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We're **ALL IN**

Your guide to SouthCoast nonprofits and volunteer opportunities





Volunteers prepare bags to give to needy children at Gifts to Give. [PETER PEREIRA/STANDARD-TIMES FILE/SCMG]

The spirit of *giving*

Generosity of volunteers, donors is what makes
GiftsToGive special

By Peggy Auliso
Contributing Writer

Just watch the video of children on the GiftsToGive Facebook page talking about the spirit of giving and you get an idea of what this organization is all about. It's fun to watch the kids trying to pronounce the word philanthropy.

The spirit of giving is the message that Founder and CEO Jim Stevens stressed during a tour of the facility in mid-October.

"The model is to connect children to giving and service," Stevens said.

As its brochure states, GiftsToGive is "a philanthropy factory powered by children and managed by adult volunteers."

The organization is in its eighth year. After five years in the former Berkshire Hathaway building on Cove Street in the South End of New Bedford, it moved in 2014 to the old Titleist golf ball factory at 1 Titleist Drive in Acushnet. The new facility has 60,000 square feet, or twice the space.



Volunteers contribute to the spirit of giving at GiftsToGive. Shown are, left side, left to right: Martha Kay, Marcia Mitchell, Louise Murphy, Sandra Haworth and Sheila Gallagher; right side front to back: Ann Polk, Vivian Scrocca, Gwen Lang, Diane Foster and Mary O'Keefe. [PEGGY AULISIO/STANDARD-TIMES SPECIAL/SCMG]

Stevens, who is 68, says he “grew up in corporate America,” working for companies like Revlon and Max Factor and starting his own import/export business before retiring in his 30s. In his 50s, he decided to tackle what he saw as a huge problem that hadn't been solved, despite good intentions from 1930s welfare programs to The War on Poverty under President Lyndon Johnson to the efforts of more recent presidents.

“I'm an original Baby Boomer, son of the Greatest Generation,” Stevens said, adding, “I'm embarrassed for my generation.”

Stevens said poverty is not just a problem of lack of education but, “The missing piece is healthy families. Half the kids living in poverty don't graduate high school. The solution is to connect them to giving and service.”

GiftsToGive serves a wide area from Newport, Rhode Island, to the Upper Cape. Stevens, who does not take a salary, said the organization operates at less than \$250,000 a year and receives no government money or grants. Expenses have been paid by a growing number of donors, beginning with just Stevens, his brother and a friend and growing last year to 900 families.

Stevens said, “We helped about 2,000 homeless kids get birthday presents last year,” and that 400 kids delivered them.

The procedure at GiftsToGive was devised to get the most use out of donated goods.

Places like social service organizations can go online to request gift packages. Stevens showed a request from a social worker for a book and clothing pack. The pack was created with seven books,

age appropriate clothes and toys that weren't asked for but included anyway.

Orders are then fulfilled from the many donated items organized inside the vast warehouse, where volunteers clean, repair, sort, package and label the materials.

More important than the gift packs, Stevens said, are the human interaction and connections. “A thousand kids a month come here, after school and on Saturdays,” he said. Plus, there are 500 adult volunteers.

Volunteers range from people cleaning and sorting donations to a retired judge “who fixes everything that's broken” in a workshop.

Among the toys are wooden train sets used to learn the alphabet. The train sets were donated by the manufacturer because a few letters were missing. The

letters were easily fixed by volunteers who just modified them. Stevens said the wooden train sets would cost \$70 to \$100 on Amazon.

The focus on education is evinced by the 180,000 children's books that were repurposed last year. “Every kid gets seven books,” Stevens said. “Most of the kids we help have no books in their

WHY I VOLUNTEER ...

“I volunteer at GiftstoGive in Acushnet. I have met many others who are also retired and give generously of their time. I cannot fit all I would like to say in 75 or less words. From the donations we receive to the processing to help children and families in the area, it is amazing. We are called the “UBERS” and yes no matter how small a group we are it does take a ‘VILLAGE.’”

