

Perspective from the One Stop Center

No doubt, more than one movie has been made recently that builds the "Great Recession" into its plot line.

"Up in the Air" with George Clooney, Vera Farmiga and Anna Kendrick is one that my wife and I watched on cable recently, about a guy who travels around the country firing people. Not very inspiring fare, or seemingly a very sympathetic character, but somehow you come to care about Clooney's character. Even in our escapism, we can't escape the reality of tough times.

Evan Longoria complained the other day

EAST WORD



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about the poor attendance at Tampa Bay Rays games, even though the team had the best record in baseball.

More than one person suggested that the economy had something to do with it. Probably true. Take the Tampa Bay Bucs. Their two home games so far this season have been

blacked out on TV because they can't fill their stadium.

On Friday, I had an opportunity to walk through the Bill Galvano One Stop Center, off Ninth Street West near McKechnie Field.

The center houses the Community Coalition on Homelessness and Our Daily Bread, organizations that feed and assist those in such dire straits that the last thing they are thinking about is watching anything on cable or going to a baseball game.

No, at the One Stop Center, the priorities of the clients are: 1. When do I eat again? And 2. Where

do I sleep tonight?

"We have gone from zero to 5,000 mph in 18 months," coalition board member Lee Martin told me in a phone interview of the huge client load.

It's difficult to imagine the One Stop Center not existing before 2009, and what those desperate clients — hundreds of them each day — would do now without it.

As I walked through the center I took note of some of those clients, many of whom were rail thin, their skin leathery from living outdoors. It pulled at the heart strings, and made me think, "There but by the grace of God go a lot

of us."

It also gave me renewed appreciation for the good people who serve as directors, volunteers and donors and make possible places like the One Stop Center and other safety-net organizations. They are helping lift some of the misery and surely saving lives.

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