

Ringling with a cause: Volunteer rings bells for nearly two decades

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON – This year's **Alton Salvation Army Corps Red Kettle Campaign** exceeded its goal by more than \$10,000; a dream not possible if not for the help of dedicated volunteer bell-ringers such as **Dane Rockafellow**.

Rockafellow has been on both sides of the **Salvation Army's** mission. When he arrived in Alton from **Fort Worth, Texas** in 1992, he discovered he could not live with his sister who he said invited him to the city. Out of options in the overwhelming heat of August, Rockafellow turned to the **Alton Salvation Army Corps Booth House**. He said they gave him a safe place to sleep and food to eat. A quarter of a century later, Rockafellow said he does not have to worry about that for himself anymore and dedicates large portions of his time during the holidays to ringing bells for the Salvation Army's Red Kettle Campaign.

“I've been ringing the bells for 19 years,” he said. “Next year, it will be 20. I had to take one year off for health reasons. I rang bells for about 35 and a half hours this year.”

Before coming to Alton, Rockafellow lived on the streets of **Dallas, Texas** for almost a decade. He said from 1984-1992, he slept on the streets and watched people freeze to death, even in the somewhat mild Texas winters. He said he thinks about those people when he rings the bells today.

“I do it because I know there are people out there without a roof over their heads, sleeping in the streets,” Rockafellow said. “They have no place to go. I was homeless in Dallas, and I've seen people freeze to death. I've seen it and I don't wish that on anybody, not even my worse enemy. I ring the bells so I can help find people a place to stay, give them food from the pantry and help them with their utility bills.”

Alton Salvation Army Corps Red Kettle Campaign Coordinator Greg Gelzinnis thanked Rockafellow by name during a press conference Saturday, Dec. 24. Just before revealing the total collected amount of more than \$95,000, Gelzinnis thanked Rockafellow and retired Navy officer **Larry Goss** for being so dedicated to being bell-ringers. Three years ago, the Alton Salvation Army Corps made the controversial and experimental decision to switch to volunteer bell-ringers over paying them. Rockafellow was one of those who answered the call regardless of pay.

“I don't mind doing this,” he said. “I look forward to this every year. I took one year off for health reasons, but before that, I just ring, ring, ring, ring the bells. People have been good to us. The kettle was so full this year, you couldn't push another dollar bill into it. If someone had a \$50, however, we may have been able to make some room.”

This year, Rockafellow split his bell-ringing time between the **Godfrey Schnuck's** and the **Alton Square Mall**, which are two of the most high-profile locations for the Alton Salvation Army Corps Red Kettle Campaign.