

The History of Love & Faith in Action in the Crescent Communities

“Miracles happen in this community – that’s all,” said Father Sebastian George, Pastor of St. Madeleine’s Catholic Church in High Springs. City government, organizations and church parishioners all joined together to save an outreach program sponsored by St. Madeleines, Community Churches, Community Members & Catholic Charities for over 32 years.

High Springs Social Services began in 1981, was incorporated in 1988 with St. Madeleine Church’s Pastor, First United Methodist Church’s Reverend and members from each Church listed as Officers. In 1996 High Springs Social Services, Inc. came under the umbrella of Catholic Charities and the Social Services program grew exponentially. For the next 17 years the Community, Churches and Catholic Charities continued to feed, clothe and help thousands of people in the Crescent Communities of High Springs, Alachua, Newberry, Fort White, LaCrosse, Gilchrist and Alachua counties. When Catholic Charities met with Father Sebastian this past December 2012 with the crushing news that due to economic conditions Catholic Charities no longer had the funds to keep the program open, Father Sebastian told them, “It’s not right, it’s unacceptable.” The Center’s Director, Belquiz Diefenderfer, the Knight of Columbus, Church & Community members volunteered time and the City of High Springs has donated the use of a newer and well-maintained building, located at 30 SW 1st Avenue in downtown High Springs. Everyone rallied together to get the information out to Bishop Estevez who was the ultimate decision-maker highlighting the good work done for the community and how vital these services are to those in need. And then the miracle happened, at the end of the flurry of communications, a hand-written note from **Bishop Estevez** arrived in which he wrote: “**The Poor won**”, the parish will receive a subsidy from the Diocese and remain open. Since then the **Knights of Columbus** have worked round-the-clock weekends and Holidays to add a window-accessible enclosed office & waiting area for clients to fill out applications; on the exterior,

one of the wives' of a Knight built the large loading dock in the rear of the building for the weekly delivery of food. St. Madeleine Community Outreach is open Monday through Friday, 9:30 am – noon and 1 pm to 3 pm. For more information contact **Belle Diefenderfer** at 386.454.1000.



Loretta Downs, Director, High Springs Social Services 1981 – 1988
High Springs Social Services, Inc. 1988 – 1992

No Picture Available

Bonnie Botita, Director, High Springs Social Services, Inc. 1992 - 1994



Lillian Morvillo, Assistant Director, High Springs Social Services, Inc. 1992-1994
Director, High Springs Social Services, In. 1994-1998
Director. High Springs Catholic Charities. 1998 – June 30. 2008



Belquiz Diefenderfer, Assistant Director, High Springs, Catholic Charities, 2005 – June 30, 2008
Director, High Springs Catholic Charities, July 1, 2008 – June 30, 2013
Director, St. Madeleine Community Outreach, July 1, 2013 - Present