

McHenry Grocery Inventory Coordinator Recognized for 14-Year Commitment to Feeding Families

Ask Pat Otterson about her efforts in helping enrich her community, and she will say it doesn't feel like she does very much.

Ask anyone else and you'll hear a different story: Her McHenry, Ill. Meijer teammates, fellow volunteers, and the 15 council members who work with Pat to organize the Knights of Columbus Annual Food Drive twice a year have a lot to say about the Meijer Grocery Inventory Coordinator's contribution.

"Pat is the glue that keeps it together;"

"Without Pat, none of this would have been possible;"

"She's the one who helps make miracles happen."

These are just a few of the reasons, according to Ron Rogers and Wayne Miczek of the McHenry Knights of Columbus, why the group presented her with a Guardian Angel Award. After all, she's represented the McHenry Meijer in support of the organization's twice annual holiday meals donation event for the last 14 years. Each year, Pat partners with her store to help provide boxes of grocery items to about 400 families in need across McHenry County the week of Thanksgiving, and again the week of Christmas.

Since Pat began volunteering with the event the McHenry Knights of Columbus have provided more than 10,000 boxes of food and the store has donated nearly \$50,000 to support. When families in need came to the event last month, each box had enough grocery items to feed a family well beyond the holiday meal.

"If we can put meals on a family's table for a few days or a week, maybe some treats like popcorn or sweets that means they might have some extra money for the holidays, maybe a few presents for their children," Wayne said. "And Pat has been with us every step of the way."

The events have provided 400 families a box of food at times they might need it most. The idea began by providing a turkey or ham for holiday dinners, but soon, Ron asked the council if they could try to do more. So, they kept raising money and seeking support in the community.

When a previous partner ended its support in 2008, there were doubts they could continue. Then Ron's wife heard a previous McHenry Meijer Store Director speak at a Rotary Event about the company's commitment to the community. Ron reached out and explained his council's dilemma and asked whether Meijer would consider lending a hand.

Within a few months, the Knights of Columbus were ready to host their Thanksgiving event.

"While I've been part of it since the beginning, I've never done it alone," Pat said, disagreeing that she deserved an award. She credits the event's success to the many other Meijer team members who've helped make sure Meijer did its part to keep things running smoothly, so those families know how much the community cares.

"When I came to this store 3 years ago, Pat told me about the donation, but this is more than a donation," said Shaun Bonner, the current McHenry Meijer Store Director. "When you are part of this event, you truly feel part of a community and see how you can make a difference. She says it doesn't feel like she does very much, but all of us know that is one of the few things she's been wrong about when it comes to the Annual Food Drive."

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