



News Briefs

Kissimmee Police Arrest Two Responsible for Multiple Convenience Store Burglaries

Kissimmee police officers arrested two suspects responsible for multiple convenience store burglaries that have occurred in several jurisdictions throughout Central Florida.

The investigation began on September 30, 2013, when two convenience stores in Kissimmee were burglarized. The Neighborhood Discount Beverage located at 3319 W. Oak Street and the Sunoco located at 1078 S. Hoagland Blvd. were burglarized minutes apart. Detectives learned that the Osceola County Sheriff's Office had convenience store burglaries that same evening. Throughout the next weeks two additional Kissimmee stores were burglarized by the same suspects.

The Kissimmee Police Department worked a joint operation with the Osceola County Sheriff's Office to apprehend the suspects responsible for the convenience store burglaries. On October 17, 2013 at approximately 1:30 a.m., a Kissimmee police officer witnessed a truck leave the One Stop convenience store located at 1901 N. Michigan Avenue at a high rate of speed. The officer confirmed the store was burglarized and released the

St. Cloud Physician Receives 'Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation Award'

Founded Ministry to Help Alleviate Poverty in Developing Countries

By Emily E. Bean,
Managing Editor &
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Contributing Writers

A small plane landed in a Nairobi airport on the morning of September 11, 2001. For one doctor, this day would not only mark the worst terrorist attack on American soil, but also the beginning of a beautiful journey.

Dr. Margie Sweeney, originally from Indiana, arrived in Kenya to a flurry of activity. A young priest quickly whisked her party to his small rectory where they watched the Twin Towers fall from a small, fuzzy black-and-white television screen.

"We could see the smoke billowing from the towers in between the static interruptions," Sweeney recalled. "It was truly an intense moment."

Sweeney, shocked and dismayed, immediately began to pray. She prayed for peace, and God granted this request. It was with faith and determination that she began her first mission in



Dr. Margie Sweeney

Africa amongst true turmoil throughout the world.

"The first trip was more of fact-finding one to see what we could do on future trips," explained Sweeney. "We spent a lot of time meeting people and learning what their needs were for future trips. The first trip had the most impact on me obviously because everything was a new experience."

Sweeney, a family practice

physician, returned to Africa again in 2003, 2004, and 2006, to make a total of four trips. She explained that the trips were more about poverty alleviation than medical attention. The good doctor founded the non-profit charity *Helping Hands Healing Ministries* (HHHM) in order to make a difference in these poverty-stricken countries. Sweeney and her group helped to open a dairy farm and

built desks for a school in Tanzania. They also contributed funding for electrical hook-up at a school in Zambia. The group gave financial assistance for medications in communities and granted school tuition scholarships as well.

Sweeney related several stories of her time in Africa including one of a young girl. As Sweeney made the child's acquaintance, she realized the girl's legs were covered in sores and she was swarmed with flies. She sat on a dirty towel in immense pain. Sweeney administered medication and treated the girl. The next day she seemed to be a different child!

"That little tiny bit of compassion that we take for granted transformed her and that in turn, transformed me," Sweeney said. "It's just that we take it for granted and it opened me up to being more attentive to others needs."

Sweeney also encountered the mother of a nun. The elderly lady was suffering from tuberculosis. Sweeney admitted that when she visited the lady, she was awed. Though she was in such pain and



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Physician Receives

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harsh conditions, she was ecstatic to be visited by a physician. She told Sweeney that she felt like a queen.

"It is stories like that that give you encouragement to just keep doing even the little things for people," Sweeney explained.

Perhaps one of the most touching stories Sweeney shared was one about a dying Zambian woman. The hospital sent her home to die as they could not diagnose or alleviate her ailment. She had a burning fever, and she was so weak she could not even use the restroom alone. As Sweeney visited her, the young woman's parents were caring for her as her children surrounded her in the dire atmosphere. Sweeney had come to pray for the woman and the family. She told the caregivers to alternate Ibuprofen and Tylenol and to keep her hydrated. She was heartbroken as she prayed with them before she left. However, several weeks later, she was met with a beautiful surprise in the form of a miracle: the young woman had survived!

