

Helping those in need

By JASON WITZ

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Elizabeth Woody wants to make it easier for the homeless to get a free meal.

The 13-year-old Punta Gorda Middle School student will spend her summer weekends making sure the residents aren't forgotten, even if it means burning a little extra gasoline to deliver that message.

The goodwill gesture is part of a new service project co-sponsored by the Florida Virtual School and Alonzo Mourning Charities, designed to better one's community.

Student teams across the state will compete during the upcoming weeks for a free trip to Mourning's annual "summer groove" in Miami, July 11-15. The event features a block party, basketball clinics and an NBA all-star game.

Each student team will document its work and prepare a portfolio to demonstrate the impact of the community service project. The **Florida Virtual School** offers supplemental courses to middle and high school students.

Woody's concept stemmed from a monthly initiative at her ministry, First Christian Church in Port Charlotte, where the homeless can get a shower and free food.

She hoped to simplify the process by bringing the meals to residents, since many didn't have transportation to attend the church program.

For the past two Saturdays, Woody has prepared bags containing hot and cold meals for needy people.

The method of distribution isn't perfect, as Woody and several church members had to drive around the first week to find possible recipients. But the results have been gratifying for Woody, who plans to continue the initiative until school begins.

"We just want the homeless to know people do care about them," she said.