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THE SEASON FOR GIVING IS YEAR ROUND IN MARSHFIELD

by Connie Drapeau Kennedy

It started as such a simple idea. Representatives from different churches in town gathered to determine how they could best work together to assist their Marshfield neighbors and friends who needed help. Volunteers came from every neighborhood, and they were determined to help others regardless of faith.

Anyone who has started a community-wide group project knows that it is much easier to plan and launch a project than it is to maintain one. Yet, somehow, with just a shoestring budget, the volunteers at Sowing Seeds have done just that.

Throughout the country many groups attempt to form local, outreach organizations each year. Few survive the first few years. Yet, Sowing Seeds has passed the tenth anniversary of its inception, and over 2,700 calls for help have been answered.

In 1993, the Rev. Ed Duffy, formerly of the North Community Church, formed that network of volunteers from which Sowing Seeds emerged. Eager to co-ordinate their efforts and collectively care for their neighbors better than they ever could individually, the past and present board of directors has judiciously guided Sowing Seeds through these years. What sets Sowing Seeds apart is the dedication, faith and planning of its volunteers. Neither economic conditions nor facility obstacles have impeded Sowing Seeds in pursuit of its mission.

Before any phone calls were taken by the pioneering volunteers, an organizational model needed to be conceived. They not only needed to determine what services were most critical for Marshfield residents, they also had to devise a way to offer those services without a central, common location. How could volunteers, from different churches, from different parts of town, many with jobs, some with children or their own relatives to help, provide sustained assistance for their neighbors? These volunteers would discover that there was no easy answer.

The early members of Sowing Seeds needed to learn how to establish themselves as a charitable organization; they needed to learn what resources and programs existed in the region and government to assist in a diverse range of situations. They needed to learn what specialty or talent each volunteer had to contribute. They needed to learn which medical, human services, trade, media and professional volunteers were available locally, and which were willing to help. They needed to learn when it was essential to get professional help, and not intervene personally. They also needed to amass a larger

group of caring volunteers to contribute their time and compassion to help with mundane and professional tasks. Each step was critical. They did all this on their own time. It took two years for them to plan. All the while, no one in Sowing Seeds has ever taken a salary. Their rewards come from working together and helping others.

Despite our region's apparent prosperity and affluence, there are families all over town who struggle from day to day. Even more families fear the loss of a paycheck or our ever rising heating, medical and child care bills. We have become a two paycheck society, but recently our economic conditions have left many of us with only one paycheck per household. Marshfield – like other South Shore towns – has homeless and transient adults and children. That's not a tourist brochure highlight, but it's a fact. Housing costs have become prohibitive to many workers, and many people born in this region cannot afford adequate housing. Sowing Seeds volunteers work to find solutions for each family in crisis. Without a magic wand to wave, they each rely on their determination, compassion and faith to research and address each need as it is presented to them.

On a recent winter's night the Sowing Seeds volunteers received part of their reward. Temperatures dipped below zero, and one person they helped extensively had just that day moved into a housing complex. Prior to that she was sleeping in her car. It was a cold night in many homes; who knows how cold an old car would have been that night.

They next day was equally as cold. Many children stood at bus stops wearing mittens, scarves and hats that had been donated to the Sowing Seeds Clothing Bank. Those same children wore new socks, boots – and yes, even underwear, provided by cash contributions to Sowing Seeds. Over seventy percent of the families served at the Clothing Bank have children. Several Sowing Seeds volunteers themselves have been helped at some point by friends, church groups, Sowing Seeds or other organizations. During the last few years over 200 families have been assisted every year at the Clothing Bank. Each adult and child is treated with dignity and respect.

The dedication, faith and planning that sets Sowing Seeds apart as an organization is also imparted to the people it helps. The volunteers don't just give a hand out, they are committed to teaching others how to plan, persevere and solve short-term or recurrent problems. The services they offer extend well beyond tangible items. One of the most important beliefs they share is: "It's okay to ask for help." Too many people wait until a problem has evolved into a crisis before they ask for help. Sowing Seeds strives to help people who struggle, or who would otherwise "fall through the cracks" of red tape. Then they try to teach those same people how to re-work their lives to sustain more positive outcomes.

Through the years Sowing Seeds has offered a myriad of tangible and intangible services, including, but not limited to: career and job counseling, family budgeting, parenting advice, shopping assistance, senior citizen companionship or assistance, legal

aid advocacy, handicap ramps and handy-person chores. They've coordinated with other Marshfield groups to assure that meals are provided to the infirm or families in need.

One of the busiest services they provide is also one that urgently needs more volunteers. With a 72 hour, notice Sowing Seeds provides rides for the elderly, disabled and chronically ill to medical appointments. Many rides are local; but some people require rides to Boston. Sowing Seeds is seeking people who work in Boston, or people who are willing to drive to Boston to assist residents with transportation to specialized medical appointments. (Gas, parking and toll fees can be reimbursed, if need be.) During the past nine years, Sowing Seeds has given a lift to well over 1,000 people.

Over 200 people regularly volunteer their time, talent or treasure with Sowing Seeds. However, that number is deceiving. It doesn't adequately reflect all the school children, Brownies, Girl and Boy Scouts and church group members who raise money through bake sales and other fundraisers for Sowing Seeds. A few generous residents specify Sowing Seeds on their corporate United Way contribution pledges. Others have made donations and acquired the newly offered Memorial Cards or Celebration Cards, from which the proceeds benefit Marshfield families through Sowing Seeds. Sowing Seeds depends upon the generosity of the community for support and many of its services; it does not raise money on its own.

