independently, seeking out healthy and productive friendships and relationships and just feeling good as a person," said Marissa Phillips, executive director of Buckner in Lufkin.

"As I've gone around and done presentations and researched other areas to see what may be going on in



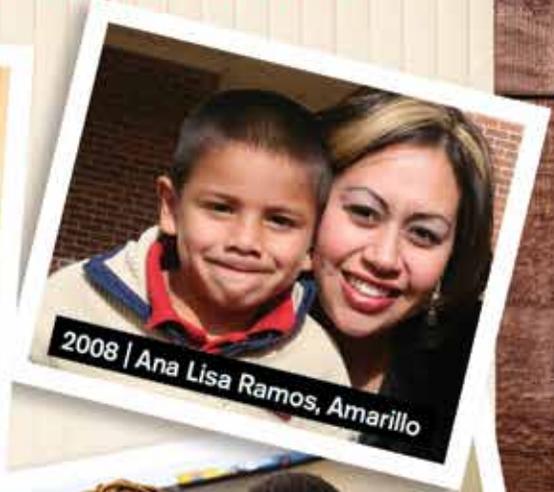
This year, Buckner Family Pathways celebrates the thousands of lives it has changed across Texas and multitudes of families strengthened in 20 years since the launch of its first location in Lufkin, Texas. Here are just a few:



2003 | Robin Moore, Midland



2006 | Virginia Morales, Lufkin



2008 | Ana Lisa Ramos, Amarillo



2010 | Shanjula Harris, Dallas



2017 | Stephanie Fletcher, Longview



2016
Cyndi Russell
Dallas



2011 | Neikedra Butler, Midland

the field, there really isn't anyone doing what we're doing at Buckner Family Pathways, in the same way and in the same scope. And just the depth of experience that we bring to the programming, that we've developed in response to our residents' needs over the years, I think puts us in a unique position to serve their needs."

Tiara Johnson came to Family Pathways in Lufkin to complete her education and give her 4-year-old daughter, Kaylen, a better life.



Shanna Bush, a graduate of Buckner Family Pathways in Dallas, called the community of single parents and Family Pathways staff a family — one she and her children could depend on during both the difficult and rewarding moments.

What's she found is guidance, support, encouragement and practical tools to succeed at home and in the classroom.

"The program is amazing," she said. "They just do so much here. Not only do they allow you to be able to go to school, further your education, get a career path lined out, but they also focus on teaching you how to become an adult and a self-sufficient adult after Buckner."

Family Pathways' approach helps change the way single parents think about themselves and the world around them. Raising a child alone is difficult and lacking a college education compounds the issues because it's harder to support a family.

Throughout the program, staff, mentors and leaders pour biblical truths into residents' lives. For several years, program participants learn that God loves them and people care about them as they accomplish one goal after another.

"I had a community behind me," said Shanna Bush, who graduated from the Dallas Family Pathways program in 2016. "It was like a family. I didn't have to worry about certain things like when I got depressed, things like that. We had therapy sessions, things of that nature that

I probably used to be like, 'Oh, I'm never going to do therapy.' But I did it, and it helped. I had help for my kids. You know, just that whole community behind you."

Success begets success, breaking generational cycles of poverty, according to Family Pathways statistics. When parents achieve one goal, it gives them the confidence to strive toward another. Once parents string together several small victories, they begin dreaming bigger and believing in themselves.

Children watch as their parents' lives are transformed and learn lessons through observation. They see education is important. They grasp the importance of hard work. They see how much their parents love them and strive to improve themselves. More than 90 percent of Family Pathways graduates' children later go on to college, continuing the pattern they saw growing up.

"It's like I tell the graduates, 'When you walk that stage as a Buckner graduate, you're not doing it for yourself. Think of the example you're setting for your kids,'" Larry Phillips said. "They have powerful statistics over these 20 years that tell how many of those kids that came through this program as kids are now graduates of high school and college. That's incredible." ■

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Give and receive

Shanna Bush (left) and Claudia Hicks (right) participated in the Buckner Family Pathways program in Dallas. While in the program they also regularly volunteered at the Buckner Center for Humanitarian Aid as a way to give back to an organization that gave them more than they dared to imagine while they worked on their educational goals.



Story by Aimee Freston

Growwin

Juan Calan and his wife Josefina Romero were living the American dream, working hard in New York to save money for their family. They sent the money to their parents to build a comfortable savings account.

