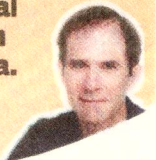


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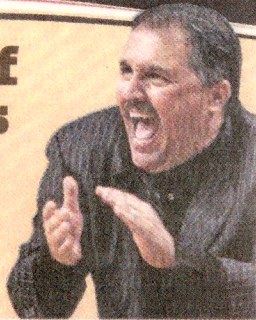
MIKE THOMAS

Let's steal jobs from California. Here's how. B1



## War of words

Pat Riley (left) and Stan Van Gundy are sparking the Miami-Orlando rivalry early, George Diaz says. C1



RAYS TOP YANKEES WITH 11TH-INNING HOMER, C6



**HEALTHKEY DAILY**  
Message: It could rev up immune system. A2

Partly cloudy. Forecast, B10

8 A.M. 77°



NOON 88°



4 P.M. 92°



8 P.M. 84°



**BUSINESS**

Harry Potter ride now is better fit for larger fans. B5



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**MENTAL-HEALTH CAMPAIGN**

# Depressed by recession? Help is here

By Kate Santich  
ORLANDO SENTINEL

Mirta Medina has wrestled with depression much of her adult life, but it wasn't until the recession hit that the 58-year-old widow "felt the whole world cave in."

A former Orange County toll operator, Medina lost her job 16 months ago. She had to sell her furniture and jewelry just to get by. And creditors pestered her so relentlessly to pay past-due bills that she couldn't drag herself out of bed some mornings to face the day.

"Before this, even though I had depression, I was doing good with it," she said. "But what I've been through in the past 16 months I wouldn't wish on anybody."

In the worst economy since the Great Depression, experts say there are thousands of others like Medina in Central Florida — and that too many of them are suffering in silence.

That's the reason behind a new campaign,

Please turn to **HELP, A9**

**WHOM TO CONTACT**

To reach a trained crisis-hotline operator, 24 hours a day, call 2-1-1. For more information, go to itsokaytogethelp.com or call 407-898-0110.



**HEALTHKEY™**

How to help someone who's depressed.

OrlandoSentinel.com/health

**From Page One**

## HELP

Continued from Page A1

"It's Okay to Get Help," launched this month to encourage people to speak up — to family, friends, pastors, mental-health professionals and crisis counselors — if they're feeling overwhelmed, and to do so sooner rather than later.

"Our hope is that people will seek help a lot earlier and save themselves and their families the heart-break of letting issues go to crisis," said Candice Crawford, president and CEO of the Mental Health Association of Central Florida, the nonprofit organization leading the collaborative effort. "Stress can be devastating."

In a series of ads now running on Bright House Networks, local politicians, business leaders and philanthropists will repeat that refrain. "If you're having a problem, don't go it alone," said Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer in the first ad, which started airing Labor Day weekend.

Other versions feature Orlando police Chief Val Demings, University of Central Florida President John Hitt, Florida Hospital CEO Lars Houmann, Orlando Magic Vice President Linda Landman-Gonzalez and former state lawmaker Dick Batchelor.

Though no particular tragedy spawned the campaign, Crawford said the unrelenting pressure of the 3-year-old economic recession has taken a heavy toll — not only on those directly affected by foreclosure and unemployment, but also by those who fear they may be next.

The Heart of Florida United Way's 2-1-1 hotline, which already handled callers looking for help paying their rent and power bills, early this year began fielding calls from people in emotional crisis. Lately, from 1,000 to 1,500 callers each month fall into that category, including a small but growing percentage that is suicidal.

"One thing that we keep hearing people say is: 'I'm worth more dead than alive,'" said Larry Olness, the nonprofit agency's vice president for community services. "I've heard that more in the last month than I have in the previous 15 years. They feel they've let their families down, and they feel like the only thing they have left is their life insurance policy."

Caree Jewell, the hotline's director, said her staff is trained to assess how desperate the caller's mental state is and to refer the person to someone who can provide in-depth help — immediately, if necessary.

But she emphasizes that

people who are feeling depressed, anxious and even desperate in the current economy are not by definition mentally ill. Three years of fruitless job-seeking or the downward spiral of one's financial well-being is enough to make most rational people suffer at least some emotional symptoms.

And for those who do have a history of mental illness, financial stress can trigger a relapse, Jewell said.

Despite increasing acceptance of mental-health therapy, Crawford said, the stigma of seeking help remains a substantial barrier for many. For others, it is the cost and the lack of insurance to cover it.

"We do provide referral services at our office, and we're usually dealing with the people who have little or no means," Crawford said. "We may have to beg ... but we are able to find therapists to take those cases."

Medina, the former toll operator, ultimately sought counseling. Though some days are still a struggle, she said, the experience has been a lifeline.

"My therapist has helped me a lot," she said, "otherwise I don't think I'd even be able to talk about it right now."

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