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Diamonds in the Rough

Submitted by David Moshier

Grand Harbor Golf & Beach Club sparkled with the success stories of program graduates last weekend during Camp Haven's 4th annual Diamonds In The Rough Gala.

More than 125 guests enjoyed cocktails and hors d'oeuvres as they mulled over which of the silent auction items they couldn't live without. After dining on a Floridan salad, salmon and crab au gratin or roasted beef tenderloin with roasted fingerling potatoes and tiramisu, attendees listened raptly to the success stories of two former residents that have completed the program at Camp Haven and moved on to live better lives.

Linda Teetz, event chair, had a surprise for Lalita Janke, executive director, and board member, by introducing U.S. Army Pvt. Vetson Derisse, who gave a testimonial in a heartfelt video message from his barracks in Fort Hood, Texas. It took Derisse two years of working Camp Haven's Pathways to Success program with staff and through in-house counseling to get his life back on track, enabling him to enlist in the military.

Derisse was recently deployed to Kuwait, where he worked on BFVs (Bradley Fighting Vehicles), which is used by the army to provide covering fire to suppress enemy troops and armored vehicles while transporting soldiers.

"The Board and staff are so pleased that another one of our alumni has made an incredible turnaround and is serving our country. Vetson came to us when he was just 18, and in less than two years he matured, changed his worldview, gained self-esteem and confidence. He stuck with the program, turning his adversities into advantages," said Janke.

Guest speaker and alumni, Wil Harris shared his story during a video presentation before joining the festivities to explain firsthand just how much of an impact his time at Camp Haven made, allowing him to succeed in his transformation from homelessness to that of a successful entrepreneur.

Harris grew up in a rough Miami neighborhood and made his way out after serving time in jail where he focused on his education. After his release he eventually worked as a congressional aide in Ohio, it was here that Harris learned just how easy it was to lose himself and everything he had worked hard to achieve.

With only \$400 in his pocket, Harris shared that he moved to Vero Beach, to get to know his father better but ended up homeless. "I knew I needed help and two names were given to me. I called the first one, Mrs. Lalita Janke, who was so warm and gave me hope right away. After meeting with her, I knew

I was no longer alone,” shared Harris.

Inspired by the stories shared, auctioneer Wesley Davis churned up the floor during a Call to the Heart and live auction. Funds raised will help to make repairs and refurbish 12 units at Camp Haven, making it possible to aide more men in need.

His journey was long and hard and according to Harris and if not for the “hand up” extended to him by Camp Haven, “I don't know where I'd be today.” Harris has his own Life Coaching business, is now a professional speaker, was featured in a TEDx Talks video and has written two books. “The Wicker Diary” his newest book was released late last year.

“Wil came to us depressed and dejected, needing a safe place to rebuild his life. At Camp Haven, Wil came to grips that because of the errors made in his youth he might never find a decent job. If he wanted the life of his dreams, he would have to reinvent himself. Teaching self-confidence to his peers he regained his own. Focused on his recovery and determined to succeed ... he made it. This is a special Wil, but there are countless ‘Wils' waiting for us to take them in our program, all wanting to change their lives.”

Proceeds from the evening will fund programs at Camp Haven for Indian River County's situationally homeless men. Through the nonprofit's transformational educational program they provide the structure these men need to transform their lives. Stability, shelter, food, clothing, life skills counseling, employment assistance and mentoring are the components the residents are provided, and in return, they attend classes, follow guidelines and curfews on the Camp Haven campus, which helps them find their way back as contributing members of society.

Camp Haven has helped 175 men find their way out of chronic homelessness since opening four years ago. “They come to us in various stages of brokenness. They are financially, emotionally, mentally and spiritually broken. We help them find themselves through daily classes and psychological education,” shared Janke.

Janke introduced the newly elected board president, Brian Korkus and acknowledged board members present: Jim Schornor, Diana Stark, Jim Kerns and Connie Bishop.

“After moving to Vero Beach two years ago, I wanted to get involved in the community,” shared Korkus. “I was drawn to help Camp Haven after taking a tour and seeing potential and desire in the men wanting to change their lives. I could see that these struggling men in our community needed a Camp Haven.”

Korkus found that Camp Haven was doing fantastic work in this critically needed area, adding “They needed help to grow their program and increase the number of men they can help. I joined the board of directors last year and am honored to be voted in as the president of the board.”

To learn more about Camp Haven, visit www.camphaven.net or call 772-999-3625 to set an appointment to tour the Campus.