The money never made it to a savings account, at least not one for them. Their parents had spent it all. They were penniless. Dejected and distrustful of family, they moved to Peñitas, Texas, to start over. This time they vowed to do it alone.

Doing so proved difficult. They lived in an old home and struggled starting a business. They needed help. That's when they learned about the local Buckner Family Hope Center.

Romero was alone in the house. The children were at school and Calan went to work. She was bored. A friend told her about a bow-making class offered at the Family Hope Center and invited her to join them. At first, she was reluctant to go. The only person she knew at the class was her friend who invited her. Anxious to get out of the house, she attended the class. Then she attended again. Soon, she was making friends and taking other classes offered at the Family Hope Center.

The whole family started to get involved at the Family Hope Center. Calan took the fatherhood class and the children participated in after-school programs. Through the Family Hope Center, they qualified for a home build through Buckner Domestic Missions. That's when they first met Sam Hutchinson, Buckner senior construction and agriculture coordinator.

Hutchinson could see how invested Calan and Romero were in their family and how hard they worked to improve their lives. A church mission group began the house build, but Calan and Romero finished about 20 percent of the house themselves.

When Buckner started a new program called AgriHope, Hutchinson knew Calan and Romero had the passion to be successful. AgriHope is a program that teaches families how to farm on their land for consumption

or income generation. While Calan and Romero already grew some plants they sold at flea markets, Calan was reluctant to increase production, but his wife insisted it was something they could do and enjoy.

"More than me, my wife enjoys planting. She told me she wanted to do this, but I said, 'Forget it. We're going to do another thing.' But she said she really liked it. So I said OK. She always gets what she wants," Calan said with a smile.

Through Buckner and some ministry partners, Calan and Romero received initial resources and supplies to start their home garden. Then Hutchinson offered further training on best practices for agriculture and farming, and their first harvest was more successful than they could imagine.



g hope

Like family

Sam Hutchinson (opposit page), Buckner senior construction and agriculture coordinator, walked alongside Juan Calan and Josefina Romero as they developed and expanded their successful agriculture business, but even more so, they developed a bond of friendship.



“Juan Calan and his family specifically have a drive, the spark and initiative to be successful,” Hutchinson said. “Their first harvest after their first AgriHope home garden was \$1,100, which is substantial. The agriculture program is only successful because of Juan Calan and his drive to succeed.”

Calan and Romero soaked in all the knowledge they could and their agriculture business continued to expand. Once, they didn’t even need to harvest their own crop. A woman approached them and offered to buy their entire crop while they were still growing. She paid them, then she and her team harvested the crop themselves.

“What motivates us is being able to show our children that we can get ahead in life,” Calan said. “Buckner has given us the motivation and hope that we can have a business. Maybe we don’t have all the tools, but we do have the willingness, the strength, the motivation and the desire of being better, to have a business for us and for our children.”

They planted papaya, cilantro, carrots, beets, cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, kale and many other items. With each harvest they learned more and more. But even more so, they developed a relationship with Hutchinson. They trusted him. Hutchinson has become family.

“What can I say about Sam? He’s awesome,” Calan said. “At home or when he sees me somewhere else, he always asks if I’m all right. Every time I imagine something great, Sam brings it alive for me. He’s always there for me. My wife laughs about me because I told her that whenever I see Sam, I want to give him a hug no matter what because I feel like he’s more than a friend, he’s a brother. I love Sam.”

Over the summer, Calan invited Hutchinson to attend a birthday party for his son at their house. Hutchinson was happy to go and spend more time with him and his family.

“Someone once told me that Juan referred to me as a father figure

because I’ve always been there to teach him something or help his family,” Hutchinson said. “Knowing their family testimony, I knew how ‘father’ was a broken word for him. That was really powerful to hear how he perceives me and the relationship I strive to build with them. Building that relationship with the families is one of my favorite things about my job.”

Hutchinson encouraged Calan to expand his agriculture business to include raising chickens. Though he didn’t know anything about raising chickens, Calan agreed because he trusted Sam to provide him with the knowledge on proper care. Hutchinson set them up with a coop and chickens and now Calan is talking about building more coops to sell to other farmers.

