Sometimes There is Just Not Enough Kleenex

By Debbie Dewey

I was asked to spend a morning on an All Charities Tour. I did not know that these tours were open, anyone can go. So when a friend invited me, this caught my attention. At first, I feared what would be asked of me. How much money, volunteer time or committee work? Then, I was told this was a particular trip selected to be filmed for a one-time project.

The thought of camera coverage during the tour panicked me. In my mind, this was all about me, how comfortable I felt! What I really needed was to have a few visits from the ghosts of Christmas past. Bah humbug! That ugly finger pointed right at my heart.

After I agreed to the tour, the emails started and the list of the organizations under consideration hooked me.

We met at the Cultural Center for treats and coffee, loaded vans and drove north. The camera crew was on board as members of the Grants Committee gave an overview of their task, who we would visit and the consideration of each grant request. They told us that they were interested in our impressions as we visited each place. I quickly realized the camera crew would soon disappear into the background and proceed unnoticed.

Facts and Figures Become Reality

The trip to Homestead was the familiar transition from our paradise to the “real world” but this would not be the real world I had seen. In the van, the Grants Committee told us that they heavily consider projects that impact the lives and families of associates, the number of associates living in Homestead is over 70%. We saw numbers and spreadsheets. Like the brilliant successful Ocean Reef people we were, we had our business like questions about figures and follow up. But no human faces, yet. Then we entered the world of real need and my eyes started to well up and my smugness melted.

First stop, a place of transition from homeless to workplace and permanent residence. Here we visited tidy classrooms and cinder block buildings where residents transition to lives of independence and employment. These residents stay six months on average as they move to a full life—the director is a graduate of the program. There the children, newborn to teenagers find counseling, help with studies and social counseling by professionals. The adults receive job counseling and mock interview training, even clothing to wear. They need money for programs, instructors, school supplies and uniforms. I felt sadness, seeing the magnets on their refrigerators, the Christmas trees and private pictures in what were austere but neat housing. This softened my heart as I saw in these personal things the intense desire to make a home, just one step away from their own.

Making a Difference

Next stop, the high school where so many of our associates have children. There a national organization trains and places an army of “gap year” students who commit one year of their time to mentor students faced with paralyzing peer struggles like gang membership and other social pressures to neglect or not perform in school. Their goal is to prevent at risk students from dropping out before graduation. The diverse faces of the twenty something mentors, the passion of the support organization, told the tale. These mentors seem to have better than a fighting chance of being heard by the at risk students. These at risk young people are the faces of young bright teenagers who are so close to a brilliant successful new life or a failed one. One young man, in ROTC Air Force uniform read a poem he wrote, how his life changed. More Kleenex, please.

Third stop, a daycare center for disadvantaged youngsters, mostly children with special needs. These children would not thrive in most settings, here smaller classrooms, special teachers and better equipment make the difference between moving on to public school or not. The playground with an Ocean Reef sign in its yard and the building plans waiting for permitting have helped these children have a chance. We meet a contractor who donates his time to work the complex permitting and construction project we fund. A small boy hangs on the Ocean Reef sign, clearly delighted by his playground yet stopping for a moment in his play to see us. I looked away long enough to dry my tears and return his big smile as he swung on the sign. Now my pocket is damp with tissues.

Our final stop is a pediatric daycare for medically complex children. This storefront hospital accepts and cares for children who would normally languish in inappropriate adult elderly homes, you have probably read these sad stories. Their parents must work, but none of these children can be left in normal day care so they are picked up by ambulance and brought to this hospital. Four RN “angels” sold everything and invested their retirement finds to open this facility. Here you look in the faces of the young medically challenged children and all instincts tell you to look away to hide from this pain.

See TOUR, page 7
**Chapel News**

**Catholic Mass**
Saturday at 4:30 p.m.
Sunday at 12:00 p.m.

**Protestant Service**
Sunday at 9 a.m.
Rev. Caroline Stewart
Church of the Redeemer
Baltimore, MD

“Reflections,” an interdenominational service is held every Sunday at 10:15 a.m.
Rev. Dr. John Guest

**Mondays**
Women’s Bible Study
1:00 – 2:00 p.m.
Chapel Annex
AA Meeting
7:30 pm.
Chapel Annex

**Tuesdays**
Pot Luck Supper
6:00 p.m.
Chapel Annex

**Wednesdays**
Intercessory Prayer, Friendship & Coffee
8:00 a.m.
Chapel Annex
Mid-Week Communion Service
9:00 a.m.
All Are Welcome
Bible Study
10:00 a.m.
Rev. Dr. John Guest
Chapel Annex

**Thursdays**
Al-Anon
4:00 p.m.
Chapel Annex

**Friday, Feb 1**
Jewish Sabbath Service
6:00 p.m.
Chapel Annex

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**WE MOURN THE LOSS**

**Arless Crawford Hudson**
nee Tirrell, age 92, passed away on Monday, January 14, 2013, at her home at the Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo, Florida. She was born on November 19, 1920, in New Troy, Michigan to Leslie and Arly May Tirrell née Crawford. She attended St. Mary's preparatory school in Evanston, Illinois and worked for Pan Am Airways during World War II in Miami, Florida where she met Navy Ensign Douglas F. Hudson. They were married in Skokie, Illinois on September 6, 1944; the happy union lasted 58 years until Mr. Hudson’s death in January 2002. She was a 53 year resident of Barrington, Illinois. Arless was also an active volunteer in the Red Cross Gray Ladies program working with injured Vietnam veterans and she also hosted Vietnamese and Korean soldiers at her home during the holidays. She was a member of LaGorce, Angler's Club, Ocean Reef Club and DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION (DAR). She was the owner of Fidelitone, Inc., located in Wauconda, Illinois; she is survived by four sons, 12 grandchildren and 12 great grandchildren.

**Tour**
Continued from page 6

But they look out at you from equipped cribs, with obvious challenges, some wearing helmets and others using walkers, still others playing with toys in a special crib, others locked in a world of their own, but challenged by special equipment to live, all playing and interacting with their nurses. They have therapy and tools designed for them and so many things provided by Ocean Reef. Here I had to walk outside for a moment to dry tears before I was ready to offer nothing but a smile, celebrate their life and watch them in their world. The RN staff was delighted to see us, marveled that two vans came and they proudly showed us what the funds from All Charities had provided. They comforted us and thanked us. They thanked us, I wanted to kneel at their feet.

**Hope in Help**

We boarded the vans in silence. No more business questions. Finally after a few miles, we spoke. Our hearts were visible, our tears flowing. As we entered our gates at Ocean Reef and returned to the Cultural Center, I thought about the needs. I realized there is never enough Kleenex, but always plenty we can do. Go on a tour, buy silent or live auction items, contribute auction items, attend the gala. But do not look away!

There are two more tours scheduled, on January 30 and February 20, departing at 8:30 a.m. To reserve your seat on motor coach for any of the tours, please call 367-4707.

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**Eugene Di Sabatino**

A memorial service will be held on January 31 at 2:00 p.m. at the Ocean Reef Chapel. A reception will follow at the Anglers Club and all who knew and loved Gene are welcome.

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**Rejuvenations On the Reef**

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