

St. Lucie West resident saving streets one child at a time

Nicole Rodriguez
STAFF WRITER
nrodriguez@YourVoiceWeekly.com

ST. LUCIE WEST — Children are our future. That's why Lake Charles resident, Scott Van Duzer, is breaking city barriers to combat street violence and pave a path of prosperity and success for some of the most at-risk youth in Fort Pierce.

Van Duzer's weapon isn't an AR-15. It's called Troop 772. The philanthropist also has an army behind him, but they're not strapped with weapons, either. Rather, Van Duzer's team consists of successful men and peaceful pillars of the community.

Van Duzer's Boy Scout Troop 772, which has been approved by The Boy Scouts of America, held its first meeting in early December. Fifty one boys already signed up, Van Duzer said.

The St. Lucie West resident and head of the Van Duzer

Foundation based out of Van Duzer's Fort Pierce Big Apple Pizza & Pasta shop, said he and others formed the group in response to one of the bloodiest summers on record in Fort Pierce. In just a 13-week period in June and July, Fort Pierce experienced more than 60 shooting incidents, a Fort Pierce Police spokesman said.

"The Boy Scouts have been around for 103 years, the structure, the meetings, the life skills, that's just the tip of it. We want to teach them about jobs, about the whole nine yards," Van Duzer said. "I think it's a no-brainer. Instead of them worrying about joining a gang, we're going to take them fishing and to the games."

Van Duzer is targeting 11, 12, 13-year-old boys who attend Dan McCarty Middle School in Fort Pierce, one of the lowest rated schools in the county. Van Duzer and his team met with 51 boys at the school just before the Thanksgiving holiday. Every



Scott Van Duzer



Dr. Shamsheer Singh

child signed up, Van Duzer said. Only 25 were able to make the first meeting, which will take place every Wednesday, because of transportation issues.

Van Duzer is in talks with St. Lucie County Schools Superintendent Genelle Yost to use a school bus for Troop 772. Van Duzer said he refuses to turn any child away, regardless of

age, ethnicity or school they attend.

"We will not turn one kid away. We need to raise more money. That's the key. Raise more money and get more volunteers," a determined Van Duzer said.

The troop costs \$24 to register and \$60 for a uniform, plus the

See SCOUTS page A15

Buddy's Holiday Mobility

for the physically challenged driver

Serving the Treasure Coast Since 1976 • State Certified

- **New Vans**
- **Sales & Service**
- **Dodge**
- **Chrysler**
- **Honda**
- **Toyota**

BraunAbility
Driving Freedom™

Trades Welcome • Financing Available
We Bill Most Insurance Companies
Schedule a free, no obligation consultation with us today!

772-465-9600

6144 S. US Hwy 1, Ft. Pierce FL 34982 • BuddysHoliday.com



SCOUTS from page A11

costs of trips and meetings. St. Lucie County dermatologist Dr. Shamsher Singh will match all donations that come in prior to the end of the year up to the amount of \$10,000.

The community's funding in its children is an investment that will reap bountiful returns, Van Duzer said.

"Statistically speaking, one Boy Scout will reach eight other kids," Van Duzer said. "If we have 50 kids, we have the power to reach 400 kids."

Van Duzer, a former scout who grew up in a fatherless household, said the boys need guidance and love to keep them off the streets.

"A kid told me, 'At least I get attention when I get in trouble,'" Van Duzer said. "All they want is someone to be there and care about what they're doing. That's it."

Van Duzer said it's vital that residents from low or virtually no-crime areas including St. Lucie West and Tradition join in the fight to end the county's violence.

"If you think you're in a bubble and you're safe, you're very mistaken," Van Duzer said.

PGA Village resident and State Rep. Larry Lee Jr., D-Port St. Lucie, echoed the same sentiment.

"Those of us in gated communities in St. Lucie West — it affects us here," Lee said. "It doesn't matter. We all should be concerned. It's St. Lucie County, Florida and the nation's problem."

Lee said Van Duzer's initiative is groundbreaking in the months' long fight to decrease violence. Lee has participated in several anti-violence forums held in recent months in Fort Pierce.

"It is one of many spokes in a wheel that is going to create and restore the village," said Lee, a former Scout master.

More state funding should go

"If you think you're in a bubble and you're safe, you're very mistaken."

Scott Van Duzer

into similar programs and the school system rather than the prison system, Lee said. It costs \$80,000 a year to incarcerate an inmate, but only \$10,000 to educate a student, Lee said.

In every free moment, Lee will be at meetings and outings to mentor the children.

"I'm totally committed to do whatever it takes to make it a successful troop and get their lives pointed in the right direction," Lee said.

Out of a stack of student letters on the counter inside Van Duzer's pizza shop, one was particularly poignant, demonstrating Troop 772's need.

