

January 5, 2005

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## Bittersweet Goodbyes to Well-Loved Community Leader

*Thurman Chambers, Executive Director of Panama City Rescue Mission announces departure to hometown, Little Rock, Ark*

It was evident at his last staff meeting in Panama City, that admiring employees of the Panama City Rescue Mission would surely miss their boss. There were tears of joy and of sadness.

“I hate to seem him go, but you know, he’s always been a man who follows the Lord, “ Ralph Morgan, Men’s Program Director, said, “Maybe they need him more than we do now.”

In no more than four years, Thurman Chambers had revived a sinking ship, brought aboard followers and leaders to a worthwhile mission, and created a ledged that will live on far beyond his departure.

When Chambers came to the Rescue Mission, the board was in desperate need of help. They were frightenedly close to closing the doors of the 30-year Christian based emergency shelter and food kitchen forever.

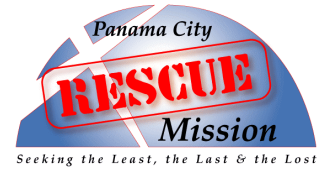
But with the expertise of more than 20 years of Rescue Mission work, our local Rescue Mission stands as a beacon to a city where many families and individuals stand in need of help, of direction.

Chambers placed a stop sign within the doors of the Mission, establishing accountability measures and a means for help beyond the basic needs. The Rescue Mission quickly became “more than soup and shelter.” It became a positive environment for change, the long-lasting kind so many recovering addicted needed.

Here is a brief history of Chambers accomplishments in his tenure at the Panama City Rescue Mission:

- After previous Director Mr. Joe O’Daniel passed away in 2001, the board hired Thurman Chambers, who had served Rescue Missions in Little Rock, Atlanta, and Jacksonville.

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- In 2002, Chambers organized the first long-term Christian recovery program, “Power to Choose,” and opened transitional spaces, introducing a mix of specialized services to assist individual needs.
- The Mission opened the Thrift Depot in the 501 East 6th Street location as an emergency clothing center and The Bargain Center as the first retail thrift store operated by the Mission at 401 East 6th Street to assist in generating self-sustaining revenues for the programs.
- In 2003, he renovated the recovery program dorm areas and opened more room for desperate individuals
- In 2004, Chambers introduced the first free long-term Christian recovery program of its kind for women and children in Bay County, “Bethel Village,” located in Springfield.
- Later that year, he announced plans to open a Day Center to help relieve the city’s problems with transient panhandling downtown. Chambers has led fundraising efforts with much success and the Mission will open the new Day Center in early 2005.

Chambers will go on to serve his first Mission, Union Rescue Mission in Little Rock, Ark, as President/CEO. It is his hometown, where he grew up, attended Arkansas University and raised a family with his wife, Teva.

“It seems like we’ve gone full circle,” Teva said, “Now when we get ready to retire, we’ll not have far to go.”

The Board is currently in search of Chambers’ successor.

The staff says good-bye one last time at the regular staff meeting this Thursday at 2 pm in the Rescue Mission’s cafeteria. Media is welcome to attend.

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