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FEATURED

On the Spot group treats homeless in the field

By ELAINE ALLEN-EMRICH Staff Writer

Jul 11, 2021



Lemon Bay Sunrise Rotary members George Fowler, past-president Jim Bruns, and acting president Rocket Atamanchuk stand with Bonnie Saxman of the nonprofit On the Spot Aid Inc. while giving her a \$2,500 donation to help give first aid to homeless in Englewood, Port Charlotte, Punta Gorda and North Port.

PHOTOs PROVIDED

ENGLEWOOD — A bug bite on a homeless man's back turned into an infection in his spine and a three-month hospital stay. The man couldn't afford to pay any of his medical bills.

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Two local women with medical experience have decided to help this man. They are also giving first aid to people on the streets of Englewood, North Port, Port Charlotte and Punta Gorda for a new nonprofit they founded.

Bonnie Saxman and Cindy Voortman formed On the Spot Aid Inc. during the early days of the pandemic, after they treated dozens of homeless in need.

Saxman, a nurse who worked in the medical field for 20 years doing vaccines and triage in disaster relief teams, teamed with Voortman, a health care lobbyist turned paramedic four years ago.



Cindy Voortman, treats a man with staples in his head after being attacked with a machete while Bonnie Saxman helps. Voortman and Saxman founded On the Spot Inc.

PHOTO PROVIDED

Voortman realized she knew the ins and outs of medical insurance policies, but had no medical hands-on experience. She went to school to become a paramedic four years ago.

Like Saxman, Voortman quit her full-time job to focus on street medicine. Now, the pair travels to homeless camps, park benches, mobile showers and food giveaways to treat homeless people's wounds.

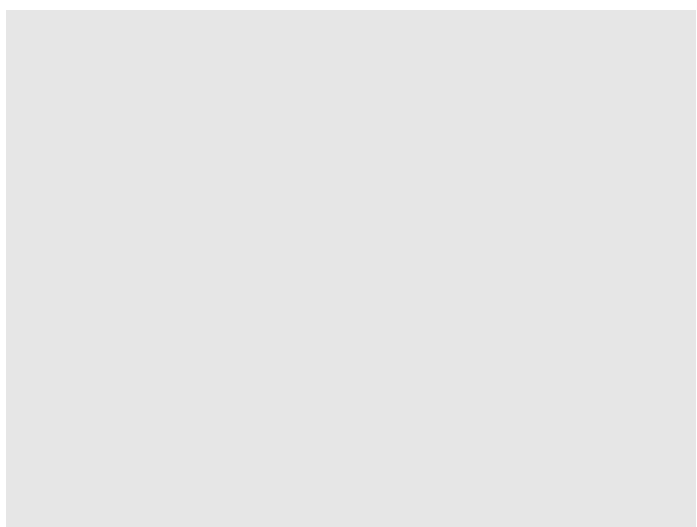
"At work, we realized the medical needs of homeless could have been prevented in so many cases had they not become infected with more serious issues," Saxman said. "One person had to have their finger amputated because of a bite that

became infected.”

The pair volunteered at the Charlotte Homeless Coalition giving away hot dogs. It's where they met and befriended many homeless in Charlotte County.

They eat with the homeless at Indian Mound Park in Englewood and show up at the mobile showers in North Port to help treat wounds.

The trust they built with the homeless allows them to do things like track down a patient who didn't return to the Virginia B. Andes Volunteer Community Clinic in Port Charlotte to have the staples removed from his head after he was attacked by a machete. The pair went to the homeless man's camp, and on the side of the road, using sterile equipment, they pulled out his staples and cleaned up the wound.



Cindy Voortman, treats a man with staples in his head after being attacked with a machete while Bonnie Saxman helps. Voortman and Saxman founded On the Spot Inc.

PHOTO PROVIDED

“We very much operate off of a horizontal relationship with the homeless, they are strong and know how to survive,” Saxman said.

“We ask a person who has a thorn in their head from being hit by a palm tree while working day labor if this has happened before. We ask what that person did that worked to treat the wound in the past. This way we can help them follow through with treatment once we leave.”

Saxman said it's not as easy to tell homeless people they should wash their hands before applying ointment or should keep their wound clean and dry because they don't have shelter or places to keep the wound care supplies dry during the rainy

season.

So, On the Spot gives out wound-care kits to help people continue treating cuts or infections.

They also refer homeless people to the Englewood Community Care Clinic for additional treatment. They give rides when needed, including to a woman who needed follow-up care in Tampa.

They work with the Homeless Outreach Team liaison Jasmine Waltz from the North Port Police Department and Jesus Loves You Ministry.

After hearing their story, the members of the Lemon Bay Sunrise Rotary in Englewood recently donated \$2,500 to On the Spot. The check was given by past-president Jim Bruns, George Fowler and acting president “Rocket” Atamanchuk.

How to help On the Spot help the homeless

Donations needed include: bug spray, Ziplock bags, travel size triple antibiotic ointment, hydration tablets, Tylenol, ibuprofen, NexCare waterproof Band-aids, dry bags (used to package supplies), bandages, ice pack (crack and shake) style.

Saxman says the money helps with the next phase of treatment for the homeless.

“We do stuff remotely and noticed that when a person gets out of the hospital, they are still pretty sick,” Saxman said. “If someone is suffering from the flu and ends up in the hospital with pneumonia, they may still be pretty sick when they are released.



“Legally a hospital can’t discharge people to homelessness. We want a place where people can have respite for several more days before going back to their living conditions,” she said.

Currently, On the Spot pays for the homeless to stay in hotels while recovering. Having a respite temporary care center for homeless people in the South County may prevent reinfections and longer hospital stays, she said.

Charlotte County Health Department nurses team up with Saxman and Voortman at homeless camps in Port Charlotte, Punta Gorda and Englewood giving hepatitis and tetanus and other shots. They want to do the same with the Sarasota County Health Department for the homeless in North Port and the Sarasota side of Englewood.

For more information, call 941-499-4664 or visit onthespotaid@gmail.com or message them on Facebook.

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