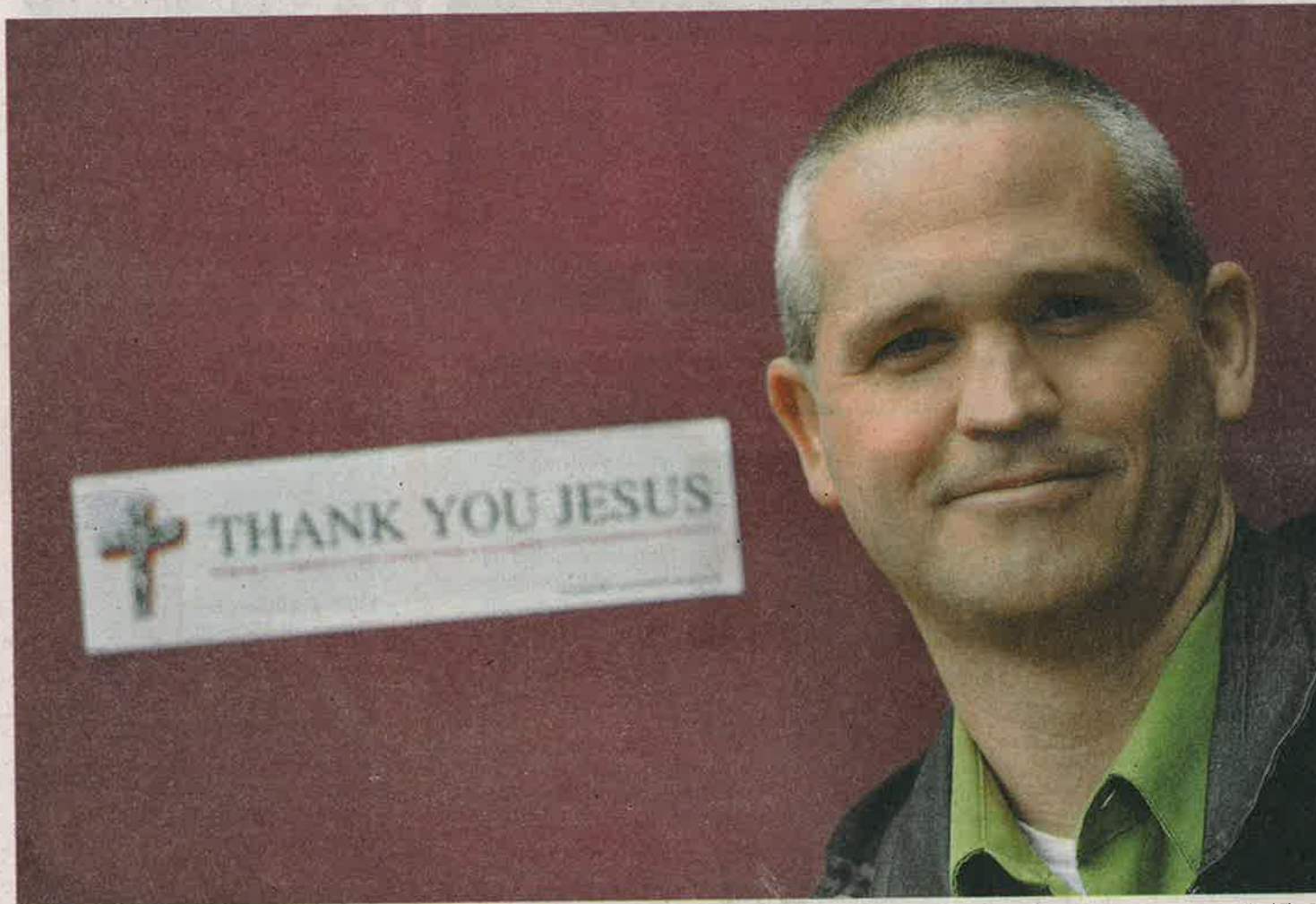


Food Rescue efforts feed hungry



MATT DETRICH / The Star

Meet John
Williamson,
2008
Hamilton
County
Citizen
of the Year
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For his efforts with his Food Rescue organization, Noblesville resident John Williamson has been named the 2008 Hamilton County Citizen of the Year. His work to keep food from going to waste and to get it to people who need it has inspired hundreds of volunteers.

