

Townsend, Mary

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Mary Townsend ending 35 years' social work

# A Sally Ann helping hand

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Staff Reporter

During more than three decades of easing pressing human need, Mary Townsend inevitably has had rewarding human experiences.

She has also faced difficult situations—"but they were very few."

All, however are recalled with anonymity—because of the nature of her work. For 35 years she's been the Salvation Army's family and social services worker in Belleville.

Now she's retiring—and among the treasured testaments of service she'll take with her are letters of gratitude from people in places near and far.

Her career in helping others didn't begin exactly as a deliberate vocation. But, it was a happy choice when it was made.

A native of Belleville, Townsend joined the Salvation Army as a teenage girl in 1939. She was following the example of her father, who was a Salvationist before emigrating from England.

She carried on with her business life, working for a time at the Dickens and Son Bake Shop—its tearoom still is fondly remembered by older Bellevillians—on Front Street.

Then there was a stint as a factory worker at American Optical. She was laid off because of ill health.

One day, realizing she wouldn't be able to cope with factory work, she recalls: "I telephoned the then commander of the (Salvationist) corps—Brig. Herbert Honeychurch—and asked him if he needed any help.

"I've been working for them ever since."

Until four years ago, Townsend was the corps family and social services director, handling welfare emergencies for corps officer, answering calls night and day from people who needed money, food, shelter or emotional support. Between times she organized fund-raising rummage sales.

The difficult experiences she can recall usually involved getting caught in the middle of a family dispute. An example: She might be threatened by a husband or wife



MARY TOWNSEND: 35 YEARS HELPING OTHERS

for helping other members of a family.

But, most incidents involved transients -- people passing through the area who needed help because of lack of funds or shelter. Some were young people out of money and luck as they sought to return home and start life all over again.

One case was a local man in need of help -- then helping others in turn. A woman and her children on their way back home to the United States were stranded when their car broke down—and they had no funds. The man, who was seeking help himself from Townsend on problems of his own, took the family to his home for shelter and, since he was a mechanic, repaired the vehicle and got them back on their way.

In recent years, most cases of people seeking help have resulted from unemployment, said Townsend.

Apart from her employment as a full-time social worker for the Ar-

my, she also has been active as a member of the Army's League of Mercy, visiting sick and shut-ins, and, for 25 years led the Salvation Army-sponsored Brownie pack. "I loved working with the Brownies, but you have to be active and I reached the point where I couldn't handle it any more."

One other aspect of her work which she sees as important is "the tremendous help I got from other volunteers in many ways," she said.

She continues to volunteer as a visitor with the League of Mercy and enjoys knitting and crocheting, but she has no special plans for her retirement.

She will continue in arge of night calls until the end of February when she turns 65 and her retirement becomes official. Meanwhile, fellow Salvationists and associates are honoring her with a retirement dinner and recognition night on Saturday, Feb. 9 -- "something I'm looking forward to very much," she said.

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