



# Operation Blessing Marks 40th Anniversary Of Serving Less Fortunate

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
September 23 2022 10:52 AM



WOOD RIVER - For 40 years, Operation Blessing, People That Care, Inc., has served low-income households from Wood River, Chouteau, and Fort Russell Townships in Madison County at 18 E. Lorena in Wood River.

The organization marks its 40th anniversary this year. The group provides food, clothing, shoes, books, toys, and small household items and are open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Mondays through Thursdays.

Karen Wilson is the executive director of Operation Blessing.



When many neighbors were in dire need due to unemployment with the closing of Owens-Illinois Glass and other industries, Virginia Kirkpatrick started collecting food and clothing from her friends in the early 1980s. It began with plywood on sawhorses to distribute what she collected. Her husband, Ned, gave her \$500 to start what became Operation Blessing, a 501 (c)(3) organization, in March 1982.

Outgrowing the sawhorses and plywood and two other locations, Operation Blessing purchased the present building on East Lorena Avenue in Wood River in 1996. Over the years, it is estimated that food was provided to serve an estimated 4 million meals, averaging 100,000 meals per year. Operation Blessing partners with the St. Louis Area Foodbank which provides high-quality, nutritious food.



Another partner is the United Way of Greater St. Louis, which has been helping to fund Operation Blessing since 1991. To supplement what comes in from the Foodbank, items are also purchased from local sources. They are grateful for donations of food items, some from individuals and some from various churches and organizations such as the Boy Scouts of America's Scouting for Food and the United States Postal Service's food drive. These donations are an important part of Operation Blessing's success over the years. In addition to food donations and various local civic organizations, many individuals and churches make financial contributions. Food is just one part of Operation Blessing's service to the community.

Clothing, shoes, personal hygiene items, bedding, books, and toys are also available to those in need. Most of these items are available due to the generosity of the people in our communities. Because personal hygiene is so important for the health of their clients, these items are purchased locally as needed. Kirkpatrick started this organization as an all-volunteer organization, and it has continued that way.

"We have approximately 50 volunteers. Some come a couple of times a month and some almost every day that we're open," Wilson said. "These loyal and dedicated volunteers make it possible for us to help our most vulnerable citizens. The Illinois Extension



Service helps our clients with healthy eating information. We partner with the Metro East Food Pantry Coalition in exchanging ideas of how best to serve our clients.

"We are blessed with a community of local groups, industry, and businesses who also provide volunteer hours from time to time it might be painting or cleaning or whatever need we might have at the time. But this allows our regular volunteers to continue with their usual routine of tasks to keep Operation Blessing ready to serve those who might walk through our doors needing assistance.

"The communities in the households in Wood River, Chouteau and Fort Russell Townships include Bethalto, Cottage Hills, East Alton, Hartford, Moro, Roxana, South Roxana, and Wood River one time per month."