UPBEAT CAROLS

St. Michael's Episcopal Church members sang Christmas carols in Noblesville.
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TOP DIVERS ARE CLOSE

Noblesville's Katie Bittner and Meghan Potee aim for excellence
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FOOD RESCUE

To volunteer, donate or learn more about Food Rescue, visit www.foodrescue.net or contact John Williamson at jw@foodrescue.net or (317) 694-4006.

After 13 months, John Williamson has about 600 people locally picking up food from 20 restaurants and delivering it to pantries such as Third Phase in Noblesville and Gleaners Food Bank in Indianapolis. Food Rescue quickly caught in with 40 chapters in 18 states.



MATT DETRICH / The Star

bread. Food Rescue grabs up to 20 pizzas a day from Little Caesars in Noblesville.

Owner Dave Koone, 39, Westfield, said offering ready-made pizzas keeps customers happy, but sometimes more pizzas stack up than people buy.

"I don't want to throw them in the Dumpster," he said. "I want to give them to the people in the community who need the food, and that's what John Williamson makes happen."

Koone, like other restaurant operators, hopes more restaurants will donate their unused food to the nonprofit. "There is often a fear about liability, but Food Rescue assumes any liability," he said. "We sign a waiver, and they assure the food is handled properly. We never let food go that's more than a day old."

With willing volunteers and national interest, Food Rescue has

quickly become Williamson's full-time commitment, if not his full-time job.

It's common for nonprofit organizations to pay executive directors such as Williamson. His position can draw up to \$48,000 annually, but he has taken only \$14,000 since becoming a nonprofit business under Indiana law in July.

Overcome by the enormity of running Food Rescue, he had thought to end the organization if it could not become financially sound in 2009. He's withdrawn that deadline, because he believes God wants him to run Food Rescue.

In making that decision, he said he considered *Deuteronomy 6:16*: "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."

Still, he knows the nonprofit will have take in more money to survive. He's hoping donations

pick up, and is planning several fundraisers. "I just want to keep my head above the water."

He used to work like his volunteers, picking up food and taking it to pantries, but he's become more focused on sustaining Food Rescue.

He obtained its nonprofit charitable status as recognized by federal taxing authorities on Dec. 11. The organization had been protected federally under Heritage Classic Foundation prior to that. He also wants to begin working with lawmakers in states in which Food Rescue operates to strengthen Good Samaritan laws that protect the donation of food. He figures that will be one of his main focuses in the new year.

"We need to change the system as it relates to food waste," he said.

★ Call Noblesville Ledger reporter Chris Sikich at (317) 444-5545.

WHAT OTHERS SAY

Many residents nominated John Williamson for the 2008 Hamilton County Citizen of the Year Award. Here is what some of them said:

"John should be commended and applauded for making his vision a reality and for the positive influence this mission is having on Hamilton County and the people who live here. He embodies all of the qualities that we admire in our citizens and is deserving of this award and recognition."

Bradley Wehner, Carmel, Food Rescue volunteer

"Last year, John got a vision and became obsessed with food that was going to waste every day. With all of the food pantries being overwhelmed daily with need, John thought it was crazy how much food was going into Dumpsters every night. . . . I know personally that this has taken a huge financial toll on his family, but John's service to his fellow man with support from God and those around him stands strong."

David Allen, Fishers, Food Rescue volunteer

"John in an inspired moment asked a restaurant what they did with leftover food. From this small beginning, John has founded a rescue of food that feeds at least hundreds of people in Hamilton County."

Pat Pfeifer, Indianapolis, Grace Community Church member

"It is a food rescue revolution!"

Donna Huss, Indianapolis, Food Rescue volunteer

"John Williamson deserves the Citizen of the Year award because he not only felt concern for the poor in our community but he did something about it."

John Bailey, Westfield, Food Rescue volunteer

"What more could one do to qualify for Citizen of the Year?"

Mike Louthan, Fishers



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