SENIORS in SERVICE
GEARED UP TO SERVE

GEARED UP **News**
Seniors in Service presents
the News You Need to Know
About Community Service in Tampa Bay

More Than a Meal: How Partnership is Showing Up for Veterans



The Humana Foundation had boots on the ground in Tampa to support local veterans. Since 2024, their funding has been instrumental in helping Operation: Veteran Connect provide healthy food and social support to Tampa Bay veterans facing homelessness, isolation, and complex health challenges. In April, their team boarded a plane from Louisville to Tampa to go beyond funding the work and provide hands-on support.

In honor of Military Appreciation Month, the Humana Foundation team packed 100 backpacks filled with hygiene supplies and everyday essentials for the veterans we serve. Each backpack also included a handwritten, personal thank-you note, because we can never say thank you enough to those who served and sacrificed for our country.

During their visit, we introduced their team to veterans like Charles and Matthew, who have benefited from biweekly deliveries of fresh produce, healthy meal-preparation equipment, and education made possible by the Humana Foundation's funding.

For the first time in his life, Charles, a disabled veteran, is living on a fixed income that must stretch from the first of the month to the last. Fresh food isn't always guaranteed. But through these deliveries, he's been able to try new ingredients, prepare meals that last, and keep food on the table. "They've given us vegetables and all kinds of things we probably never used or thought about using," he shared. "I've never had kale before. I cooked it up like collard greens… and now I'm hooked." He added, "The food really makes a difference. I can make it to the end of the month until I get paid again."

Matthew, a veteran with serious health issues and dental pain, had begun losing weight because it was difficult for him to stand, cook, and eat hard foods. With protein powder, peanut butter, and fresh fruit, along with the gift of a blender, he now makes smoothies every day and meals that are filling, nutritious, and easy for him to eat. This support has helped him regain weight and increase his energy.

For many veterans, this support is the difference between getting by with any food available and having healthy options that can improve their well-being. Just as important as the food is the connection that comes with it. Each produce delivery is brought by compassionate Operation: Veteran Connect volunteers who are ready to listen and support veterans through every challenge they face.

We're grateful to partner with the Humana Foundation to ensure veterans have what they need to live with stability and a community they can count on.

Be the reason a veteran has food on the table and someone in their corner. Volunteer with Operation: Veteran Connect and help deliver nourishment and support. Email OVC@SeniorsInService.org or scan the QR code to get started.

Humana Foundation







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CEO Corner



I've been thinking a lot about curiosity lately. The kind that asks us to slow down, lean in, and really listen to one another. It may be one of the most powerful leadership tools we have, and I'm instilling that in our team.

When we get curious about our volunteers, who they are, what they carry, what lights them up, we stop trying to fit people into roles and start creating roles that fit people. Imagine what's possible if someone's greatest strengths are fully plugged into serving our community!

That same mindset matters in the hard moments, too. It challenges us to stick with tough conversations a little longer instead of rushing to find an easy fix. It pushes us to trade quick assumptions for better questions that get to the root of the problem. Because how can we truly help if we do not understand what someone is going through?

But what I love most about curiosity is that it's a wrecking ball, knocking down all the walls we've built for ourselves out of long-held beliefs. When we start a conversation with the intent to learn, the barriers we've built don't hold. We start to see common ground and reasons to care. All of a sudden, the unsolvable problems aren't so unsolvable.

I remember listening to an interview with astrophysicist Neil deGrass Tyson. What he said has stuck with me. "I love to learn what other people know." With all of his knowledge, he shows up ready to learn, not to prove what he already understands. Feels like a free lesson for us all on how he became one of the world's smartest people.

Go be curious.

-Robin Ingles, CEO



Florida Blue Foundation

Seniors in Service Presents at the Florida Blue Health Symposium

Seniors in Service was honored to present at the Florida Blue Health Symposium, sharing the work, culture, and connection that power our impact.

