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Hastings Resident Named 2011 'Hunger Hero'

Steve Hunt leads "Food for the Hungry," a charitable organization based out of Dobbs Ferry's Sacred Heart Church.

By [Lizzie Hedrick](#) | [Email the author](#) | 7:42am  [Print](#)

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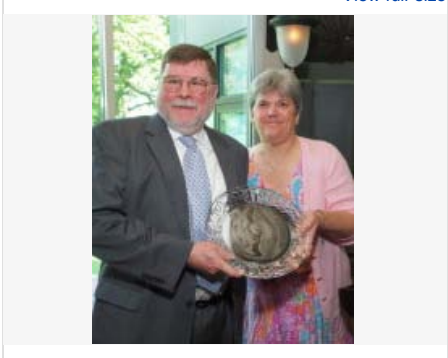
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Nearly every Saturday for the last 15 years, Hastings resident Steve Hunt has coordinated the distribution of about 250 bags of food to the needy at St. Joseph's Church in Yonkers.

Hunt, whose day job is managing "penta-bytes" of data for Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, takes a pragmatic approach to his community leadership—making Dobbs Ferry-based "Food for the Hungry" one of the most successful food-distribution programs in the county.

"I tell people who want to volunteer to come not every week, but to choose one Saturday a month," he said. "This way it's not overwhelming and people stick with it. That's what keeps us going."

Recently, Hunt was named one of 2011's "Hunger Heros" by the [Food Bank for Westchester](#).

"This is not just my award," he said. "It's an affirmation of all the people who work for the program—the 25 people down in Yonkers distributing food on any given Saturday, the people who collect bread from local supermarkets and our two invaluable drivers who go every Friday to pick up the food from the food bank."

In 1984, Dobbs Ferry resident and Sacred Heart Church member Lloyd Westlake bought a van with private donations and started distributing food every week in Yonkers. His individual effort grew into "Food for the Hungry"—and when Westlake began suffering from back problems a number of years ago, Hunt and a few other congregants stepped up to keep the program going.

"Lloyd has been feeding the hungry since he returned from World War II," Hunt said. "There's no way I could even come close to what he did. He used to pick up trays of leftover food after parties in the area and immediately drive them down to Yonkers."

Westlake still lives with his wife Alice in Dobbs Ferry—and even though he can no longer lift heavy bags of food, Hunt and other volunteers often bring bags to his home so he can continue feeding those who know to knock on his door when they're in need.

Hunt said the strength of his program is the dignity with which he and his fellow volunteers treat the people they serve.

"Nobody feels like they're begging when they come to us," he said, invoking the words of the great Irish author James Joyce, that being hungry makes people angry. "I talk to people, try to keep the conversation light and upbeat—and they respond to that. People often tell me that they feel welcome, safe and human with us."

After years working at a site, Hunt said you get to know people's stories. There are two brothers and a sister who have come almost every week for Hunt's 15 years. "One brother is mentally challenged and his brother and sister care for him," Hunt said. "And then about a month ago there was a man who came and said he'd never done this before."

Hunt described the man as "well-dressed" and said "it was obvious he'd seen better times. He came back for two or three weeks, and then the next week he came and told us he'd gotten a job. We haven't seen him since."

Every week, Hunt puts in an order from the Westchester Food Bank for ten items—each item being something like 10 cases of tuna, 10 cases of corn, or 10 cases of beans.

"We have an assembly-line approach," he said. "Everyone knows they have a job when they volunteer with us and they do it." The entire 200 to 300-bag distribution takes only about an hour and a half.

And unlike many other organizations, "Food for the Hungry" is sensitive to individuals' needs. "There is one man who will ask to swap canned pork for something else because he doesn't have a refrigerator to store it in once the can's open," Hunt explained. He has even taught homeless recipients how to make a penny stove out of a soda can and how to poach an egg in a an orange peel.

"It has a quite nice and interesting flavor," he said, laughing. "These are the things I learned as an assistant scout master."


Hunt is incredibly proud that all three of his children are also active in community service, his two daughters also feeding the hungry through his organization and Midnight Run and his son, an environmentalist, is one of the youngest board members for Clearwater.


And Hunt's work certainly doesn't go unrewarded.

"People have different ways of saying thank you," he said. "One woman we served used to bring us homemade jams and jellies. Another woman sweeps the floors for us every week once we're done to show her appreciation."

You can donate to "Food for the Hungry" by sending a check to Sacred Heart Church, 18 Bellewood Avenue, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522. To volunteer, reach Steve Hunt at hunts@mskcc.org.

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