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FEATURED

Retired letter carrier continues food drive legacy

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Chris Howell
Chris Howell | Herald-Times

A dialysis machine beeps in the background as blood flows in and out of Bill Sherman's 60-year-old body. He's done this for a year as he waits for a kidney transplant.

But even with deteriorating kidneys, Sherman is still preparing to collect food for the 25th annual Stamp Out Hunger campaign, an initiative he helped start in Monroe County.

"It was my baby for 25 years," he said. "It's very humbling. I've seen how much it's grown."

Though he has missed a food drive or two, once to make funeral arrangements for his father, he won't miss this one — despite his failing kidneys.

"If you continue to keep giving, it gives you a sense of worth and keeps you going," said Sherman, a retired postal carrier of 37 years.

This year, for the 25-year anniversary of the program, letter carriers and the Hoosier Hills Food Bank have set a goal to collect 50,000 pounds of food. According to their annual report, in 2016, the food bank managed to bring in 39,123 pounds.

Julio Alonso, Hoosier Hills Food Bank's executive director, said the 50,000-pound goal is feasible because of two factors: growing awareness in the community about the drive and the work of letter carriers, and former carriers, such as Sherman.

"This drive wouldn't be possible without the letter carriers," Alonso said.

Joshua Peterson, president of Branch 828 of the National Association of Letter Carriers, worked with Sherman for 10 years before Sherman retired. He said Sherman's passion for the food drive and helping others was obvious.

Sherman had been an officer for the local branch of NALC for around 20 years and president of the board for Hoosier Hills Food Bank. He said the support the food drive receives each year is remarkable.

"It was just like 'boom,' and it exploded," Sherman said. "I can't believe it's been 25 years."

He did acknowledge it's become more difficult to volunteer since starting dialysis this past year. The likelihood of survival gets worse the longer someone is on dialysis, Sherman said. But working on his '58 Cadillac and having the support of his wife of 35 years, Cyndi Currie, help him persevere.

He also has another reason for hope, and it comes from the people on his former mail route. Sherman's letter-carrying route took him through the Hyde Park neighborhood, where he joked and chatted with residents every day.

He was so involved with people's lives, they organized a fundraiser for him when his kidneys started failing.

"I used to always get real emotional about it," Sherman said of the event. "You just take the time to talk to people."



Bill Sherman, a letter carrier with the U. S. Post Office, has been participating with the Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive for 25 years.

Courtesy photo

As a letter carrier, Peterson said, it's vital to understand people and encourage them to help with initiatives such as the Stamp Out Hunger food drive. Letter carriers see people in need every day on their routes. They see the older couples who need a little extra food to make it to the end of the week. They see the families unsure whether their kids will have one meal or two after school meal programs stop for the summer.

Sherman said it is often those who have the least who are the most consistent food donors. "They've been there," he said. "If they have something extra, they help out."

Letter carriers, some retired like Sherman, will be out in force on Saturday as they make their rounds to 130,000 addresses in Bloomington and the surrounding areas. Alonso said he has no doubts about the success of the food drive or the commitment of people such as Sherman, who stay involved no matter what, even through illness.

"They always come through for us and they come through with a smile," Alonso said.

How to help

Letter carriers and other volunteers will be picking up donations throughout the day Saturday. Fill a grocery bag with healthy, nonperishable food in nonbreakable containers and set the food by your mailbox. Items will be collected rain or shine and delivered to Hoosier Hills Food Bank and other local agencies. Early donations can be dropped off at Bloomington's main post office, 520 S. Walnut St., or Woodbridge Station, 3210 E. 10th St., and in donation barrels at downtown businesses.

For more information, visit www.monroeunitedway.org/StampOutHunger or <http://www.hhfoodbank.org/>.