



## Respect 90® Foundation Volunteer Spotlight

Says Joe Maddon: "The volunteers are the unsung heroes. Without them, none of our efforts occur." Every month, the Respect 90 Foundation will salute a distinguished volunteer from the communities of Tampa Bay, Chicago, Mesa, Arizona or Hazleton, Pennsylvania. Respect 90 will present a \$1,000 grant to that volunteer's charity. Should you have someone who is deserving, please let us know.



**Byron Graves | Trinity Cafe (Tampa)**

There is a sign outside the Trinity Cafe that reads Humanity Begins with a Meal.

Want proof? Meet Byron Graves.

"I was homeless living in Rowlett Park in North Tampa," the 50-year-old Indianapolis native recalls. "I was sleeping at the park on benches. My stomach was growling. I used to get a 50-cent cake and pinch off a piece and eat it and drink water. That would last me for three days. That was my nutrition. That was what I used to do.

"A guy told me that Trinity Cafe was feeding people every day. I said 'Feeding?' So, I went there the first day and saw the meal that was laid out and I was in tears.

"I went to the director there and I asked him 'What can I do to help? I want to give back. I can't take this meal and give nothing.' He told me I could volunteer. I told him I would do anything. One meal is like a year's wages when you're on the streets."

Graves volunteered for Trinity every day for three months while still homeless.

"I showed myself as faithful and dedicated. Since then there has been a great transformation within myself. Just about two years ago, they hired me on part-time as director of first impressions so I thought that was a good thing," he says proudly.

Cindy Davis, program director at Trinity Cafe, is equally proud: "I sometimes hear people make distasteful remarks about the "homeless." When I hear the word "homeless" I immediately think of Byron, who was homeless, and is now an integral part of our staff and a role model our guests respect and relate to because he has walked in their shoes. You cannot be in Bryon's presence for more than one minute before you have a huge smile on your face. His sunny disposition and positive attitude is contagious! I thank God for him and the positive impact he has on our organization and those we serve."

No longer a volunteer, Graves was able to get off the street. "I had enough to get me a small apartment- an efficiency- but it was just the biggest thing that had ever happened to me. People looked at it and said it was so small, but it was big to me."

For someone who had been on his own since he was 16, it probably looked like a castle. It was at that age while at home in Indianapolis, that Byron had an almost unthinkable conversation with his mother.

"My mother told me she was sorry she ever had me, that I was a misfit, that she wished that I was dead and I looked at her and said 'mother if you feel that way, then what I am doing here?' She said, 'my point exactly, so she kicked me out.'"

Thus, a life of uncertainty began with Byron surviving on the streets, or in motels and efficiencies. His solo journey over the years took him from Indianapolis through Kentucky and many points in between before he arrived in Tampa in 1992 in his mid-twenties.

"I was working with a youth group that was going door to door selling cleaning products. Every other week we would go to another city. But when we got here it was different. We were in our van, and I heard this voice say to me, 'Your train stops here.' I looked at the driver and said, 'Excuse me, my train stops here.' He asked why I didn't tell him that the night before and I said I didn't know then."

His time as a resident of the sunshine state has included a lengthy stint as a waiter at a Golden Corral, sharing his life's journey as a guest pastor in nearby churches and oh yes, a brush with death.

While traveling to visit family in Kentucky he was hit by an SUV and pronounced dead. "That voice said to me, 'It's not your time.'"

He recovered.

When Byron's not building relationships with guests at Trinity's door, he can usually be found setting up and preparing for service or cleaning up after each day is done. His spare time is filled with a passion for bowling. A natural, Byron carries a 200+ average and has won a number of amateur tournaments.

It's an unlikely journey that isn't finished.

"When they say humanity begins with a meal. It really did and I thank God for that meal," he says thankfully "My experience at Trinity has changed me tremendously because now when I look at the people who come through, I see me all over again. So, I began to look at them and say 'Hey, that's somebody's mother, that's somebody's brother or sister. You know what? That was me.

"I want to write a book entitled One Paycheck Away. Many people are just one paycheck away from being homeless and some people are just one paycheck away from coming up off the street and some people are just one meal away from getting their strength back.

"Trinity gave me that strength and now I am able to go and help somebody else."

- Rick Vaughn | Executive Director, Respect 90 Foundation

**Trinity Cafe** is a free restaurant, serving more than 400+ hot and hearty meals daily, at two Tampa, Florida locations, 365 days a year.

Anyone who comes to their door is welcome and served with kindness, compassion, dignity and respect – without question or qualification. For more information go to [trinitycafe.com](http://trinitycafe.com).

The logo for Trinity Cafe is displayed on a light-colored wall. The word "Trinity" is written in a large, purple, serif font, with the letter "i" in red. Below "Trinity", the word "CAFE" is written in a smaller, purple, sans-serif font, with each letter spaced out.