



a hand up:

Convoy of Hope helps families in need

The northern Atlanta suburb of Roswell, Ga., is one of the wealthiest cities in America, noted for its exquisite antebellum plantation homes. The median household income in the commuter hub of 87,807 is \$84,595. Nearly 63 percent of the residents have a college degree.

But off the beaten path of modern thoroughfares, in historic "old" Roswell, there are plenty of families struggling to make ends meet.

The plight of a 32-year-old laid-off construction worker named Oscar illustrates a 2009 reality: The ranks of the "new" poor are growing quickly. These are people gainfully employed only a few months ago who now, unable to find work, are sometimes at risk of hunger.

"Work just dried up," Oscar says. "It's tough for me. It's tough for everybody."

continued on page 20

by john w. kennedy
in roswell, ga.
photos by randy bacon
photography



a hand up

Yet Oscar, who attends a Baptist church, found some cause for optimism on a beautiful day in April when he attended a Convoy of Hope citywide outreach in Roswell, one of more than 40 such events the nonprofit ministry is holding across the nation this year. More than 60 area churches and organizations joined together to host this event in Georgia.

The ministry endeavor presented a host of free services, from a play zone for kids to immunizations for

don't get a lot of attention," says Schuler, ministry development pastor at Fellowship Bible Church. "This is a wake-up call to our community leaders that we really have this kind of demographic."

About 18 percent of families in the city earn less than \$30,000 a year.

"Everyone feels the pains of an economic downturn," says City Councilman Rich Dippolito, who served on the planning committee. "But I love the message of hope

there are fewer opportunities these days. The couple are grateful for the sacks of groceries they receive from Convoy to feed them and their 11-year-old son, Josue.

Victor came to the Convoy because he has had a difficult time finding construction or plumbing jobs. Wife Robin says Convoy of Hope is a blessing for the Hispanic community, because many families have lost medical and food services.

Some of those helped at the outreach have been in poverty much

"We're getting the hands and feet of the people of God out into the streets. We want to create a sustaining community presence, connecting the unchurched to churches."

— Tom Schuler

adults. Convoy's day in Roswell provided Oscar with the opportunity to connect with area employers looking to hire workers. Oscar, who emigrated from Cuba nine years ago, filled out job applications with various companies.

The city of Roswell co-sponsored the event and allowed the festivities to take place on the picturesque five-acre grounds of City Hall. An impressive two-story brick New England-style architecture complex overshadows magnolia trees along grassy strips next to the parking lot.

Vonda Malbrough, development director of Fulton County Community Charities, welcomed Convoy's presence.

"The demand for food has gone up in this economic downturn," Malbrough says. "Donors are now coming in as clients."

Local Convoy coordinator Tom Schuler also realizes how times have changed.

"Beneath the radar of affluence is a compelling need: families that

demonstrated here, to show people that the community cares."

Like many cities, the service economy of Roswell until recently had been supplied by the growing ranks of recent immigrants — the primarily Hispanic influx of workers who roof houses, landscape properties and wash restaurant dishes. But as residents stop buying new homes, start mowing their own grass and eat out less often, many of those jobs have evaporated.

A couple named Jossué and Eduuiges, originally from Mexico, are both employed, but generating income has become more difficult. Jossué is a street vendor selling Mexican foods such as tamales and burritos. He is among the 2,700 guests who receive help at the Convoy.

"I need more customers," says guest Jossué, who had just picked up some free medicine and scheduled a follow-up appointment at a health clinic.

Eduuiges cleans houses, but

longer. Kerry came for free medical services, groceries and a chicken sandwich lunch.

"I used to do outreach ministry myself," Kerry says. "Now I need some help."

Kerry, 43, explains how he lost his job when he took time to care for his ailing mother. But his mother died of cancer, and Kerry, who now carries his worldly possession in his backpack, lost his house.

A priority is to restore his health. He says his energy is low, he's 35 pounds underweight, he tires easily and he has trouble standing.

"It's a long process to turn things around," Kerry says. "I'm trying to get some job skills. I've learned how to use a computer."

The tent providing free portraits proved to be a popular spot. Tina, 26, had her picture taken holding 1-year-old son Titus. Tina, who is completing a faith-based substance abuse program at a local shelter for poor and homeless women, says she enjoys the fellowship of mingling



with other Christians at the day's events.

"I'm hoping to learn a new way of life with God," says Tina, mentioning that she had a spiritual awakening during the winter. "I want to reunite with my other four kids and live a life free of drugs and alcohol."

A steady stream of guests is taking up an offer of free haircuts, where 40 volunteers are clipping away. By the end of the afternoon, 550 guests have received free haircuts.

Hope Jones, a student in a local cosmetology school, recently moved to the area after being laid off as a Cleveland-based flight attendant. When she couldn't find a job, an area church and nonprofit ministry helped her make ends meet.

"I didn't know anybody, but they allowed me to get work," says Jones, 42. "I'm volunteering today because it's time to do something for the community that's done so much for me."

Ben Taylor, 46, also has a sense of payback as he grills 4,000 hot dogs served up at lunch. Although Taylor now is a project manager at a marketing company, the Roswell Assembly of God attendee says he appreciates the Convoy giveaways because he once went through months of unemployment himself.

Schuler believes the Convoy outreach will serve as a catalyst for Christians to take a more active role in caring for the hurting in their midst. A total of 1,508 volunteers participated in this outreach.

"This is more than a one-time event," Schuler says. "We're getting the hands and feet of the people of God out into the streets. We want to create a sustaining community presence, connecting the unchurched to churches."

One example is Anna Lee, among

the 120 volunteers in the prayer area. Barbara, one of the guests she prayed with, had two children in tow. The woman explained about the drug rehabilitation program in which she's enrolled and asked Lee if she would be her sponsor.

"Of course I said yes," recalls Lee, who attends Fellowship Bible Church. "We're going to have an ongoing relationship. I'll be taking her to church."

She found the experience of praying for strangers less intimidating than she anticipated.

"Now I'm going to be looking for people to help," Lee says. "The Lord is teaching me a new thing."

Convoy prayer coordinator

Hugh Duncan says area churches contact guests who express a spiritual interest the following week.

"The connection to a local church is important so they can receive ongoing guidance and help," Duncan says.

Volunteers also gave away 1,500 backpacks of school supplies such as paper, pencils, rulers and notebooks to children in 2½ hours. As a result of the Convoy cooperation, six local churches have agreed to sponsor an unprecedented back-to-school outreach for students. **tpe**

JOHN W. KENNEDY is news editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.
"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God's forgiveness and repent of your sins.
"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.
"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.
"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.
"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.
If you would like someone to pray with you concerning your decision to follow Jesus Christ, please contact the church indicated on the back cover or call:

1-800-4PRAYER
Assemblies of God National Prayer Center

FREE
Following CHRIST
RANT HUST