– Sheila Gallagher

GET TO KNOW THE NONPROFIT New Bedford YMCA

By Curt Brown
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The New Bedford YMCA is celebrating its 150th year as it looks at its past and plans for the future.

James F. Scherer, president and chief executive officer of YMCA Southcoast, and Tara Pacheco, executive director of the New Bedford YMCA, talked about the New Bedford YMCA's longevity and its future plans to eventually upgrade its current building in an editorial board meeting with The Standard-Times.

"The YMCA has a rich history and has been a part of the city's history. Our mission is to strengthen the community," said Scherer. "The 150th is a watershed opportunity to launch the next 150 years."

At its core is youth development, now defined as battling obesity, helping children realize academic success and its aquatic program; healthy living through proper eating and exercise to prevent Type II diabetes; and social responsibility or becoming "good stewards" of existing resources, particularly through the community farm at the Dartmouth YMCA, they said.

The New Bedford YMCA is working with the New Bedford School Department and other nonprofits to correct the academic imbalance that currently exists in the city, Scherer said.

"We're tackling head-on community issues — health and education, diabetes control and prevention, keeping people out of the doctor's office and keeping premiums down," Scherer said. "We want to be here as much as possible for the community. We will continue to be here for everyone who needs us."

At its heart, though, the YMCA is still about friendship and "the good feelings" that come from those friendships, which sometime last a lifetime, she said. "So many people have been touched by the Y," she said.

The Y's aquatics program — considered "a must" for a coastal community like New Bedford — teaches children survival skills with a boost in self-confidence as a bonus, Scherer and Pacheco said. The Y will be teaching third-graders from the Gomes School and the Renaissance schools swimming lessons and water safety this year.

The New Bedford YMCA sees the need for upgrades to its current building.

The current building, located at 25 S. Water St., was built in 1972 and an addition was constructed in 1996, they said. "We have some 1970 challenges," Pacheco, who has been executive director for three years, but began working there 21 years ago as a lifeguard.

The fitness center, for one thing, is in the basement and needs to be relocated upstairs and given a more modern look, she said.

But the Y will not be moving. "It needs to be in downtown. It is in the right place," Pacheco said.

Learn more about the YMCA at ymcasouthcoast.org or 508-997-0734.



house."

Clothing makes up about half the volume, and the toys are cleaned so many times, "Every single toy looks immaculate," Stevens said.

Stevens said 95 percent of their donations come from families and 5 percent from businesses. "Twenty-thousand pounds a week of raw donations, all delivered here."

The donations have to be cleaned and processed. Just the size of the facility shows how important it is to employ organizational skills like taking inventory. In most cases, it's retirees, primarily women, who take on these tasks. And they do it cheerfully.

Many events are held at the facility, which has a great view of the Acushnet River. On the horizon for next year is the rehab of the old Titleist kitchen, where volunteers will serve food and teach nutrition.

About 10 percent of the donations are for adults. Stevens said they used to be given to an organization that sold them. Now, GiftsToGive has its own thrift shop, which is open on Saturdays.

"The thrift shop pays about 45 percent of our operating expenses," he said.

Among the programs offered are

middle school mentoring. There is also an early literacy, community-based reading program in pre-school, kindergarten and first grade, fueled by PTO parents and GiftsToGive volunteers.

Under Project Cinderella, gently worn formal dresses and accessories are provided to middle and high school girls to help celebrate their prom or other occasions.

Stevens described our nation as having "huge amounts of child poverty and huge amounts of wealth." As for how GiftsToGive plays a role, "Child poverty is our issue." Stevens said 24 million children live in poverty in the U.S., with another 24 million being "the working poor."

As for why people like him and the many volunteers have to help tackle such a big problem in America, he said, "All the problems, the government's not going to fix them." Stevens said it's up to "the community to fix them."

Stevens, who lives in Boston, said he looked at Gateway cities when he decided to "build a nonprofit based on business principles."

