

Beyond the Call

By Michele G. Hudson

Lake Mary pastor rallies volunteers to support neighbors in need, and provides spiritual support.

When **Phil Ayres**, lead pastor for LifePoint Christian Church learned the Lake Mary Police Department (LMPD) needed a chaplain, he willingly agreed to serve. But what he didn't anticipate was the impact his decision would have on not only the police department, but on scores of residents and volunteers in Seminole County.

During Ayres' first week as police chaplain, miracles began to unfold, laying the groundwork for the Senior Intervention Group (SIG). Ayres heard about the unmet needs officers saw when responding to calls among the senior population.

"The police department was not equipped to handle these burdens but wanted to help," says program manager **Zach Hudson** of the LMPD. Meanwhile, LifePoint church members were praying for a special way to serve **Lake Mary**. Ayres realized the divine connection and went to work. Armed with a crew of LifePoint volunteers and a network of local church contacts, Ayres coordinated the program by building relationships and matching volunteers' skills with service needs.

"Chaplain Ayres was key to the success of our Senior Intervention Group," says Hudson. More than 30 seniors have been assisted, and SIG has grown to include volunteers from more than half a dozen churches and businesses. "There is a whole community of people who have a desire to help—and a big group who needs help—and we just needed a way to bring that together," says Ayres.

In addition to being an advocate for seniors, Ayres provides pastoral support. **Lt. Mike Biles** says they are fortunate to have Ayres on board as he provides counseling for the LMPD as well as families in crisis. His role is especially helpful in cases involving serious injury or unexpected deaths. "Chaplain Ayres has an open door and we can talk with him about personal problems or job stress," says Biles. "It helps the officers to have someone who gives them emotional support."

How does Ayres unwind? Among his favorite activities are hanging out with family, playing music, and golf. Married to **Stefanie**, a science teacher at Lake Mary Elementary, the couple has a son and a daughter.

On Sunday mornings Ayres can be found at the J. Douglas Williams YMCA leading his LifePoint Church family in a time of praise and fellowship. "At LifePoint we have people from a lot of different backgrounds. Our focus is on relationship, not religion," says Ayres. The nondenominational church met in a movie theater prior to moving to the YMCA in 2005. "It has been a perfect partnership. Our church is thrilled to help the Y meet some of its objectives: to strengthen mind, body, and soul. We meet the 'soul part.'"

The church's administrative office is located in a historic building in the heart of downtown Lake Mary. The 4,000 square-foot of renovated space also houses "The Loft"—a venue for youth activities and special events. "We rent our space on Sunday morning to a smaller church. Our philosophy is about supporting other churches and establishing unity," Ayres says.

Ayres received his bachelor's degree in religious education from Cornerstone University in Grand Rapids, Mich., and then worked as a youth leader. Before transitioning into fulltime ministry, Ayres spent time in the business sector as an E-business development director. His transfer to Clearwater, Fla., paved the way for his move to Lake Mary in 2003 where he accepted a worship leader position at LifePoint.

Three years ago Ayres was named lead pastor. In this role he enjoys teaching and mentoring people to make a difference in others' lives. "My hope for anybody serving is that they get a chance to use their talents. It is not about performance. If you have the right attitude and do your best ... that is what pleases God." **L**



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Pastor Phil Ayres finds joy in serving his family, church, and the Lake Mary community.

To learn more about Senior Intervention Group visit CentralFlorida-Lifestyle.com.