Year round people need a hand. Year round the volunteers offer support. One special group in town recognizes that Sowing Seeds' services are as necessary in July as they are in December. For the past five years that group, led by Brenda and Rick Reardon, has made a concentrated effort to raise funds for Sowing Seeds. This summer their Charity Cruise for Sowing Seeds once again boarded the Pilgrim Belle in Plymouth. As a result of their five annual cruises, the Charity Cruise group has raised over \$20,000 in total for Sowing Seeds. This year's silent auction and raffle were a great success due to support from cruise organizers, sponsors, donors, volunteers, and participants.

Just like Sowing Seeds, the Reardons reached out to others to help organize their event. Kris Cleary, Marie Kurmin, Barbara Last, Sheila Matthews, Dina Mattaliano and Debbie Ritz assisted in the planning of the cruise, and several businesses and organizations contributed to its success.

Generous corporate donors included the Marshfield Kiwanis, the law firm of Graeber, Davis & Cantwell, Attorney Bob Galvin, Attorney Robert Barrett, Steinbeck & Taylor, Southern Ready Mix, John Farragher, Gerard's Turkey Farm, Lobster Tale Restaurant, Green Harbor Marina, McDonald's Funeral Home, William Last Builders, House of Carpet and Scituate Federal Savings Bank.

Silent auction items were donated by Armstrong Fence, Marshfield Blanchard's Liquor, David Brega, Doug Brega, Mike Sleeper, Two Painted Ladies, Kurmin Creations, R & C Farms, That Bloomin' Place, Kennedy's Garden Center, The Village Gardens, Inc. and Windswept Studio in Sandwich.

Raffle items were donated by Pilgrim Belle Cruises, Tosca's Café, Stars on Hingham Harbor, The Capital Grille, Green Harbor Golf Course, 99 Restaurant, Boston Accents Hair Salon, Star Land, Max Lax Lacrosse Camps, Roche Brothers, Starbucks, Uno's Restaurant, Shaws, Stop & Shop, the Foohey Family, the Kurmin Family, the Noonan Family and Bicycle Junction.

Delicious food was provided by China Wok, Leo's Bakery, and Pacini's Restaurant. Cuisine of Mark Connolly in Plymouth warranted special thanks.

Because of efforts of concerned individuals like the Charity Cruise organizers and their committee, Sowing Seeds volunteers are able to continue helping Marshfield residents in need.

Sowing Seeds attributes its organizational success to its volunteers' talents and the community's generosity. However, the volunteers claim a third element critical to their success. Since inception, Sowing Seeds has had the support and guidance of the Marshfield Clergy Association. While it is a faith-based ministry, the volunteers don't all profess the exact same religion. They also do not proselytize to those they help. Rather they each live and work within their own faith. They each know that what they are doing is right and making a significant difference in the lives of their neighbors. They know that they are helping those around them and that they are answering to a call from deep within their hearts.

Their faith sustained them when they operated without a designated, permanent location. When the generous members of Marshfield's former First Baptist Church gave them their church building, the Sowing Seeds volunteers' faith helped them through their organization's growth. Economic conditions have been hard on nearly everyone, their faith helped them to answer the increased number of critical phone calls they received from Marshfield residents who struggle or suffer. Last winter they experienced a major furnace mishap, and once again their faith sustained them through the dark, cold winter.

Their story is reminiscent of the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*. They live knowing that no man or woman is an island. Their mission states that: "Sowing Seeds is a network of people who share their time, ideas and special gifts providing the support to empower each person to replace darkness, despair and hopelessness with dignity and self-esteem."

Their mission statement continues that they "are committed to sowing and nurturing the seeds of hope in a prayerful and spirit-filled environment of networking and advocacy for those who feel frustrated, alone, impoverished or forgotten." Isn't that a wonderful life?

Yes, the founders of Sowing Seeds had a simple idea. It has taken many people and much work to bring that idea to fruition. Yet, the volunteers and visitors to Sowing Seeds know that it has all been worth the effort. Mary Doolan, Sowing Seeds president and one of the founders, often quotes Mother Teresa: "We can't do everything; but we

can do something.” Many people in Marshfield are grateful for the many things they have already done.

If you need assistance or would like to volunteer your time or services and truly make a difference in someone's life, please call (781) 837-3337 (or 781.83 SEEDS). Located on Rt. 139 at the corner of Plain and School Streets, the Sowing Seeds Clothing Bank is open to distribute new and nearly-new clothing and to accept donations on Thursday and Saturday mornings from 10:00 AM to 12 noon (or by appointment). Volunteers are needed for many Sowing Seeds services, including the Clothing Bank. Clothing Bank volunteers are asked to help for two hours, once per month. There is also a constant demand for additional trades people, attorneys, home budget advisors and intake volunteers.

If you are in need of other services provided by Sowing Seeds, or if you are able to volunteer your time, services or vehicle (in very good mechanical condition), please call. Each year Sowing Seeds serves an increasing number of families. Additional donations may be mailed to PO Box 1001, Marshfield, MA 02050.

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