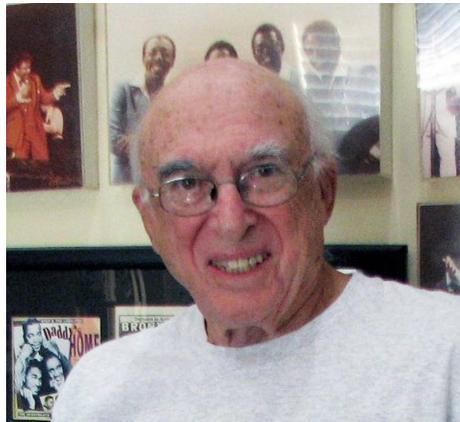


# DELRAY SUN

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## Our neighbors need help beyond the holidays | Opinion

By Steve West  
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Steve West (File Photo)

At this time of year, our thoughts turn to others. We think first of our dear friends and family, near and far. We express our relationship with a token of our love. Be it a toy, a jewel or a check — it's what we all do every December.

Many of us also think beyond our immediate circle. We express our thanks to those who've served us throughout the year, or who have done something special for us.

Even with all these joyous obligations making our head spin, we reach out further to share with someone we don't know personally, but we know they don't have the opportunity or support system that we might have.

In today's need-filled environment, just trying to discern how to best allocate our support can freeze us into inaction. There is so much need and so few resources in the hands of some of our overlooked neighbors.

Giving back makes us feel good knowing that a neighbor's struggle has been eased with a child's toy or a holiday meal. This makes for a warm moment for everybody, but the need outlives the moment. Our neglected neighbors struggle every day.

We tear off December's calendar page feeling good that we helped a stranger. Yet, in January, cupboards remain bare. School books remain tattered. Structures remain shabby. Hope erodes.

But hope also survives. Palm Beach County has a caring infrastructure that works tirelessly to help the poor get by each day while lifting themselves to a self-sustaining future. [THE IN-CROWD](#) has been organizing this "caring majority" of residents into a movement of volunteers and supporters to build bridges between poor and sufficient populations. Their mission is to help build a platform of equal opportunity that gives everyone a fair shot to realize their individual potential.

Let's take a look at one of the many incredible organizations that aid the poorest of our neighbors to survive today and partner to flourish tomorrow.

Spark plug powerhouse Maura Plante founded [Living Hungry](#), which provides literally tons of food to the most distressed. At the same time, she is helping people to build themselves, their families and their neighborhoods to become self-sufficient.

Living Hungry, in partnership with the [Palm Beach County Office of Community Revitalization](#) and in league with [Farm Share](#), Palm Beach County Sheriff Ric Bradshaw's officers, the School District of Palm Beach County and others, have teamed up to produce extraordinary results.

One example of Maura's incredible accomplishments is to provide food to every homeless child in 20 public schools — even on weekends. Visit [livinghungry.org](#).

There are hundreds of organizations and agencies that work tirelessly to bring resources and inspiration to our underserved neighbors. Together, they work to improve the quality of life for all residents in every way. To learn more and to volunteer, visit THE IN-CROWD at [thein-crowd.org/building-bridges](#). There is an holistic array of activities looking for volunteers to give a hand-up to help poor neighborhoods transform themselves.

Thanks to June Neal for inspiring this article. Readers can help pass the Universal School Meals Act, which will provide free breakfasts and lunches to all students in America. No more needy kids being left out. Sign her petition at [chng.it/rWp26yNRqZ](#).

*Steve West is a social justice advocate and entrepreneur living in Delray Beach.*