“I see that with a lot of families,” Hutchinson said. “Families go from a situation where they are broken and in poverty, from living in a trailer or a house with tarp walls and dirt floors into a beautiful home that is secure. To see that transition in their happiness and their joy, to see all their mental anguish disappear, and seeing their frustrations and hardships really turn into a better situation is my favorite thing.”

With family coaching from the Family Hope Center and building a trusting relationship with Hutchinson, Calan and Romero have seen their hard work pay off. But even more, Buckner was able to restore trust in family.

“Since we’ve known Buckner, they’ve done a lot of things for us – for me and my family,” Calan added. “Everything they can, they’ve done it. I feel happy because when you need hope from Buckner, they are always there for you.” ■





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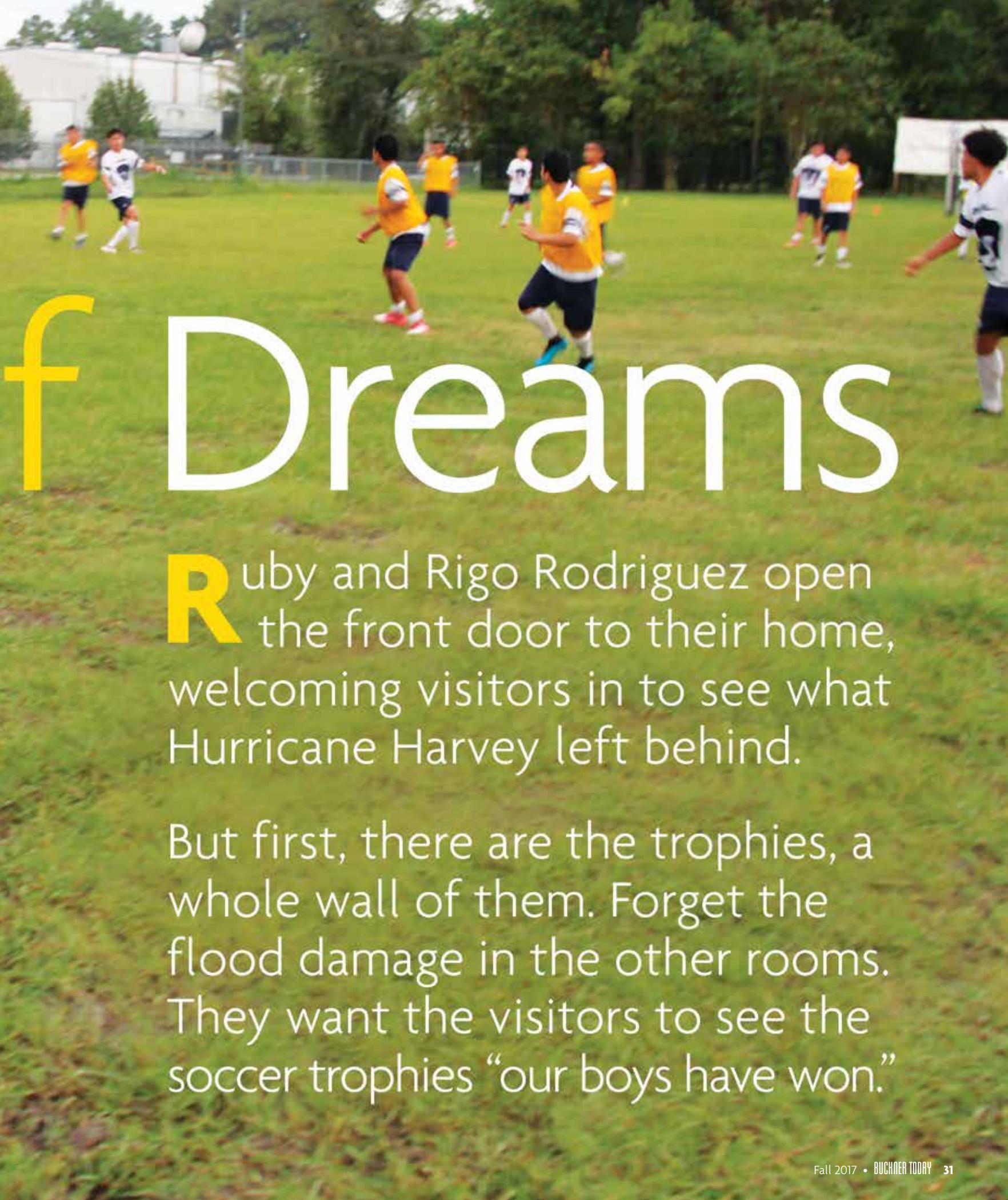
Field

Story by
Scott Collins

Photography by
Russ Dilday

Teamwork makes the dream work

Through activities like soccer, volunteers and staff at Buckner Family Hope Centers build relationships with young people and their families. By working together with coaches and staff, young people become leaders as they learn the importance of working hard, cooperation and serving others.



f Dreams

Ruby and Rigo Rodriguez open the front door to their home, welcoming visitors in to see what Hurricane Harvey left behind.

