

# METRO

## Stability for chronically homeless

**Housing-and-services model 'not just about saving money, it's about saving lives'**

**By Beth Reese Cravey**  
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Providing housing and individualized services for 68 chronically homeless people in Jacksonville reduced by 30 percent the overall crisis-services expenses that would have been spent on them otherwise, according to study

results from a four-year pilot project. The project, called the Solution That Saves, compared the cost of such "high utilizers" of emergency rooms, jails and overnight shelters for two years prior to them receiving housing and two years afterward. The results showed \$7.5 million in pre-housing costs, \$5.3 million in

**Ability Housing: The Solution that Saves**  
For more information go to abilityhousing.org.

post-housing costs, according to Ability Housing, the Jacksonville-based nonprofit that ran the pilot project.

"The Solution That Saves is the first project to provide Florida-specific data on the impact of this approach," said Shannon

Nazworth, president and CEO of Ability Housing, which serves Northeast and Central Florida. "The evidence shows us that housing is health care. Housing linked with individualized supports can help end homelessness in our community, reduce utilization of crisis services and, most importantly, contribute to a higher quality of life for our neighbors in need and our community as a whole.

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## Tracing lives of those who served

**A century after WWI's end, UCF researchers tell stories of veterans**

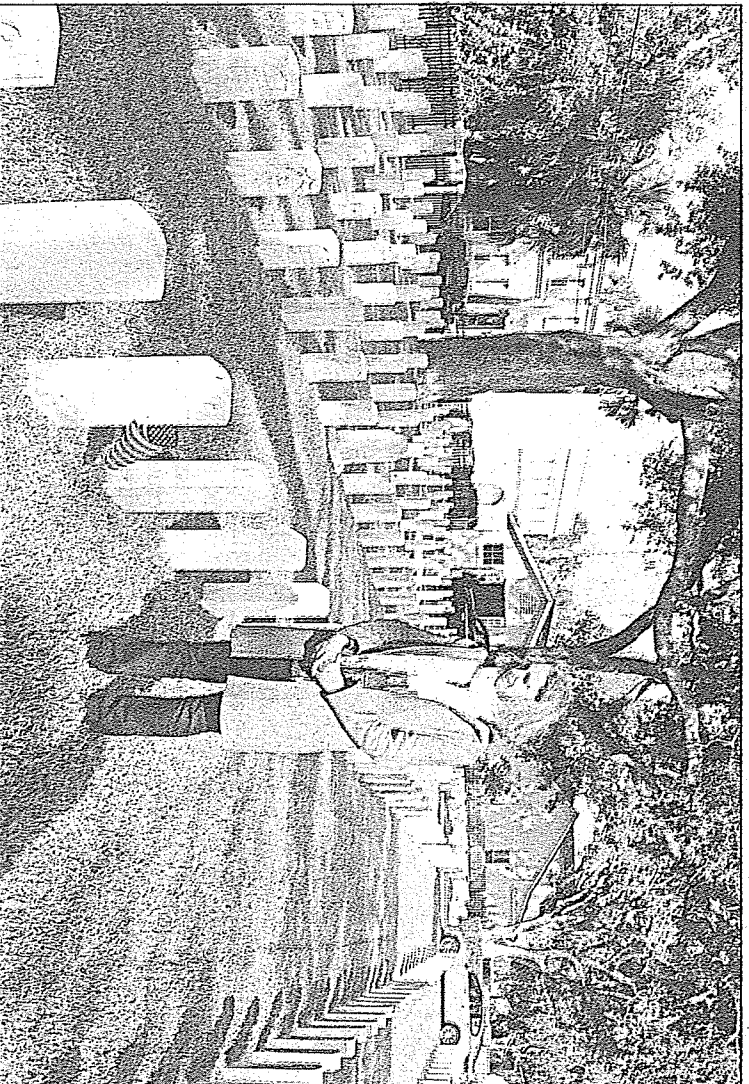
**By Matt Soergel**  
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**ST. AUGUSTINE** — Marie Oury came to the veterans' cemetery in this historic city Thursday, her first visit there, and looked down upon the gravestones of the two World War I veterans whose lives she had traced: Buster Williams and Jason Waitman.

