

EXPERT CONTRIBUTOR

Florida's Goodwill Emissary - Plenty of Reason to Give Thanks

By Laura Byrnes, APR, CPRC, Communications Manager

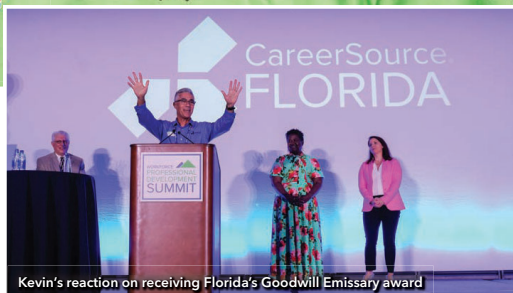


This month we give thanks by feasting, gathering with family and friends, and counting our blessings.

I hope, knock on wood, one of the things we'll be thankful for is making it through another hurricane season relatively unscathed. We're certainly very, very thankful Dorian didn't do to us what it did to our neighbors in the Bahamas. And it's hard to believe that just a year ago, our fellow Floridians in the Panhandle were still digging out from under the devastation of Hurricane Michael. Which leads me to a major reason CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion is particularly thankful this year: an Aussie named Kevin Harrison.

Kevin is a retired 24-year Navy veteran (Australia), originally from New South Wales, who subsequently built a career as a trainer and human resources generalist in the manufacturing industry before joining our staff in 2010.

As one of our mobile career development representatives, Kevin excels at providing mobile services to job candidates and businesses in remote areas of our region. You may have seen his "office" around Citrus County: a 40-foot Winnebago tricked out with 10 computer stations and everything a job candidate or business may need. Moby1, as it is affectionately called, is regularly stationed at the Dunnellon Library, Floral City Library, Homosassa Library and Lakes Regional Library in Inverness.



Kevin's reaction on receiving Florida's Goodwill Emissary award

Terrific as that is - bringing our free services to areas of the county that might not be as accessible to our brick and mortar career center in Lecanto - that's not the only reason we're thankful Kevin is on our team.

It was in the wake of Hurricane Michael when Kevin - with a go bag ready - quickly volunteered to be part of a team of CareerSource CLM staff sent to the Mexico Beach area where the Category 5 monster made landfall.

You see, time was of the essence in helping survivors file disaster unemployment assistance claims, find work, or apply for help rebuilding their businesses. Part of the problem was that the offices and staff of the CareerSource Gulf Coast region which serves Bay, Franklin and Gulf counties - the very area hardest hit by Michael - were themselves very nearly out of commission due to storm damage.

Kevin helped set up mobile centers, working six days a week, week after week. CareerSource CLM mobile resource units



The 40-foot mobile resource unit set up next to the FEMA trailer.

became such a fixture that residents expected to see them pretty much any time. I remember I was on the road to New Orleans to celebrate Thanksgiving with my family when I got a call from a job seeker wondering if the team would be available to meet with him on Thanksgiving Day.

We had more than a dozen staff rotate to Carrabelle and Callaway; earlier this year they were honored by CareerSource Gulf Coast as "Hurricane Michael Heroes." But like I said, Kevin made the trek time and time again, working Monday through Saturday, returning Sunday to head back with a fresh crew and supplies.

"I immediately responded ... I didn't even ask my wife because I wanted to help out and I knew the mobile units had to be taken up there," he told me.

In all, Kevin spent four weeks in the hurricane-ravaged area, proving to be what our Executive Vice President Kathleen Woodring described as a "natural leader, whose sense of humor and calm demeanor can smooth out any stressful situation."

She added **what that** particularly stood out is that Kevin knew what actions could make a difference. "The sweetest note was his call back to the home office for crayons and coloring books. Staff responded with donations; children's pictures were hung on the walls as parents tried to find a job and secure benefits after such destruction."

Kevin said that families were coming with children in tow, and they needed a way to make them feel comfortable. "I'm not a psychologist, but to look at some of those images they drew of what they went through ... it's something I'll never forget. We wanted the kids to realize, hey, it's okay ..."

For his pivotal role, Kevin was recently recognized as one of the state's 26 Workforce Champions at the annual Florida Workforce Professional Development Summit and was named Florida's Workforce Goodwill Emissary of the Year.

