

TIMES & TRANSCRIPT



Riverview Mayor Ann Seamans (left) and Ginette Pettipas Taylor, Moncton-Riverview-Dieppe MP and federal health minister, volunteered to help out with the Salvation Army's annual kettle campaign Saturday morning at the Atlantic Superstore in Riverview. PHOTO: CRAIG BABSTOCK/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

'I'll do this as long as I can stand': Longtime volunteer fundraiser

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TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Jeff Wood has stood next to a Salvation Army kettle for hundreds of hours over the last decade, but he's not tired yet.

"I'll do this as long as I can stand," he said while collecting donations at the Dieppe market Saturday morning.

Wood is one of many Salvation Army volunteers who dedicate their time in the weeks leading up to Christmas each year to collect cash as part of the army's iconic kettle campaign. It's the organization's main fundraiser for the year and every cent dropped into the kettle is used to fund programs throughout Metro Moncton.

Wood said he started as a kettle volunteer nine years ago, spending every lunch hour at the Blue Cross Centre downtown. Over the last few years, he's spent his Saturday mornings in the weeks before Dec. 25 at the market.

By mid-morning Wood's kettle — which these days is really more of a hanging plastic bubble — had a pile of coins inside, to go with a handful of bills.

"I like the sound of the coins, but I like the swish more. I'd rather hear the swish," he said with a laugh. "I started off with \$20 this morning. That was a good start."

Joking aside, Wood said he's happy whenever someone makes a donation, and the amount doesn't matter.

"The need's great in the community and it all adds up."

He volunteers Tuesday mornings at the Salvation Army's King Street location, where breakfast is provided to those in need. Last Tuesday, he counted

90 people.

"Maybe they otherwise wouldn't have had breakfast that morning. The only reason that can exist is because of this," said Wood, thumping the kettle for emphasis.

While speaking to the Times & Transcript, he constantly paused when someone dropped cash into his bin to offer a "Thank you very much, Merci beaucoup" or a "God bless." When asked if working the kettle can be a boring job at times, he said not for him.

"No, I enjoy meeting the people. It can be long, standing here, your legs cramping up, but I enjoy talking to people.

"Mostly every shift someone comes along and shares how the Salvation Army has touched them. Either they've directly received services or they know a family that has. They know how much of a difference the army makes. I've had people talk to me about life-changing things that have happened to them."

Natasha Burkett, the Salvation Army's director of community and family services, told the Times & Transcript the annual goal for the campaign this year is \$175,000 and it ends Dec. 23, although people can still donate after that date at fillthekettle.com.

Burkett said 100 per cent of donations are used for programs such as the free breakfast, food and toys as part of the Christmas aid effort, summer camp for kids, emergency services for citizens in need, and other services such as free laundry, life coaching, budget counselling and addictions recovery.

Last year, the campaign raised \$160,000, which was \$15,000 short of

the goal. This year's campaign is about \$12,000 off the 2016 pace.

"We are down a little bit. I'm not sure we will make our goal of \$175,000," said Burkett. "But the Greater Moncton area has always been good to the Salvation Army. This community is very compassionate."

The Salvation Army has 14 kettles out this season, in grocery stores, liquor stores, at the mall and in other venues, and a group of dedicated volunteers collecting from the public. On Saturday morning, Riverview Mayor Ann Seamans and Moncton-Riverview-Dieppe MP and federal Health Minister Ginette Pettipas Taylor were part of that volunteer team, spending a couple of hours with a kettle at the Atlantic Superstore. It was their second straight year volunteering with a kettle, in the name of #BeccaToldMeTo.

Pettipas Taylor said shoppers were generously donating whatever they could.

"People recognize, whether their donations be small or large, they really make a huge difference in the lives of people in our community and, at the end of the day, that's really what it's all about," she said.

Seamans considers working the kettle an excellent chance to see people in her community and wish them a Merry Christmas while also helping the Salvation Army. She said seeing people who may not have a lot of extra money digging into their pockets to donate is a moving experience.

"It pulls on your heart strings to see that, but it doesn't matter if it's a quarter or whatever it is."