She's a graduate history student at the University of Central Florida, working on a project with the Department of Veterans Affairs to tell the stories of veterans buried in national cemeteries, people such as Williams and Waitman.

They were black men, drafted into the Army, who left their Florida homes to join the battle in France, in a terrible war that ended 100 Novembers ago.

They left no memoirs



**Marie Oury, a Frenchwoman and a University of Central Florida graduate student, stands alongside the gravestone of Jason Waitman, a WWI veteran she researched. [SARAH SMITH/FLORIDA TIMES-UNION]**

off four years so he would

Columbia County in 1895,

for construction projects and

### OUTDOORS

## Tales of old, wild Arlington



**Chris Hong**

**B**etween driving across the Southeast to visit family for Thanksgiving and receiving strict orders from an emergency room doctor to stay out of the woods and away from the water, I haven't done any hunting or fishing in two weeks.

Doctors are always warning us about having fun, but I'm heeding their advice this time. Infection is serious business, and the threat of a nasty one felt all to real after I accidentally pushed a knife blade an inch deep into my left hand while field dressing a deer.

There's more to that story, but I'm not telling it today.

Instead, we're going back in time before developers got their hands on Arlington, when it was still very much a wooded and swampy wilderness.

With no stories of my own for this week's column, I gave my buddy Bob Sikes a call. With nearly 80 years of life under his belt, he's got a few to tell.

My favorites are his tales about old Arlington, including the one about a hog hunt gone wrong in a pig-infested swamp near Craig Airport.

I met Sikes earlier this year while researching a story about the demise of Mill Cove, once the crown jewel of the St. Johns River that forever changed after the Jacksonville Port Authority ordered the

## LAW &amp; ORDER

# SWAT arrests neighbor in double shooting

The Times-Union

A father and son are recovering in a hospital and their neighbor is in jail following a double shooting Thursday in their East Arlington subdivision just north of Landmark Middle School, according to the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office.

Officers were called about 3 p.m. to the home in the 12000 block of Scott's Cove Court. Arriving officers found the two adult victims, one shot

in the leg and the other in the chest, Lt. Steve Mullen said.

He did not say what may have started the shooting, which apparently occurred inside the garage, police said.

"The shooter was the neighbor. That person went back to their home," he said. "He shut the door and concealed himself in the house. Officers surrounded the house."

SWAT officers were called in and began negotiating with the man. After a brief negotiation, the man came out of

his home about two hours after the shooting, Mullen said.

The gunman, who along with the victims were not identified, has been charged with aggravated assault and aggravated battery, Mullen said. He also faces another charge after pointing his weapon at a third person but not firing.

The victims' wounds were not deemed life threatening, Mullen said.

Dan Scanlan

## LIVES

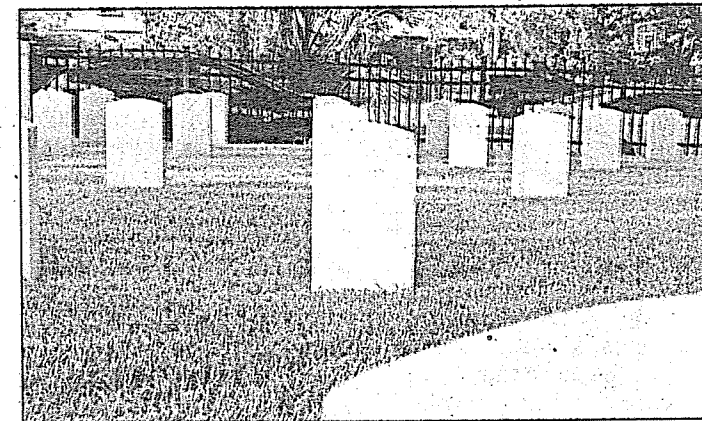
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She cried at the grave there of a soldier whose life she had studied, and at old battlefields she pondered the sacrifices made by many.

"I kept on thinking how Floridians came all the way to this unknown country, in this unknown territory, to fight in such a hell," she said. "I don't know how they made this sacrifice, this ultimate sacrifice, for a country they didn't know, a culture they didn't know, for that ultimate goal of freedom."

