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MIKE KEEFER/DENVER POST

Advocates for homeless help to stimulate economy

■ Federal funds not only serve needy; they create (and preserve) jobs

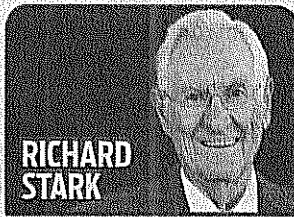
There has been much discussion lately of the costs and results of federal stimulus fund programs. Since a significant amount of stimulus funds was entrusted to the Treasure Coast Homeless Services Council, I thought it would be appropriate to report on these funds.

Over the past 10 years, our council has obtained and administered almost \$16 million in federal and state grants, due entirely to the skill and dedication of our executive director, Louise Hubbard.

In addition, in 2010 the council undertook administration of two major stimulus programs, also under the management of Ms. Hubbard.

Under the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program, the council expended almost \$1.9 million in rental and utility assistance for people making \$29,940 or less for a family of four.

A review of the impact of these funds on the local economy shows that about 1,519 households were assisted with rent and utility payments made directly to local landlords and utility companies to restore services.



RICHARD STARK

GUEST COLUMNIST

The funds were disbursed directly to 347 landlords, primarily in Indian River County. Eight new local jobs were created with these funds.

Not only did we help tenants in distress by paying rent to keep them housed, but we also helped the local economy by paying the landlords.

These landlords, in turn, were able to pay their own bills and property taxes, putting money back into our economy.

An additional \$2.4 million in Neighborhood Stabilization Program funds were administered by our council (in cooperation with the Coalition for Attainable Homes, which was created by our council). This program provided for the purchase by Indian River County of vacant, foreclosed homes in distressed neighborhoods.

Fourteen homes were purchased by the county and transferred to our council for rehabilitation and rental with a view to transfer most of them to five service agencies, including Every Dream Has a Price, National Association for the Mentally Ill, Homeless Family Center, Breath of Heaven and Economic Opportunities Council. Most of these homes had been vandalized and overgrown with weeds.

All rehabilitation work on these foreclosed homes was awarded to five local contractors, 10 local subcontractors, two Realtors, three inspectors, a surveyor and a local title company. The impact of these funds on the local economy was no doubt favorable, and all of those involved were very grateful to get these jobs in this economy. I am sure that we also helped them pay their own bills.

In addition, 14 families will be able to obtain housing otherwise unavailable to them. Other people involved in this program were Todd Heckman, treasurer of the Coalition for Attainable Homes and

chairman of the board of Habitat for Humanity, and Tom Tierney, chairman of the coalition and recent chairman of the Homeless Family Center.

I must confess that I personally do not favor spending federal funds (basically borrowed funds) on local projects such as these, notwithstanding the benefits to our community.

However, a decision was made by our federal and state governments to appropriate and allocate stimulus funds locally. If these funds were rejected by us, they would have been reallocated elsewhere. Our council concluded that we could not make the decision for our community to reject these funds.

With the encouragement of Indian River County government we decided to take whatever benefits were available for our citizens and hope that the policy issues would be resolved at the ballot box.

Richard A. Stark has been chairman of the Treasure Coast Homeless Services Council, Vero Beach, since its inception in 2000.