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MAGAZINE

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2016 Threads of Hope Award Winners



Photography by Saroyan Humphrey

and toothpaste, as well as a chocolate bunny.”

Fran and Vic Smith

Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano, Concord
By Sara Hare

Looking back, it's the Easter baskets that Fran and Vic Smith remember most.

“We do them for the children,” says Fran, 90, a former pediatric nurse who later served as the preschool director at St. Mark's United Methodist Church in Orinda for 30 years. “We do all this for the children.”

After a lifetime of volunteerism that has included such activities as sorting through donated books at the Orinda Library, building houses and playgrounds in remote Mexican villages, and boxing food for children at the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano, the Smiths light up when they talk about their Easter basket program. This year—their 10th making the colorful baskets for children in need—the Smiths assembled 100 baskets.

“The baskets are useful, too,” says Vic, 94. “The kids always get school supplies, and a toothbrush

This project is just a drop in the proverbial basket compared to the contribution the Smiths have made to the food bank during the past 15 years. Two to three Fridays each month, in a 32,000-square-foot warehouse in Concord, the Smiths have served as the heart and soul of the Food for Children “boxing team,” which assembles more than 700 boxes of food a month for children ages four to six.

“When it’s a choice between paying rent or buying food, families will go hungry to keep a roof over their heads,” says Sharon Zepegno, manager of volunteer services at the food bank. “This program makes sure the children have something to eat. The Smiths understand that.”

Using an assembly-line process, the boxing team fills large cardboard boxes with nutritious, kid-friendly food—cereal, peanut butter, canned tuna, pasta and sauce, rice and beans—then the food bank staff distributes them at nine sites across two counties.

The Smiths have seen families receive their boxes. “I am so impressed with how the mothers share,” says Fran. “If there’s a food item their children are allergic to, like peanut butter, they’ll give their jar to someone else.”

A commitment to sharing has been the thread running through the Smiths’ 67 years of marriage. (They met on a blind date.) “For my 80th birthday, I gave myself a little present,” explains Fran. “My father passed away and left me some money. Vic and I used it to build a playground in Mexico.”

Recently, the Smiths wondered if they should slow down just a bit and talked about not volunteering at the food bank anymore. The members of their boxing team wouldn’t hear of it, declaring a “Fran and Vic Day” to discourage them from leaving. The Smiths decided to stay with it.

“That’s one of the reasons we continue,” says Fran. “We do it for the hugs.”

How you can help: *Donations can be made to the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano at foodbankccs.org.*