"These stories are examples of how humbling it is to open yourself up like that and the true blessing that it is," Sweeney said.

Dr. Sweeney is a member of the Secular



Dr. Margie Sweeney with JPIC Award.

recognize those who have modeled such courageous efforts."

The annual award was revived in 2007 after a lapse of several years. The 2007 award recognized the work of Dr. Tony Lazzara, an American physician and Secular Franciscan who operates a clinic and shelter for ailing children in Peru. The 2008 award honored Marie Dennis, a Secular Franciscan who directs the

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Answers to Puzzles on Page 10

Sudoku

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said. Dr Sweeney is a member of the Secular Franciscan Order, a mission-based group of the Catholic Church. It is different from other orders as members may be married or unmarried. Members spend one to two years in the order's formation program, learning about how St. Francis of Assisi loved and lived by the principles of the Catholic Church. Sweeney became professed in the order in 2006.

"It's really to follow the gospel of Jesus Christ in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi," Sweeney said.

The Secular Franciscan Order recently recognized Sweeney's endeavors and dedication. The Order awarded her the Franciscan Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Regional Award at the Sand Pedro Center in Winter Park, Florida.

"I was just amazed. I had no idea that I was even being considered for the award!" Sweeney said. "It was a huge surprise to me."

While this was a huge surprise, she was in for an even bigger astonishment. The Order then bestowed the National JPIC Award upon her during the annual chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States at Savior Pastoral Center in Kansas City! National Minister Deacon Tom Bello, OFS, presented the JPIC Award, a glass statue of a pair of hands enveloping the globe, along with a \$2,000 prize.

"I gained a new level of faith and trust in God," she told the 80 chapter attendees, representing over 13,000 Secular Franciscans across the U.S. and Guam. "I had a new attitude of gratitude."

Formerly known as the Peace Award, the JPIC Award was renamed to capture the significant inter-related efforts in the areas of justice, peace and the integrity of creation, noted Ferris, OFS.

"Our Franciscan Rule reminds us of our responsibility to 'individually and collectively be in the forefront of promoting justice by the testimony of our lives.' The JPIC Award allows us to

2008 award honored Marie Dennis, a Secular Franciscan who directs the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns and who is immersed in advocating on behalf of people marginalized by society, poverty, abuse, war, violence, and human trafficking. The 2009 award went to Don Ryder, a Secular Franciscan from Wisconsin who helped save the Maasai people in Kenya from disease and drought by drilling water wells.

In 2010 the award honored Br. David Buer, OFM, for his work with the homeless and marginalized in Tucson and Las Vegas. In 2011 the award went to Fr. Louie Vitale, OFM, a Franciscan friar known for protests against war and torture and advocacy for the poor. Last year Janice Benton, a Secular Franciscan from Maryland, was honored for her advocacy work for people with disabilities. Among the more notable prior recipients were the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

Dr. Margie Sweeney begins practicing at Osceola Council on Aging on November 1, 2013. Dr. Sweeney is minister of St. Michael the Archangel Fraternity in Tampa, Florida. She resides here in St. Cloud with her environmental-engineer husband, Michael. They have a son, Patrick, and a daughter, Kelly and are members of St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church.

Currently, Sweeney is focusing her mission trips in Haiti. She first visited in 2010 and has continued to visit each year since. She will return in March of 2014. She encourages other physicians and community members to share in this experience. Currently, HHHM is in need of a dentist and an ophthalmologist.

"Really, it's a blessing. They should consider giving some of their time back whether it's locally or on a mission trip," said Sweeney. "I can't explain how it affects you. When you give back, you get much more in return than you ever realize."

If you would like more information about how to get involved, please visit Helping Hands Healing Ministries on Facebook or call 407-973-3366.