"I am looking forward to do things [I've] never done before, to be a better young man, to respect, to learn from the older people that has experience, to become a [leader] of something positive and not negative, travel places, learn new things, meet new people, become a part of [something] that is an advantage, and volunteers," a student named Willie wrote.

Troops leaders and program contributors include: St. Lucie County Firefighter Rusty Hines, Fort Pierce resident Dan Hafner, Fort Pierce Police Chief Sean Baldwin, St. Lucie County Fire Chief Ron Parrish, School Board member Troy Ingersoll, State Rep. Larry Lee, St. Lucie County Commissioner Kim Johnson, retired St. Lucie County School Security Officer Terry Miller, St. Lucie County Sheriff Ken Mascara and attorney Loresno Williams.

Anyone interested in donating or volunteering should contact the Van Duzer Foundation at (772) 528-3467 or visit www.vanduzerfoundation.org

Colorado Pawn & Jewelry

SPECIALIZING IN SHORT TERM LOANS!

Don't be Left in the Cold!
For Last Minute Gift Ideas -

Visit us and discover a **Large Selection of top quality, high end Jewelry and Electronics**

Over 30 Years Serving Treasure Coast

WE BUY AND SELL GOLD, SILVER, DIAMONDS AND MORE!

Se Habla Espanol

Christmas Gifts

30% OFF

1 item
 (Exclude ROLEX)
 Expires 1/10/2014

STUART
 2275 South Kanner Highway
 (Corner of Monterey Rd. and Kanner Hwy. North of 7-Eleven)
772-283-3660

PORT ST. LUCIE
 1168 SE Port St. Lucie Blvd.
 (Corner of PSL By Tutto Fresco)
772-335-1896

We Know What You Don't Know

The **SMART** way to **PROTECT** your **BUSINESS**

Conspire! before you hire

Drug & Alcohol Testing • Mobile and On Site Testing
 Background Checks • Policy Writing & Review
 National Locator Service • Reasonable Cause Training
 Corffit Pre-Employment Fitness Tests • Community Outreach & Prevention • D.O.T. Compliance & DATIA Certified • Student Drug & Alcohol Screens

conspire2hire.com/treasurecoast
772.333.0163

HOLIDAYS

James
Stammer
and his 12
Days of
Christmas

WEATHER

Friday: Partly
cloudy; high: 79;
low: 66; high tide:
10:04 a.m.; low
tide: 4:03 p.m.

Saturday: Partly
cloudy, chance of
rain; high: 81; low:
74; low tide: 4:40

high: 82; low: 66;
low tide: 5:20 p.m.
www.weather.com

Out & About B1
Police Report A5
Fests & Raves A6
Viewpoint A6

New scout troop aims at keeping boys off streets

For Hometown News
newsfp@hometownnewsol.com

ST. LUCIE COUNTY—
There have been 137
shootings in St. Lucie
County this year.
Whether it's a gang initi-
ation, drive-by shooting,
drug-related shooting,
or whatever the reason,
the number is far too
high.

Despite numerous
town meetings, roundta-
bles, and take back the
streets marches, shots
continue to be fired and
the lives of young com-
munity members are lost
in a wave of unnecessary
violence.

Gangs are recruiting

new members at
younger ages than ever
before (some report
members as young as
eight), so it's important
to find other ways for
young boys to feel a
sense of solidarity,
camaraderie, and
belonging than the dead
end life of a gang.

While there are no
clear answers, a small
group of dedicated com-
munity volunteers work-
ing through the Van
Duzer Foundation, think
the answer may lie in the
number 772.

St. Lucie County Fire-
fighter, Rusty Hines,
along with four assis-
tants, have begun the

process of training to
become scout leaders for
St. Lucie County's
newest Boy Scout Troop
#772.

Targeting at-risk youth
from St. Lucie County's
Dan McCarty Middle
School, Mr. Hines and a
diverse group of com-
munity members and
dedicated volunteers
including Scott Van
Duzer, Van Duzer Foun-
dation president, Dan
Hafner, Fort Pierce
Police Chief Sean Bald-
win, St. Lucie County
Fire Chief Ron Parrish,
School Board member
Troy Ingersoll, State Rep-
resentative Larry Lee, St.

See **TROOP, A2**

Police announ awards

For Hometown News
newsfp@hometownnewsol.com

FORT PIERCE
Pierce Police Chief
Sean Baldwin promote
officers at their annual
Luncheon and Awar
d ceremony held at
the Fort Pierce City
PAL.

In addition to
commendations, awards were
presented to officers and
volunteers in several categories.
The recipients include
volunteer of the year,
officer of the year, mar-
shal of the year, detective
of the year, and
officer of the year.
The awards were presented
at the retirement of
Officer Rex's retirement.

The officers who
were promoted are as fol-
lows:
Sergeant William