Our session "Creating Lasting Impact: Why Connection Matters," focused on a simple truth: building connection is at the center of everything we do from strong, mission-driven teams to strengthening partnerships and delivering services. AND that connection starts with curiosity!

We highlighted how a connected team drives innovation and accountability through weekly SMART goals, an 80/20 focus, and a "no silos" approach that keeps us aligned and impact-driven. We also shared how intentional partnerships help us expand services, close gaps, and build more coordinated, sustainable care across the region.

During the Symposium, we showed up authentically, grounded in the belief that connection drives everything we do. From how we support our teams to how we serve the community, we're intentional about addressing not just immediate needs, but the isolation behind them. We were honored to present, learn from fellow leaders, and bring back new ideas to strengthen our work and impact.

The Right Start Matters



Those early years of a child's education are some of the most important. Research shows "Before 3rd grade children learn to read, after 3rd grade they read to learn." Classroom Grandma Denise, and more than 200 like her, are sitting side by side with young children, making sure they have the foundational reading skills that fuels their entire education.

In her classroom at Town and Country Elementary, Grandma Denise isn't just helping kids with letters and sounds, she's helping set them up for everything that comes next. And this year, her impact earned her Hillsborough County Public School Senior Volunteer of the Year.

Thanks to her steady, one-on-one support, teachers saw real, measurable growth. Students she worked with showed a 20–30% increase in letter recognition and name writing accuracy over the school year. But the numbers only tell part of the story.

Kids showed better self-control, stronger manners, and needed fewer redirections. And maybe most telling of all, they wanted to be there. On the days Grandma Denise was in the classroom, students were more excited to come to school. She is their champion, someone who believes in them even when they don't have confidence in themselves. And when kids feel that way, it can change how they learn and how they see themselves.

We're grateful to TECO for helping bring more Classroom Grandparent Volunteers like Grandma Denise to schools where children need a champion to transform them into confident learners for a lifetime.

Help children run into the classroom with excitement. Volunteer as a Classroom Grandparent and build confidence. Email FGP@SeniorsInService.org or scan the QR code to get started.

TECO TAMPA ELECTRIC AN EMERA COMPANY





Making the World Feel Open Again

Loneliness can creep in slowly after retirement, a move, or changes in routine. Or it can hit all at once through loss, grief, or trauma. Either way, life can start to feel smaller.

That's where Mr. Chan found himself. After losing his wife, the world he once moved through with ease had narrowed. The piano sat quiet. Time outside became rare. The routines that once brought comfort felt out of reach. Then Senior Companion volunteer Kathy started visiting.

She didn't come to fix everything but she showed up. They talked, looked through photos, and shared memories. Some days, they sat on the porch. Other days, she gently encouraged him to step back into familiar routines fresh air, small outings, even the piano.

Over time, those moments added up. The days felt fuller. The quiet felt lighter. Mr. Chan recently shared, "I really love her visits… we talk, she makes me want to live."

We hear stories of transformation like this all the time from our Senior Companions. They show up as a friend and remind someone the value of reconnecting to life. We're grateful to the Pinellas Community Foundation Operating Grant for ensuring more seniors have someone who will show up, listen, and help the world feel open again.

Volunteer as a Senior Companion and help a senior feel seen, heard, and connected. Email SCP@SeniorsInService.org or scan the QR code to get started.

PINELLAS COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
Giving Humanity a Hand Since 1969

THE GALLERY OF SERVICE

Step into a space where service is the masterpiece. We're honoring the volunteers who bring our mission to life, each one a unique work of dedication and compassion. Every frame tells a story. Every story reflects the power of showing up.



Ivette Villalba "True Connector"
Senior Companion Volunteer
Ivette gives 46 hours a month to care for seniors so families know their loved ones are safe; as one caregiver shared, "For the first time in 2 years I feel at ease knowing my mom is in good hands."





Kathy Lenington "The Unstoppable"
RSVP Volunteer | Trinity Lutheran Café
Kathy gives 10 hours each month serving meals, and supporting daily operations at the café for neighbors experiencing homelessness She's there without hesitation, even returning to serve with a broken wrist.