Oury was part of a group from UCF that gave a presentation Thursday on the school's collaboration with the Department of Veterans Affairs. They held it at the St. Augustine National Cemetery on Marine Street, where 2,823 people are buried, a picturesque spot just south of downtown.

Barbara Gannon, an associate professor of history at UCF, said there were two black Army divisions that fought in World War I, the 92nd and the 93rd. Most African-Americans



The grave of WWI veteran Buster Williams. He is one of the men Marie Oury, a UCF graduate student, researched, along with another WWI veteran, Jason Waitman. [SARAH SMITH/FLORIDA TIMES-UNION]

though, were consigned to service units or labor units.

That was a time in this country of much strong racism, and African-American troops continued to face that during the war, Gannon said: "Because of legalized segregation and disenfranchisement, they were in no way, shape or form seen as equals."

Oury found that both Waitman and Williams married after the war and lived and worked in St. Johns County.

Jason Waitman came back to America on the USS Floridian and went back to work in St.

Augustine as an iceman. He died in December 1936 of lobar pneumonia.

After coming home on the USS Kroonland, Buster Williams was a laborer, in a cemetery and elsewhere, but saved enough money to buy a house by 1930. He and his wife had three children, though in 1938 their daughter Audrey died of malaria at 17.

Williams lived until December 1945, dying just months after the end of the next world war.

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## STABILITY

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But it's not just about saving money, it's about saving lives."

But there are roadblocks to applying the housing-and-services concept to all 450 or so of Jacksonville's chronically homeless. First, it would use up the city's entire inventory of affordable housing and, second, the state, local and federal governments are not allocating much money to build more, she said.

"We have an affordable housing shortage in this country. We have an affordable housing crisis," Nazworth said.

The Florida Housing Finance Corp., Disability Rights Florida, Florida Blue Foundation and U.S. Department of Housing and Development funded the Jacksonville pilot project and two others still under way in Miami-Dade and Pinellas counties. Earlier studies by other states reported cost savings from the housing-and-services model, and Florida officials wanted a "cost-benefit evaluation of the concept to see whether that was really true," said Nancy Muller, director of policy and special programs for the Housing Finance Corp.

The local participants ranged in age from 20 to 64 and most had at least one disability. They were placed in scattered housing across the city and at Village on Wiley, a multifamily development owned by Ability Housing.

The largest savings in the Jacksonville pilot project were in health care expenses, including a 58 percent drop in hospital costs, 59 percent drop in inpatient services and 43 percent drop in emergency room costs.

"Why does a hospital care about housing?" said Mike Griffin, vice president of public policy and advocacy for Adventist Health System and an Ability Housing board member. "Someone who lives in a house is probably going to be healthier than someone who lives in the woods."

The data must be followed by action and then results, said

Darnell Smith, market president of Florida Blue.

"Solutions come through partnerships," he said. "It's appropriate to put together solutions that absolutely work."

The study also showed a 65 percent decrease in costs associated with arrests and jail bookings through the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, as well as a 72 percent decrease in jail costs. In addition, 77 percent of the participants reported improvement in at least one aspect of life, such as perceived physical and psychological health.

"Life was much better," Nazworth said. "They're at home, they're getting health care, they're getting jobs."

The individualized support, such as enrollment in Medicaid and Medicare, primary care and specialty health care and transportation and employment services, were key, Muller said.

"You can't just do the housing. You've got to do the services," she said.

Although the Miami-Dade and Pinellas results have not yet been released, she said likely "we're going to be able to tell policy makers that this is truly the solution that saves."

Jacksonville City Council President Aaron Bowman said he wasn't surprised by the study results. He said affordable housing and homelessness are already on the minds of some council members and have been brought up in talks about the upcoming city budget.

"It's good to see the data that supports the idea," he said.

The next step for Ability Housing and its partners in health care, homelessness prevention and other fields will be educating other elected officials and their staffs about the study results, Nazworth said. State lawmakers in particular will be asked to stop diverting money from affordable housing trust funds — expected to collect \$300 million this year — to other priorities.

"That's ridiculous. This is a growing state," Nazworth said. "Help them understand the impact their decisions have."

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