He first planned to open a place in Lawrence where he signed a lease only to have the Environmental Protection Agency close the building. New Bedford

Jim Stevens, CEO and Founder of GiftsToGive, looks over some toys. [PEGGY AULISIO/STANDARD-TIMES SPECIAL/SCMG]

How to help

GiftsToGive, 1 Titleist Drive in Acushnet, is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday and from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Wednesday and Saturday. Contact the organization at 508-717-8715 or www.giftstogive.org.



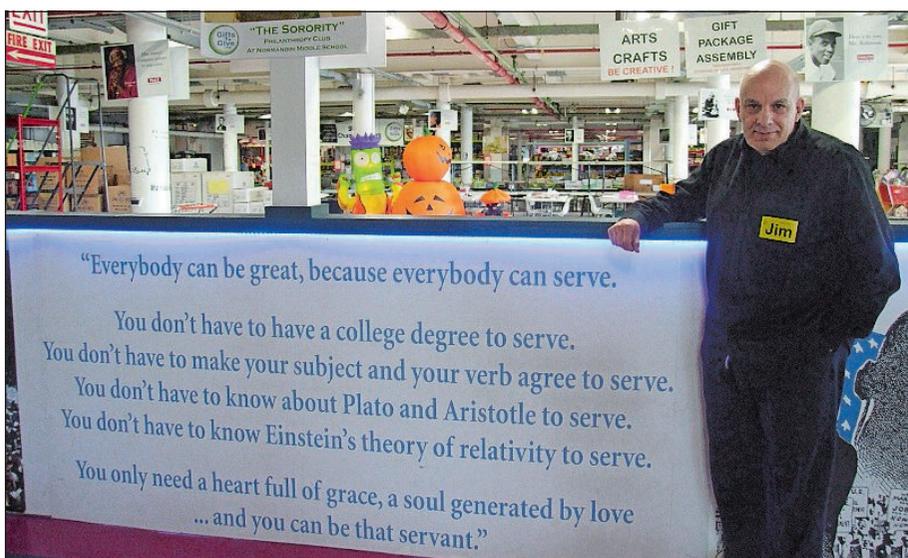
Shoppers look over the items for sale at the Gifts to Give Thrift Shop on 1 Titleist Drive in Acushnet. [DAVID W. OLIVEIRA/STANDARD-TIMES FILE/SCMG]

was second on his list.

As the brochure states, the business model “is low cost, high impact and has become almost self sustaining. In essence, we’re building a more caring community by repositioning philanthropy and redefining citizenship.”

It states, “Our primary mission is to

give young people, both the privileged and those in need, a very real opportunity to practice ‘Big Citizenship’ and ‘Tangible Philanthropy.’ From their gifts of time and treasure, children come to understand, through their doing, the power of giving and service and that we all have gifts to give.”



Jim Stevens in front of a sign that greets visitors to the facility in Acushnet. [PEGGY AULISIO/STANDARD-TIMES SPECIAL/SCMG]

WHY I VOLUNTEER ...

“I volunteer with United New Bedford and support their efforts to



not only bring nourishment to people in this community who are less fortunate but they also bring hope through spirituality to help

citizens find self worth and a sense of humanity. My reward is watching the smiles on people’s faces and seeing the positive impact it has on their lives. No compensation necessary! ... We donate time so that others might know what it feels like to be cared about. This isn’t a hobby; this is a labor of love. ... Together, we are just better together. This is our city and we should all take accountability for what happens here. Participation is necessary for change. It costs nothing to donate your time and effort. We all have a duty to respond, when able, to the needs of people around us.”

- Damond Normandin

GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN, INC.

Support Group

We provide support to grandparents raising grandchildren with monthly support groups, information, special programs and referral services.

We are a 501 C(3) Funded by donations & grants

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SUPPORT GROUP MEETING SCHEDULE

3rd Tuesday of Every Month
6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
Andrea McCoy Recreation Centre
Building 8

181 HILLMAN ST. (LOWER LEVEL)
NEW BEDFORD, MA 02740
508-996-0168