

Offering a hand

Turnbull, Sheila

up



Sheila Turnbull

By Jennifer Bell
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Sheila Turnbull believes if you can work, you can eat. Her philosophy, as a long time volunteer who's helped hundreds in need, is that people don't want a handout, but rather a hand up.

"When a person needs a meal, or some clothing, or a place to stay, I ask them if they can help serve, or peel potatoes, or wash dishes," said Turnbull. "Whatever they're able to do is fine, but it's important that they do something. They can contribute, instead of just getting a handout."

Turnbull, as a member of one of the city churches' kitchen co-ops, considers herself a "facilitator of raw materials and the people who can turn them into products."

She and other co-op members glean produce from farm fields and make everything from tomato paste to jam, for members.

Materials come from a variety of places, such as stores, restaurants and warehouses; and Turnbull says she'll beg or borrow "just about anything to help someone out."

The 61-year-old has had an interesting and varied life, ranging from raising 13 foster children, teaching clothing and textiles at a community college to setting up and operating a cloth hat factory for the former ARC Industries from 1978 to 1984.

Her expertise in the textile industry also saw her start up Belleville Protective Gear (now Impacto) in the mid-1980s.

She also worked with her sister, who owned Goodwin Drapery, until suffering a combined heart attack and stroke in 1995.

"I was fortunate to be a survivor. There are a few things I have trouble with, but for the most part I'm able to do plenty."

The phone rings frequently at her East Hill home; requests for help, offers of produce for the co-op, and calls from friends keep Turnbull busy.

"I'm thankful that God has allowed me to help people and help my community. Volunteering has become my full-time job. There is always someone, somewhere, in need, and the best part of it is that they very often have something they can give back to the community. It lets them keep their dignity."

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