

IMMOKALEE BULLETIN

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Submitted photo/Neiva Ashley

Nurse Jessica Flores has returned to her home, in Immokalee, after being deployed to fight COVID-19 in Detroit.

Nurse returns from Detroit to face rapid increase of COVID-19 cases

By Danika J. Fornear
Immokalee Bulletin

Jessica Flores has been a nurse for 9 years. She started her nursing journey at ITech in 2010, when she enrolled in the LPN program.

"I completed that program in 2011, went back to college for Associate Degree in Nursing in 2013, took my state exam and officially became a Registered Nurse." Flores added, "I took a year off and went back to college in 2014 where I completed my Bachelor of Science Degree in Nursing (BSN) in 2016."

She has lived in Immokalee for 28 years, "I grew up here. Our family and friends are here. We go to church here, my kids go to school here, we volunteer at community events and at our church," she explained. "I used to work in the school system, so I have not only watched my children grow up here but many others as well. It is a tight knit community so everyone knows everyone."

She loves her community, especially the way they all come together for each other. "It is no secret that we have a lack of resources in this community, so whether the band needs new uniforms or tragedy strikes, someone always steps up and the community comes through with donations or volunteer work."

She did express that she wished improvements could be made, "The living conditions, we need more affordable and sanitary housing. More outreach programs especially for our Spanish/Creole speaking community. Accessible healthcare, in an emergent situation we travel at least 45 minutes to a hospital." She went on, "Renovate government housing that already exist in Immokalee. Expand our schools, up to date technology, accessible resources, school supplies, retention strategies and incentives for our teachers. Smaller classroom sizes, school restoration, another middle school would be nice. I would like

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New emergency shelter opens in Immokalee

Special to the Immokalee Bulletin

Despite a worldwide pandemic that delayed the opening from April to May, The Shelter for Abused Women & Children cut the ribbon on the new Shelly Stayer Shelter, May 26, in Immokalee. The residential wings of the long-awaited facility opened to residents in need of safe shelter on Monday, June 1.

"The dream we planted three years ago has come to fruition," said Lead Benefactor Shelly Stayer during a small ribbon cutting, "We know this beautiful facility will bear much fruit in this community and break the cycle of violence for generations to come."

In October 2016, Stayer provided a \$3 million gift to launch the capital campaign to build and endow the 22,500-square-foot, 60-bed shelter designed by architect David Corban and built by Build, LLC. The location of the new shelter is undisclosed for security reasons. The facility's unique design includes state-of-the-art security with separate residential areas for victims of human trafficking and survivors of domestic violence, as well as a wing for outreach services. All services are provided free of charge.

Although the emergency shelter is new to the community, the Shelter's Immokalee Outreach Office has been serving Immokalee since 1997, providing counseling,

prevention programs and referral services. In 2000, The Shelter was recognized as a national model for the Immokalee Outreach Office's work serving immigrant and migrant battered women.

Shelter CEO Linda Oberhaus says The Shelter recognized the need for an emergency shelter in Immokalee around 2010, as incidents of domestic violence were increasing.

"We saw that some victims were choosing to stay in unsafe circumstances rather than travel 45 miles to Naples for emergency shelter," she explained, "Having this new facility in their own community will allow Immokalee survivors to be safe as well as close to their family support systems, employment and their children's schools."

As The Shelter launched a needs study for a domestic violence shelter in Immokalee, they also noticed a rise in human trafficking incidents county-wide. In March 2015, the Collier County Sheriff's Office and Florida Department of Law Enforcement made the largest human trafficking bust in southwest Florida history, arresting 15 traffickers and rescuing six women, some of whom were forced to perform 25-45 sex acts a day.

"It was shocking to most people," Ober-

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Submitted photo

From left, Patricia and Craig Jilk, Benefactors of the Jilk Family Center for Domestic Violence Wings 1 & 2, Shelter CEO Linda Oberhaus, and Lead Benefactors Shelly and Ralph Stayer.



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The Immokalee Bulletin welcomes submissions from its readers. Opinions, calendar items, story ideas and photographs are welcome. Call (239) 657-6000 to reach our newsroom. The deadline for all news items is 11 a.m. on Monday prior to the following Thursday's publication.
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- To provide a right to reply to those we write about.
- To treat people with courtesy, respect and compassion.

Masthead photo courtesy of Waddy Thompson
www.facebook.com/waddyphotos

Nurse

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to see more focus on our children from the gym to the classrooms."

At the hospital she is the Charge Nurse, whose job duties include, "Assessing patients, monitoring them knowing when to intervene in an emergency, educating them and their families. Collaborating with physicians and ancillary staff to ensure the patients' needs are met. Keeping track of patients that are being admitted and discharged from unit. Creating patient assignments for nurses before their shift. Daily staff meetings. Serving as a resource nurse to my designated unit," but she also gets deployed as an RN, teaches as a Professor, and is mom at home. "During season I work at one of our local community hospitals, I also do travel nursing, and I'm a part time clinical instructor at a community college."

She recently returned from a deployment in Detroit, where she battled against COVID-19. It was a challenge, and one of the hardest parts for Flores was, "Sacrificing my family to save someone else's. Working on the COVID units, taking a COVID assignment in Detroit knowing that I would be sealed off from my family until my quarantine was complete. It was a long 65 days. I thank god that I am finally home safe with my family."

She is proud of her many accomplishments, and hopes the future allows her to, "Watch my kids grow. Catch up on lost time. Even though this experience has been overwhelming I would have to say it has taught me to slow down, enjoy life, and not take anything for granted. Maybe focus on our business a little more. Eventually I would like to go back and complete my master's degree."