Kelley Hunte "The Steady Line"
RSVP Volunteer & Operation: Veteran Connect Member
With 96 trips and over 3,100 miles behind her, Kelley makes sure veterans get to their doctor's appointments and when seniors call for help, she's the one making sure someone answers.



A.J. Rivera "Confidence Builder" RSVP Volunteer | Regency Park Library
A.J. sits side-by-side with adult learners, helping them build their reading skills and confidence while picking up a few refreshers himself along the way.



Margie Prichard "The Weekly Lifeline"
RSVP Volunteer | Florida Food Force
Every week, Margie packs emergency food boxes that help families make it through. After finding her way to service during a difficult time in her own life, she now brings that same consistency and care to neighbors who rely on it.



Jo Balantyne "The Fix-It Force"
Operation: Veteran Connect Member
Joe restores furniture and brings it back to life for veterans in empty apartments, helping turn houses into homes with every repair she makes.

MEET THE PEOPLE POWERING OUR MISSION



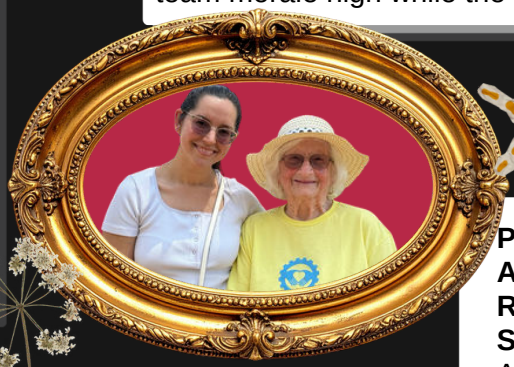
Helen Daley "The Heart of the Operation"
RSVP Volunteer | Mercy Keepers
Putting in 30 hours a week, Helen keeps things running at Mercy Keepers food pantry and thrift shop organizing volunteers, stocking shelves, and making sure no one leaves without what they need.





John D'Antonio "The Calm Before the Storm"
Senior Disaster Support Volunteer
After joining last year, John didn't waste any time recruiting 12 new volunteers and helping put together disaster binders so families know exactly what to do when it counts. His steady jokes and stories even keep team morale high while the work gets done.

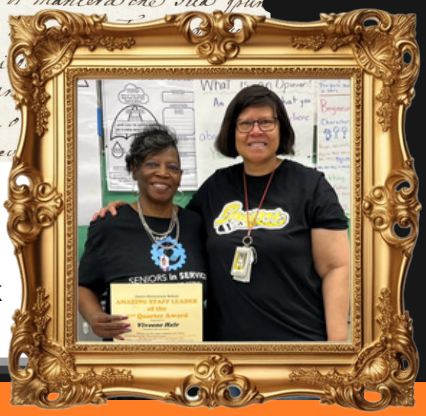
Cathy Tatum "The Pantry Backbone"
RSVP Volunteer | St. Vincent DePaul Food Pantry
Cathy steps in wherever she's needed at the pantry packing food boxes and even taken on bookkeeping tasks to keep operations running smoothly. In her busiest month, she gave 173 hours of service, showing up every day with consistency and care.



Patsy Geiger "True Ambassador"
RSVP Volunteer | One Stop Shop Food Pantry
At 83, Patsy serves up to 60 hours each month checking in clients, and making sure everyone who walks in feels welcome and respected with a smile.



Bill Humphrey "Community Protector"
RSVP Volunteer | VITA Tax Program
As site lead, Bill keeps the entire operation running training volunteers, building scheduling systems, and ensuring seniors and low-income residents can access free, reliable tax help. Known for being constantly on the move and on the phone, he holds the fast-paced site together so clients are served quickly and with dignity.



Grandma V. "Classroom Leader"
Classroom Grandparent | James Elementary School
Named Staff Leader of the 2nd Quarter, Grandma V. is a steady, caring presence in the classroom, helping students stay on track and teachers do what they do best.

