

# Ringin' with a cause: Retired Navy chief petty officer donned his uniform for donations

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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**ALTON** - The Alton Salvation Army Corps's Red Kettle Campaign exceeded its goal of \$85,000 by more than \$10,000, partially thanks to its dedicated volunteer bell-ringers.

**Retired Navy Chief Petty Officer Larry Goss** said he wears his old uniform as he rings bells, saying as many as 99 percent of people donate as they walk out of the store. He said wearing the uniform not only increases donations and generosity, it also gives him a joyful reminder people still care about the armed forces keeping their freedoms safe.

"When I was in uniform, almost 100 percent of people donated," he said. "They were hugging me and shaking my hand. A woman who didn't know me from Adam got off the bus one day and hugged me. I think it's payment enough for me that people know what the military is all about."

The **Alton Salvation Army Corps** made the controversial and experimental decision to quit paying bell-ringers three years ago. Since then, it has struggled to meet its goals some years, but ultimately saved as much as \$40,000 in bell-ringer expenses. **Alton Salvation Army Corps Red Kettle Coordinator Greg Gelzinnis** said the move to all volunteers allowed people to see people they recognize from the community posted at red kettles throughout the Riverbend.

Goss said he rang for as long as 32 hours during this year's campaign, sometimes taking shifts as long as four hours. He said he did not mind the time standing in the weather. He said he knew what to expect when he agreed to ring.

"I'm retired," he said. "I have nothing better to do. I've kept myself in good shape. I can ring for three to four hours at a time."

Several of his shifts were spent at the **Godfrey Schnuck's** location, Goss said. He said that was the most lucrative place in the entire Riverbend. Next year, he said he would like to see Gelzinnis and the Alton Salvation Army Corps raise the bar a step further with the help of local veterans' groups.

"I bet if some of the veterans' groups in the area, like the **American Legion**, would coordinate with Greg, people could wear their old uniforms and raise the bar even further," Goss said. "I'm sure they would be more than happy to be involved. We need good volunteers who are doing it because they want to."

Goss praised the efforts of his fellow volunteers, especially **Dane Rockafellow**. Rockafellow has been ringing bells for the Alton Salvation Army Corps for nearly two decades. Goss said Rockafellow went "above and beyond" for the Red Kettle Campaign.



Like Rockafellow, Goss has benefited from the efforts of the Salvation Army. When he was a very small child, Goss said the Salvation Army helped his parents provide some Christmas presents to his family while they were impoverished.

"When I was younger, like real young, we received Christmas presents through the Salvation Army," he said. "We received a piece of rock candy, some nuts, an orange, maybe a candy cane or two and hell, we were happy."

As he became an adult, Goss made the decision to join the Navy, where he remained for just under four years. After leaving, he returned a year later for what would become a 24-year career. He said he refuses to wear the Salvation Army's red apron over his uniform while ringing bells.

"I would never put my red apron on with my uniform," he said. "I am proud of my uniform and would not want to cover it up."

Of the many charities in the world working toward the common good, Goss said he trusts the Salvation Army the most to use the money it receives well.

"It's one of the best around for keeping the money local and not sending it off to some executive," he said. "I don't just give to anyone, and I do my research to see if they're a worthy cause."

Goss said he admired the Salvation Army for staying true to its message and philosophy for nearly a century.