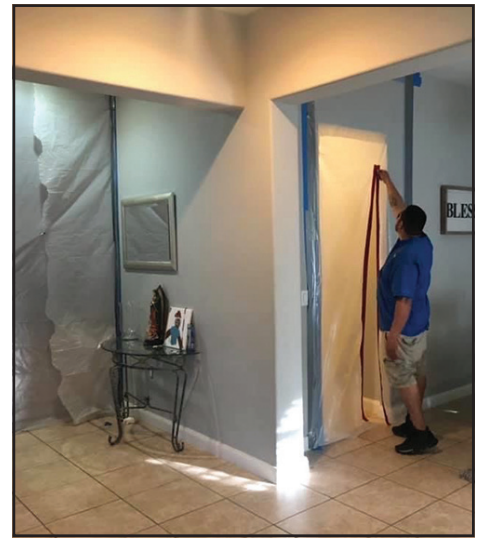
Pushing through the hard times, she gathers inspiration from God and her family, "I am a strong woman thanks be to God. I also have a strong support system made up of family and friends. But my daughters are my ultimate motivation and they get me through the hardest times."

"Before COVID-19 I carried out my daily routine. Reported to my scheduled shifts. Lived a normal life. That is all changed now," she explained, "My life has been

completely changed. My days consist of continuous updates, things are constantly changing, making sure we have enough PPE for the unit, reassuring my team because we are all scared and nervous. We feel pressured, we're tired, and we're always on edge, always being as cautious as possible because one error can lead to infection. The same day I opened the COVID units was the same day I became isolated from my family. We sealed off the bottom half of my house and that's where I lived, I would see my family from a distance, no physical contact with my children or family. Some people might say it was drastic but honestly after seeing what happened in Detroit, we did the right thing. As parents our focus was and always will be to protect our children."

"I have had some rough days in my career, days I've cried in my car on the way home, days where we have call offs and we have to pull together as a team and make it through. But NONE of these things have affected my career like this virus has," she said. "Be kind to the healthcare workers. The stress and anxiety that come with this job have heightened. It takes a heavy emotional toll on us. We feel for you more than you know. It is hard seeing patients' in the hospital who are alone, there are no visitors allowed, we FaceTime families from our personal phones sometimes, push them close to windows so their family can hold up signs, put the phone to their ear so their families can say goodbye, and we hold the hands of the dying so they're not alone."

While she is grateful to be back home, Flores is gravely concerned, "Virus numbers are going up in Immokalee. We need more testing. More outreach programs especially for our Spanish/Creole speaking communities, Language barriers create Education barriers. People are coming down with covid-19 and being told to isolate but, how can they? Who's going to bring them groceries, medicine, or go to a hospital if need be? Housing conditions need to improve. Work conditions need to improve. Immokalee is a large farming community, we have limited resources, limited healthcare, high poverty levels, and this is the perfect combination for an outbreak. Will restriction criteria be reviewed if these numbers continue to rise? Will anyone really pay attention to the healthcare disparities that are going on in this community?"



Submitted photo

Flores has her husband seal off the house, to keep her family safe.

When asked what advice she would want to pass on, she said, "First, I want everyone to know especially in my community that this virus is real. We must take care of each other, respect each other, love each other especially with all the chaos going on in this world. We do not have to agree with each other, but we should still respect one another." She added, "In my opinion I think SWFL has not seen the damage this virus can do to our communities, our healthcare systems, our own families. We do not see it, so we think it does not exist, but we are wrong. COVID-19 is very real and if we are not careful, we can most definitely exhaust the healthcare system. Also, I feel that there is a misconception that if you contract the virus you die. Not everyone dies, not everyone gets the same symptoms, if I've learned anything from this virus its that no two people are the same. This virus does not discriminate and that is evident with the death toll surpassing 100,000 in America."

"This virus is confusing, literature and recommendations are always changing. Clearly, we do not have a handle on this pandemic. Viruses evolve they change, and it seems that no one really knows what to expect from this one. So take care of yourself take care of your family we can not live in fear of the virus and yes normal life must resume but we should still be cautious," Flores warned.

Shelter

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haus said of the arrests, "It created a loud call to action by law enforcement and the entire community. Most people had no idea that human trafficking was taking place in Naples."

To maximize the use of the new facility and accommodate the increasing need to serve victims of both domestic violence and human trafficking, The Shelter designed the new facility with separate wings for each populace.

According to Oberhaus, there are similarities in the abuse suffered by domestic violence and human trafficking victims.

Both involve the use power and control by the abuser or trafficker to dominate their victims. Common tactics include isolations, physical and emotional violence, sexual abuse, financial abuse, threats to family and children to manipulate and control their victims, as well as withholding food, sleep and medical care.

While the average length of stay for a survivor of domestic violence is 6-8 weeks, a victim of human trafficking might require a stay of 6-8 months or more of long-term therapeutic care due to multiple perpetrators causing significant physical, emotional and mental abuse. Endangerment levels and legal remedies are also very different for trafficked women.

Craig and Patricia Jilk, benefactors of the two domestic violence wings of the new shelter, have been actively involved in phil-

anthropic efforts in Immokalee for 15 years.

"In that time, we have seen the changes and growth in Immokalee and, although there are many nonprofits that offer services to families, the one missing piece that we noticed was the lack of a building for victims of domestic violence," Patricia Jilk says. "So when The Shelter announced plans for a building in Immokalee, we signed up. We all appreciate the successful shelter in Naples and we know how the work they have done has turned around the lives of women and children. The same thing can now happen in Immokalee."

For more information on the Shelly Stayer Shelter, call 239-775-3862. To secure services, call the Immokalee Office at 239-657-5700. If you are in an unsafe relationship and need emergency shelter, call The Shelter's 24-hour Crisis Line at 239-775-1101.