But first, there are the trophies, a whole wall of them. Forget the flood damage in the other rooms. They want the visitors to see the soccer trophies “our boys have won.”



Despite suffering flood damage to their home, Ruby and Rigo Rodriguez were more concerned for the welfare of the boys they mentor at the Buckner Family Hope Center at Houston/Aldine. “What I do for the kids, it comes back to me,” Rigo said. “I don’t want to see these kids on the street or doing something wrong. That’s the main thing for me, to keep these kids on a straight line.”

Eventually they lead the group to the back two bedrooms where floodwaters left their mark. Furniture is piled in adjacent rooms, revealing wood floors that aged overnight from the water. Their guests, including Buckner International President and CEO Albert Reyes, shake their heads in sympathy, although the truth is, unless water has invaded your house, you can’t really appreciate the magnitude of what’s left.

Rigo shrugs it off. It’s really no big deal. Others have suffered much worse, he insists. Besides, he’s already started the repairs and everything will be back to normal soon enough.

What Rigo and Ruby really want to talk about is soccer, or more importantly, the Pumas and ‘Pumitas’.

He leads his visitors back through the narrow hallway to an open space next to the kitchen. “Wait here,” he implores, as he scampers out of sight. Rigo hustles back into the room holding a box overflowing with white jerseys, sits it on the floor in front of the visitors, disappears and returns with a second box.

“We just got these for the boys,” Ruby says, telling the visitors they had ordered brand new jerseys for the two teams just before Hurricane Harvey

showed up. “They called and said the jerseys were in and we could pick them up. But I told Rigo we should wait because we had to pay for them when we picked them up and it would take all of our money. ‘What if our house floods?’ I asked him.”

Rigo’s reply? “We can worry about that later. The boys really need and want these jerseys. This means a lot to them.”

More than a game

It’s Labor Day and more than a week has passed since Harvey made his unwelcome stop in Houston. The parking lot at the Buckner Family Hope Center in the Aldine community of north Houston is a beehive of activity. Three trucks from a church in Florida are backed into the lot and an army of volunteers are unloading and sorting the donations.

By 8 a.m., the temperature is creeping up and humidity covers the workers like Saran wrap, clinging and sticking to their clothes and skin.

The army is a mixture of employees from Noble Energy, churches, Buckner staff, neighbors – and the Pumas and Pumitas soccer teams.

Coach Rigo has called the boys and told them to show up at the Family

Hope Center to help. He wants them to know there is more to life than soccer; others need help.

"I don't want them to be in the wrong place," Rigo says. "I'm trying to teach them the best. I've been telling these kids that when they grow up, I want them to be responsible. I tell them to do what they say."

It's a message the boys and their parents understand.

Juana Mendoza's son Marcus, 13, plays for the Pumitas. "They grew up together like brothers," she says about his teammates. "Coach Rigo is super

one wants to see except maybe the Pumitas. Playing soccer in the rain is "like candy," one of the boys says. "It's sweet."

Ruby and Rigo pull up to the Family Hope Center and boys pile out of their vehicle, each proudly adorned with his new jersey.

Rigo gathers the boys around him – 24 in all. He hands the Pumitas yellow pullovers, gives instructions to both teams and the scrimmage is on.

Standing on the sideline, Rigo hollers instructions and encouragement to the boys. The air is filled with a mix of Spanish and English. He punches



nice and he's very patient with the kids and he's fair to all of them. He treats them like his own kids."

"He tells us to stay in school so we can get a good job," Raul Torres explains. "He wants us to be outside, to play and to have a good education."

The words most often used by players and parents to describe Rigo and the soccer teams are father and family.

