

SPOTLIGHT ON MISSION

Positive stories
Valuable work



John Younger is a loyal Christmas Kettle volunteer after an encounter with The Salvation Army changed his life.

Christmas kettles herald season of hope

Salvation Army campaign a tangible expression of "God among us"

Renée Joette Friesen
Special to ChristianWeek

John Younger was grieving the loss of his wife of 45 years when, in 2009, he tossed a toonie into a Salvation Army Christmas Kettle outside his local mall in Scarborough, Ontario.

The kettle worker thanked him and wished him a merry Christmas, to which he reacted harshly and swiftly—"No way will I have a merry Christmas!"

Seeing she had upset Younger, the bell-ringer apologized, and so did Younger with an explanation for his outburst.

"I had sort of put her on the spot and I was ashamed," he says, adding the worker then suggested he attend The Salvation Army Scarborough Citadel Christmas Eve service to help with his grief.

A couple of weeks later, Younger took her up on the suggestion and went to the church, where he was warmly greeted and soon made many friends.

He has been going to the Sunday services ever since then, and he

also attends adult Bible study and grief counselling sessions.

"The people have all been so kind; it is just like being at home," he says.

Younger's positive experiences at The Salvation Army prompted him to want to give back.

"When the (2010) kettle campaign started, I thought 'that's for me,'" says Younger, who is now into his third consecutive year of volunteering. "Volunteering for The Salvation Army makes me feel good," he says. "I still miss my wife so much, but it's not as bad because of the people at The Salvation Army."

Younger's experience is like many others touched by The Salvation Army around the world.

In Indiana in 2005, Diane Stark was also moved by the compassion of a Salvation Army bell-ringer when she told him tearfully she had nothing to give. Just a few days earlier, Stark's husband had asked her for a divorce, and she nearly broke down when the bell-ringer encouraged her with kind words.

"The 2005 Christmas season was

the most difficult time of my life. I was scared and without hope, and that bell-ringer's kindness meant more to me than he will ever know. He reminded me that I wasn't alone and I still had something to offer," Stark says.

She never forgot that meaningful encounter, and in 2007 she and her children began volunteering for the Christmas Kettle Campaign.

"It started when my son's Sunday school class asked each of the students to take a shift manning the kettle, but it's become so much more than just a church obligation. It wouldn't be Christmas without it now. It feels good to give back and I think it's important to teach my children that helping others is something God expects of us as Christians. And we think it's fun!"

All money raised through the annual Christmas Kettle Campaign stays in the community where the donations are generated, which means Younger's and Stark's volunteer efforts as kettle workers benefit their local areas.

Spots

- The Salvation Army is an international Christian organization that began its work in Canada in 1882 and has grown to become the largest non-governmental direct provider of social services in the country.
- Canada's first kettle appeared in St. John's, Newfoundland in 1906.
- The Salvation Army gives hope and support to vulnerable people in 400 communities across Canada and more than 120 countries around the world.
- The Salvation Army Christmas Kettle Campaign helps provide direct, compassionate, hands-on service to more than 1.8 million people in Canada each year.
- How The Salvation Army impacted Canadians last year:
 - Addictions, Rehabilitation and Shelter: 6,340 shelter, addictions, detox and mental health beds provided each night for vulnerable men, women and families; 2,040 people completed addictions and rehabilitation programs; 2.8 million free meals served.
 - Community and Family Services: 1.3 million persons assisted with food, clothing or practical assistance; 4,506 children went to Salvation Army camps; 18 daycare centres provide a total of 1,008 available spaces.
 - Emergency Disaster Services: 20,835 people helped when disaster struck.
 - Hospice, Health and Long-Term Care: 200 hospital beds provided; 1,130 long-term care and supportive housing beds provided; 40 hospice beds provided.

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Photos courtesy of The Salvation Army

In Canada, the annual Kettle Campaign has grown into one of the country's most significant and recognizable charitable events.

Last year, donors across Canada gave more than \$21 million to the Kettle Campaign. Funds raised in the nearly 2,000 kettles in shopping malls, on street corners and online were used to support programs to assist more than 1.8 million people across the nation.

In addition to tending to the basic necessities of life, The Salvation Army provides shelter for homeless people and rehabilitation for those struggling with addiction.

"The Kettle campaign is proof that God is working among us. Only God could take a few hours of someone's time or a few of their dollars and use it to touch so many people," Stark says. "Volunteering to man a kettle is such a small thing. It doesn't take a lot of time or any special skills. It just takes a willing heart. God can use our willing hearts to do some really amazing things, and that's what The Salvation Army is all about."

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To find out how to volunteer for the Kettle Campaign or to make a donation, visit fillthekettle.com.

THE SALVATION ARMY

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