This is indeed a big deal. The summit is a three-day educational and training conference attended by more than 800 direct service and leadership staff from Florida's workforce system. Kevin's Goodwill Emissary award was presented by the Florida Workforce Development Association "in recognition and appreciation of (Kevin's) commitment to strengthening Florida's workforce and for making a difference through his dedication to excellence."

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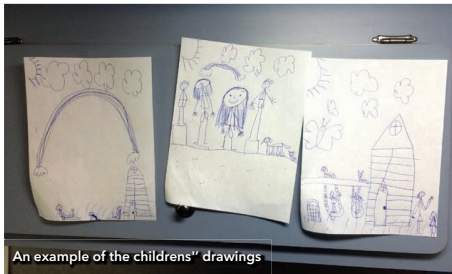
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An example of the childrens' drawings

Kevin said the honor was "unreal."

"We all do what we do for our customers, and I just enjoy what I do. It just feels great. The best part of my job is helping people."

And for that, you can believe we are more than just a little thankful. Oh, and that "go bag" I mentioned earlier? It is repacked and at the ready, once again.

Laura Byrnes, APR, CPRC, communications manager at CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion, is Accredited in Public Relations, a Certified Public Relations Counselor and a Florida Certified Workforce Professional. She would love to hear from you and learn what kind of information you'd like to see each month. Please contact her at (352) 291-9559, (800) 434-5627, ext. 1234 or lbyrnes@careersourceclm.com.




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Batteries Plus Bulbs: Getting to Know Rob and the Team

By Amanda Clark-Rudolph



Need batteries? Need bulbs? The Batteries Plus Bulbs Store has these, and so much more. I had the opportunity to communicate with Rob Osmond, co-owner of store #596 - conveniently located in your neck of the woods at 2418 W. Hwy. 44, in Inverness. During our correspondence, he offered detailed information about the store's products, history, and dedicated staff.

"We sell just about any battery you can think of," he began, "from automotive, marine, golf, mobility devices, to watches, and even solar applications." We also sell a large variety of light bulbs," he continued, "we repair cell phones, tablets, and on occasion other electronic devices. We program and cut key fobs for automobiles. We also provide delivery and installation services." Rob also holds expansion plans for the future: "As we grow, we would like to broaden the services we provide," he noted.

The local store opened for business on May 6, 2019. "We transitioned from the Printing Industry, which is rapidly being replaced by new technology," Rob said. "The only constant in life is change, so we switched to the battery industry, which is an integral part of today's technology-based world." Batteries Plus Bulbs maintains a simple business philosophy to provide quality merchandise and superior service.

One aspect of the business that stood out was Rob's appreciation for his team. "I would have to say my biggest inspiration would have to be the people I work with," he expressed. "Patrick, my co-owner, was in a horrific car accident and as a result, is now a quadriplegic. Rather than feeling sorry for himself, he fought his way back to good health

and started a business. Mackenzie is our store manager," he continued, "she is a young lady who recently graduated from the University of South Florida with a degree in anthropology. If you ever stop in the store, she will be the one with the blue, red, or green hair. Don't let the wild hair color fool you; she is very good at what she does. Our Assistant Manager is a young man named Jordan. Jordan is tech-savvy and will go the extra mile to help provide a solution for our customers. Just a few weeks ago he repaired a high-end drone for one of our customers! We round out our service with Shelby, a young woman new to the working world. What she lacks in experience, she makes up for with her amazing personality and wonderful customer service. The last staff member would be me, Rob," he playfully added, "I'm the guy with the gray beard. I'm a veteran of the United States Marine Corps and the United States Navy."

The well-rounded team loves getting to know their customers and are guilty of enjoying good-natured humor. "We are just regular people," he noted, "we tend to be a modest, private family. We have lived in the area for about three decades and take pride in where we live. From the rivers to the Withlacoochee forest, to the fresh seafood and the small-town feel of belonging to a community."




When asked if he had any particular message to share with the neighborhood, he answered,

"We offer a 10% discount to all veterans and first responders," he then added, "We also provide installation and delivery services. We are dog-friendly and usually have some dog treats on hand."


Rob's most memorable times at the shop are when a customer leaves the store happy because his team solved their problem. "Whether it be finding an odd battery for

their garage door opener, replacing the broken screen on their cell phone, or changing the batteries in their wheelchair or mobility device," he concluded.

The Batteries and Bulbs store is more than a store; it's a team of employees looking out for their customers. To find out more, give them a call at 352-329-2914 or check out their website at batteriesplus.com.



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