"Ruby and Rigo are always willing to help others by volunteering," says Shawna Roy, director of the Buckner Family Hope Center. "They have such great spirits and truly care about the community and families they come in contact with."

Never mind that it's a day off. Ruby Rodriguez shows up at the Family Hope Center like she does every day. Ruby is the office manager and administrative assistant here. But the work she and Rigo do with the Family Hope Center soccer teams goes way beyond what she's paid to do. This is a passion. So is volunteering to help Harvey's victims – even though their family suffered too.

"There are people out there who had more damage done to their homes than us," Ruby says. "We're just happy we're alive. Material things come and go and there are people who lost everything and we just want to be out here doing this for them because they need us."

Moving on

Three weeks after Harvey, it's raining again in Houston, something no

the air with his hands as he coaches, ignoring the steady and annoying rain that's falling.

"I am just 100 percent happy to be with them," he says. "I love to play with my kids. I do this because I feel like I need to do something for them. I'm trying to teach them the best."

"The soccer team represents hope," says Roy. "Many of the boys on the teams come from broken homes and don't have fathers or positive role models. They don't have a sense of belonging.

"Ruby and Rigo have taken on a big role in managing the soccer teams and making sure the boys also excel at school and in the [Family Hope Center's] Teen Academy. But they do it with such grace and compassion. The world needs more couples like them."

Win or lose, Rigo tells the boys the game and lessons they learn are more important.

"I like to win the games, but I tell them don't worry about it. If we don't win, we don't win. We're going to play and just enjoy being on the field. Do your best. For me, the most important thing is to watch them grow up from day one to this point."

"What I do for the kids, it comes back to me. Even if not, I still feel happy with what I'm doing," Rigo explains. "I don't want to see these kids on the street or doing something wrong. That's the main thing for me, to keep these kids on a straight line." ■

The soapy hands and feet of Jesus

Jesus told his disciples to wash one another's feet ... not one another's cars.

Staff at Buckner Westminster Place, however, had different plans.

Each year, leadership at the Longview, Texas, senior living community take a day to wash residents' and team members' cars as a sign of appreciation. Those no longer driving get a tune-up on their walkers and scooters, and everyone enjoys a laughter-filled day of soapy smiles.

"This is who Buckner is," said Wes Wells, executive director of Westminster Place. "By washing these seniors' cars, walkers and scooters, we're showing them they matter. It gives us the incredible opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus to people who've already spent their whole lives serving others."

Westminster Place serves over 260 residents. Through independent living, assisted living, memory care, long-term and skilled nursing, the community gives senior adults at each stage the opportunity to live a fully-enriched life.

"Our job is to create fun moments like these for residents every day," Wells said. "Everything we do, we do for them."

These small but mighty acts remind senior adults — a population often forgotten by the fast-paced, youth-driven world — that they matter. ■



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In one day

In one day after Hurricane Harvey, the Buckner Family Hope Center at Houston/Aldine distributed food, water, cleaning supplies, hygiene items and clothes to hundreds of storm victims. Among them was this young lady.

Aleida is 2 years old. Her family lost everything in their apartment because of flooding caused by the storm. Her family is served through the Family Hope Center and came seeking emergency supplies.

While she was there, Aleida picked up these pink rain boots “in case the water comes back in my house.”

Families are coming to grips with the damage the storm left behind. They’re realizing the long road ahead. Volunteers are working in the area through Buckner. Families are cleaning out their homes. They are forging plans for their futures.

Will you continue to pray for the children and families affected by Hurricane Harvey and those who are trying to help them? ■



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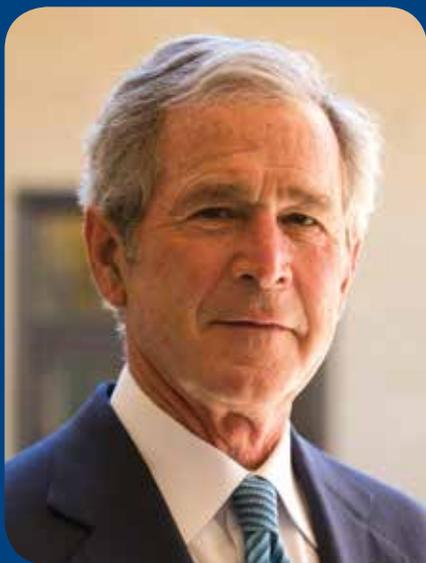
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