

## “This is the time to help others’: volunteers step to assist those in need



Employees of The Palace Gardens Homestead, FLA Assisted Living Community, traveled to the Lower Keys to provide hot meals, needed cooking supplies and water to Hurricane Irma victims.

BY CHRISTINA MAYO

Helping others is what many of us try to do every day. When residents of the Lower Keys needed extra care recovering from the devastation of Hurricane Irma, employees of The Palace Gardens in Homestead stepped up.

On Sept. 19, they traveled by bus with a truck loaded with food and supplies in a caravan escorted by city of Homestead police to mile marker 15 — the site of Baby’s Coffee — to serve hot meals and give out donated items.

The Palace Gardens’ executive director Zack Shaham also participated in the relief mission.

“It’s important for us to help others in this time of need,” Shaham said in a release. “Some of our employees are working on their first day off since Hurricane Irma but wanted to be part of this effort. We’ve experienced the devas-

tation from a hurricane when Hurricane Andrew hit both The Palace Gardens in Homestead and The Palace Kendall. We know how important it is to lend whatever support we can.”

About 25 employees were joined by The Palace Gardens residents Nancy and Charles “Cap” Pender, and their daughter and son-in-law Kim and Ray Harr.

Elizabeth Martinez, director of sales, put the wheels in motion for the community relief mission. The Palace Coral Gables’ executive chef Ken Eubanks joined with Palace Gardens sous chef Orlando Casanova in planning the menu. They served barbecue ribs, roasted chicken, yellow rice, macaroni and cheese, cole slaw, potato salad and corn on the cob. The food was prepared ahead of time and packed for serving.

The group also brought nonperishable food to give to local chefs cooking in the Keys and 1,000 cases of water donated from the 10 Palace communities.

Dining room manager Carmen Ojeda, who has worked for The Palace for 29 years, said being part of the relief team was especially meaningful.

“This is the time to help others,” she said. “Hurricane Irma left them like it left us after Andrew.”

Ojeda remembers working at The Palace and staying at the community with her children, then ages 2 and 5, during Hurricane Andrew. When she returned to her home, she found she had lost her house and her car. She and her family had to live in a FEMA trailer for three years.

Shaham said the team was glad to assist those in the Keys.

“We strive to be good neighbors and it was heartwarming to be able to be of help,” he said. “Many people we served were Keys residents, workers and first responders. We’re happy to do our part in helping hurricane recovery efforts.”