

# Quest to Financial Stability

Homeless Coalition Pays Off Administration Building Mortgage

*by Angie Matthiessen, Executive Director – United Way of Charlotte County*

Being compared to Don Quixote is rarely an occasion of flattery. But truth be told, Quixote was a dreamer. He envisioned a world where justice and chivalry prevailed, and he did his part to make that vision a reality.

Mark Martella, Dellutri Law Group, had a vision in February 2013 of a windmill-sized leap to financial freedom for the Charlotte County Homeless Coalition. During his time as President of the Board of Directors, Martella had seen first-hand how thousands of dollars each month were being diverted to the mortgage on the administration building.

The costs were justified, as this building houses case managers, intake staff, the development department, administration staff, the agency food pantry as well as the dining room, which provides three meals a day to Charlotte County residents in need. But Martella knew that the need could be better served if the burden of a \$866,000 mortgage was eliminated.

“It was really for financial stability and to put the money to better use,” said Martella. And with that vision, the 87 Freedom Club was born. The Coalition sought 866 people to contribute \$87 each month for a year. The idea was simple, albeit lofty. Martella explained that while the initial one-year goal was not achieved, “the neat thing was it got the word out to a lot of people, especially the foundation that took an interest in us.”

Tina Figliulo, Executive Director of the Homeless Coalition explained that participation in the 87 Freedom Club brought the mortgage down, which decreased the interest owed and started some long-term momentum. It was the Pat Moran Family Foundation that joined in to provide regular donations to pay down the mortgage.

Fast forward a few years. Figliulo said, “They gave us an opportunity in 2020 to pay off the mortgage. The remaining amount was a little over \$400,000.” This matching opportunity began in January 2020 but was stalled due to COVID-19. “We rekindled the campaign in 2021,” stated Figliulo. “From March to about the middle of July we finished up and we paid it off.”

The vision, the creativity, and getting the word out to caring people brought an \$866,000 debt down to zero. Figliulo explained, “The biggest thing is that by us paying off the mortgage, it frees up about \$45,000 a year for our programs and services. We have a bigger capacity to serve.” She noted that this was the last of the Coalition’s long-term debt.

Mark Martella’s original idea for the 87 Freedom Club was likened to, “some sort of ‘Don Quixote’ type of quest,” – a quest for elimination of a financial barrier to serving more of those in need in our community. And while it was a dreamer’s vision that began this journey to financial freedom, Martella said, “I started the ball, but it was picked up by all these people over the years.” Figliulo agreed, stating, “The faith-based community, our Board, donors – there were gifts of all increments. It just shows the power of numbers and the people who support our mission.”

United Way of Charlotte County also supports the Charlotte County Homeless Coalition in its mission to alleviate and prevent hunger and homelessness. We share the vision that by working together we can increase capacity and do more good work for our community. This is a milestone worth celebrating and we are pleased to share this inspiring tale of boldness, dedication and synergy.

*For more information about United Way of Charlotte County's mission: Mobilizing the power of our community to break the cycle of poverty, please contact Angie Matthiessen, Executive Director. She can be reached at [director@unitedwayccfl.org](mailto:director@unitedwayccfl.org).*