

Recent Press Releases



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Neely Young/Project Share Article -- <http://gapress.org>

Small Acts

Retirement affords reflection. Upon conclusion of my service as CEO of Dalton Utilities I have had time to explore much of Georgia that the demands of a work life wouldn't allow. I have seen its diverse landscape and beauty and had the chance to reflect on its many places and people in my new season. The enduring truth that has emerged is how small acts by individuals and organizations enrich our State...and can compound over time with unimaginable effect. Allow me the clearest example.

The Salvation Army operates throughout Georgia and is an invaluable resource for those in need. If you or others have been touched by them, you know it. If you have stuffed a dollar in their kettle at Christmas, you've been a part of it. They serve in the true spirit of doing "for the least of these". But part of their story in Georgia have never been written.

Many times, those they serve are in grave financial circumstances...and in those moments The Salvation Army provides help with rent and food and energy assistance, and sometimes just a comforting conversation. However, like most social service non-profits, their resources are always limited. Yet, they soldier on and make a profound difference to those in need.

The leadership of The Salvation Army, both professional staff and volunteers have always been creative when solving problems. This proved to be particularly true around 1984, with the Dalton Georgia chapter. Because of the inability of many of The Salvation Army clients to pay their electric bills the staff and board chairman began conversations with my former employer, Dalton Utilities as it was in both parties' interest to address the problem. The Salvation Army of Dalton Board Chairman was the publisher of the local newspaper, the Dalton Daily Citizen. This publisher, Neely Young, later an award-winning columnist, CEO of a newspaper publishing company and co-owner of Georgia Trend magazine championed the conversations with my predecessors. They agreed that Dalton Utilities would solicit funds for the Salvation Army through bill stuffers and that the newspaper would solicit funds through a

printed public awareness campaign. The community responded and the local Salvation Army was able to increase its benevolence funds by nearly \$30 thousand, no small sum in the 1980's. A small act generated early support to defray the electric bills of the many Salvation Army client families.

This fledgling effort was noticed by the leadership of Georgia Power. Ben Harris, a Georgia Power executive at the time invited Neely to come to Atlanta describe the Dalton innovation. Georgia Power modified the concept birthed in Dalton to allow customers to make voluntary donations through their electricity bill which would be matched dollar-for-dollar by the Company. The program would go on to be named Project SHARE and evolve into one of the nation's most successful assistance endeavors . The Salvation Army was contracted with to administer the distribution of the funds statewide. In addition to help with electric bills these funds also aid with rent, food, and other essentials.

Then the miracle. Throughout the ensuing 35 years, Project SHARE by these Salvation Army managed funds has provided nearly \$73 million in much needed assistance to nearly one million of our struggling neighbors throughout Georgia. No small act!

Small acts of innovative fundraising by a few in the NW corner of Georgia so long ago have multiplied to so many. Furthering the compounding, other utilities in Georgia took up this program in support of their neighbors. Municipal Utilities, the Electric Membership Cooperatives, Gas South, and Atmos Energy have adopted and implemented similar programs...and the spark struck by a few has been fanned further by many.

We're fortunate that Georgians are generous and that this program has continued to provide much needed meaningful assistance. A further illustration of the generosity of Georgians is that during the worst of financial times the giving increases. Ironically, as times have seen economic upturns of late, the contributions have decreased slightly. It would be my hope to see continued growth in Georgian's generosity toward this program. Such growth would honor those early initiators who birthed this worthwhile endeavor. Increased generosity to Project SHARE also furthers the noble mission of the Salvation Army's efforts to assist "the least of these" and solidifies the small act that gave this program its genesis that has helped so many.

—Don Cope, Retired CEO, Dalton Utilities

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