



NewsFeed

Life Can Take an Unexpected Turn

Norm Nelson knows what it's like when life throws you a curve ball – or two.

He lost both his parents when he was just 17 and has always worked hard for what he wants from life.

Norm always liked coaching sports. Coaching turned into refereeing from pee-wee football all the way to the college level. After officiating a college football game one night, another referee asked Norm what he thinks of when he hears the national anthem.

"I'm not a wimp," Norm told his colleague. "But I become emotional."

At that point, Norm's life dream came true. The other ref said, "Welcome to Big Ten football."

Norm retired from officiating after 17 years. His "day job" was at a local bank, and with his son on his way to law school, Norm was considering full retirement. Life was good.

Then Norm got his first curve ball: a call from Madison County social services asking him if he would be willing to take custody of two young relatives. In January, 2011, he was awarded full custody of the two little boys. And then came the second game changer. In June of the same year, Norm was at his bank job when the computer screen looked blurry and wavy. He was having a stroke.

The disability payments weren't what he anticipated,

and he had to wait to start the Social Security process. "I had two young boys who didn't understand why suddenly they didn't get the cereal they wanted. All they knew was their little bellies were hungry. It was a change for them, a change for me, and now we had less income."

A friend told Norm about Mid-Ohio Foodbank (MOF). He says being able to get food from the Kroger Community Food Pantry at MOF helped him bridge the income gap until the disability payments came in. Norm and the boys, now 13 and 11, give back by volunteering at the pantry. "It's our way of saying thank you," Norm said.

What would Norm say to others? "You never know when it's going to be your time, when you're going to get sick. I say to those who support the Foodbank: Thank you. To those who are in a position to help: Please help." 



Working Together for the Greater Good



Hungry people in the Marion community are getting access to fresh fruit and vegetables, thanks to a produce delivery collaboration started in 2012 by Marion City Schools. The program began with a summer produce market at school.

Winnie Brewer, Food Service Supervisor for Marion City Schools, said the program evolved into a community-wide initiative with creativity, out-of-the-box thinking, and determination to end hunger in the community.

Originally fresh produce was delivered by Mid-Ohio Foodbank to a Marion school where it was housed and boxed for families.

"We couldn't keep the food cold (that first summer), so we created our own cooler unit. We covered the produce with visqueen (tarp), connected it to a ventless floor air conditioning unit and blew cold air into the visqueen creating a tented cooler," Brewer explained. She added this innovative technique drew attention from a variety of groups, including students from Northwestern University, seeking ways to extend the life of fresh produce.

The project also caught the interest of community stakeholders who wanted to help. With the resources of Marion Public Health, Marion General Hospital, the Marion County Developmental Disability Board, The Ohio State University (OSU) Marion Campus, and OSU Extension, the project was refined and expanded with more locations to get more fresh food to people who need it.

Anonymous donors pitched in to get a van to deliver produce to the growing number of market locations.

With multiple locations including OSU Marion, a senior center, the community hospital, school buildings and others, the program moves fresh produce to hundreds of needy Marion area families every month.

"Every community needs to look at the underlying issues causing hunger. Don't be quick to say 'we can't do that,'" Brewer said. "We needed produce – we got it. We needed a van – we got it. We needed a mobile produce market – we got it. We're pooling resources and working together for the greater good." ☺



"The Pantry was a "Blessing"



Monica doesn't go to a food pantry on a regular basis. Like many pantry clients in the Mid-Ohio Foodbank footprint, she visits the food pantry only when she needs to, such as if hours are cut at work or there is an unexpected medical bill.

But Monica loves fresh food, so she goes to a fresh market on the south end of Columbus several times a week.

"The fresh produce doesn't keep and is expensive in stores," Monica explains.

But with access to produce whenever she needs it, she can take just what she needs for a few days, and she knows she can always get more when that runs out. And that's good for her health.

She says the pantry stretches her budget when money gets tight between assistance checks.

"There have been many times when I didn't know what I was going to do about food, and the pantry was such a blessing," she said.

Thanks to you, people like Monica have regular access to fresh, healthy food and to food pantries when they need them. ☺

NOTE: Client name has been changed to protect confidentiality.



8th Annual Food Drive is 'a Big Part of My Life'

When Braxton visited a food bank in Youngstown with his family at age five, he wanted to turn the family's garage into a place where hungry people could go for food. That food bank visit inspired a passion and what has become an annual food drive.

The family moved to Columbus in 2015, and Braxton shifted his food drive work to Mid-Ohio Foodbank.

He delivered nearly 2,300 pounds of food to the Foodbank earlier this year, bringing his total amount of food collected in his eight food drives to more than 7,000 pounds – and \$700!

Now 13 and an eighth grader, Braxton says his goal is to raise community awareness about the challenges hungry neighbors face.

"Everything I collect goes to help feed hungry people served by Mid-Ohio Foodbank in their 20 county service area. Doing the annual food drive has become a big part of my life, and I look forward to it every year," he says.

Braxton is confident that his ninth food drive this coming spring will bring his total amount of food collected to more than 10,000 pounds. We believe he will do it! ☺

Thanks, Braxton!



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