From Boxes to a Place to Finally Relax

When Robert, a veteran, moved into his home, he had what he needed but couldn't use it. With limited mobility and a walker, assembling furniture on his own wasn't possible. So his space stayed unfinished, a daily reminder of what he couldn't do.

Within an hour of his call to Operation: Veteran Connect for help, volunteers showed up, assembled his furniture, and transformed the space. For the first time, Robert was able to sit back in his own lounger and relax. A simple moment, but one that meant everything.

Moments like this often start at our monthly free shopping days. Veterans moving into housing visit our storage units, where they can choose furniture that fits their space and their needs. Volunteers organize each area ahead of time, making it easy to browse, select, and plan for a home that works for them.

But it doesn't stop there. For many veterans living with disabilities, getting the furniture is only half the battle. That's why our volunteers go further delivering, lifting, assembling, and making sure everything is ready to use. No boxes left behind and no barriers to comfort.

Because a home is built when you can finally sit down, rest, and live in the space around you. We're grateful to CSX and Jabil for helping veterans not only receive what they need but truly use it.

Volunteer with Operation: Veteran Connect and be the hands that turn a space into a home. Email OVC@SeniorsInService.org or scan the QR code to get started.





JABIL

CSX TRANSPORTATION



United Way of Pasco County

She Thought She Had No One

"I don't have anyone." That's how 82-year-old Rene described her life when she joined Health Buddies this year. Living alone, with no nearby family, her world had already begun to shrink. Then, just weeks later, she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Surgery was scheduled, but she had no one to take her or bring her home. Except now, she had Marni. It started with weekly phone calls sharing stories, memories of Italy, and cheering on Olympic athletes. Simple conversations that quickly turned into something more.

When Rene needed support, Marni didn't just stay on the phone, she showed up. She arranged transportation, stayed through surgery, and made sure Rene got home safely. Then she stayed overnight for more than 24 hours, helping her through those first, hardest moments of recovery.

And she kept going. Marni tapped into her own network, coordinated meals, and checked in often encouraging small steps forward like walks outside, reconnecting with family, and returning to the piano Rene had played her whole life. Slowly, things began to shift. Rene started walking daily. She reconnected with her grandson. She began talking regularly with her sister. The pieces of her life that had gone quiet started to come back.

We're grateful to United Way of Pasco County for making moments like this possible turning "I don't have anyone" into "Now you do."

Volunteer with Health Buddies be the voice that turns "I don't have anyone" into "I'm not alone. Email HealthBuddies@SeniorsInService.org or scan the QR code to get started.

Thank you to our funders!

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AdventHealth

500+ Rides That Make the Appointment Possible

For Barbara, getting to the doctor isn't simple. She's legally blind, and driving is no longer an option. The cost of rides adds up fast making even essential appointments harder to keep. But now, our Companion Transportation Program is here to solve the problem.

Barbara has received 15 rides so far, most to her eye doctor. But before her very first trip, one of our volunteer drivers went a step further connecting with Lighthouse for the Blind to understand how to support her safely and confidently. Because these rides are thoughtful, personal, and built around each individual.

"If it wasn't for the program, I'm not sure how I would get to my appointments," Barbara shared. "It's very helpful to someone like me who can no longer drive."

Since launching in South Shore in May 2025, 14 volunteer drivers have completed more than 500 rides, helping seniors get to critical appointments often to places like Moffitt Cancer Center, where care can't wait.

Transportation is the number one reason seniors miss medical care. Each ride changes that. It means a patient makes it to treatment, a diagnosis isn't delayed, and a follow-up actually happens. It's the difference between hoping someone can get there and knowing they will.

And now, with the addition of a new minivan, we're reaching even more seniors in need. Thank you to AdventHealth for making this possible and ensuring that when a senior has an appointment, they also have a way to get there, and someone by their side along the way.

See the impact in action! Scan the QR code to watch our Bay News 9 News segment and hear directly from the seniors and volunteers making it happen.

SPECTRUM NEWS BN 9