

## Tewksbury resident Fred Simon: All he does is give, give and give again

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TEWKSBURY — To find someone who can say anything negative about Fred Simon would be a Herculean task.

A lifetime of charity has made him a hero in the eyes of many in the Merrimack Valley — even those who wouldn't recognize him are more than likely to have been touched by his generosity in one way or another.

For Simon, every day is an opportunity to give.

“The Greeks have a word for it,” said Simon, his voice gravelly yet inviting. “Philanthropy. Literally translated, it means a lover of mankind. I'm not even Greek!”

Lessons in loving mankind and being generous came early in Simon's life. Long before cancer was part of most people's lexicon, his mother passed away from the disease, leaving behind 17-year-old Simon and his siblings.

His relatives, friends and neighbors rallied to the family — it was those acts of kindness that first made Simon realize the importance of giving to others.

He found his calling in 1996, when he began his work serving Sen. John O'Brien of Andover and later Sen. Steve Panagiotakos of Lowell as a legislative aide. Working in constituent services allowed him to give to others in an official capacity and flex the skills he learned working in insurance sales MetLife.

Simon has kept busy since his retirement in 2006 from the Middlesex County Sheriff's Office. His year is defined not by seasons, but is divided by charity events. There is no Memorial Day until he sees Owl Diner Charity's annual golf tournament come to fruition, and New Year's Eve can't happen until he's raised money for the Salvation Army of Lowell's Radiothon.

This past year, the Salvation Army raised over \$160,000, much of which will go directly to serving the Lowell community. Captain David Childs, head officer of the local chapter of the charity cited Simon as being instrumental in obtaining those funds.

“He (Simon) has his black book of friends that he calls to get them to make a pledge,” said Childs.

It goes beyond an ability to convince people to give; something about Simon simply inspires others to do good.

“I think his heart is just in a good place,” said Childs.

Simon's unending acts of grace have not gone unnoticed. He has won awards for his service before, but perhaps none so important as being selected Person of the Year by the Merrimack Valley Council of Eastern Orthodox Parishes.

Simon has attended St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church in Lowell since his birth — the same church where he was baptised officially recognized his charity work both in the Hellenic and Lowell communities with a ceremony at City Hall in March.

Still, Simon is humbled by the accolades. He is quick to note that while he may be in the spotlight for his charity work, it's an army of people that get the job done. For Simon, awards are a nice bonus for the work he does, but they're far from the reason he has devoted his life to giving.

"I was totally surprised," Simon said. "I believe in most cases, the gift is really to the giver. You get the satisfaction in knowing that you helped someone else."

"This is not the first award that he's ever received and it won't be the last," said former Tewksbury Selectman John Ryan, who worked with Simon on the September 11 Memorial. "People recognize Fred for his generosity and his kindness for people."

Ryan and Simon began work on the memorial in the weeks following the tragedy. Two Tewksbury residents, Peter Gay and Peter Hashem, had been on the hijacked American Airlines Flight No. 11. Ryan and Simon made it their mission to honor those from their town as well as the other 2,994 lives lost on that day, eventually raising over \$350,000 and relying purely on volunteers to complete the project.

It was more than a memorial, it was a message of solidarity and love.

"He doesn't mind enlisting other people to help," said Ryan. "There's an old saying that when Freddie Simon walks down Merrimack Street in Lowell, and people are walking the other way, they say, 'Oh, here comes Freddie.' He's going to shake their hand and ask them for something. And they'll give it to him."

Simon plans to continue giving back to his community for as long as he can. He is looking forward to celebrating his 80th birthday on December 10, the same day as this year's Radiothon. Next year, 2017, promises to be a busy year for Simon, with a calendar full of festivities. His next big project will be to help plan the celebrations for the St. George Orthodox Church's centennial.

As for what keeps him going and what keeps him giving, Simon has a few words of advice.

"As you get older you realize that you have to do things for other people. If a kindness has been done for you, I feel very strongly that you should give kindness back."

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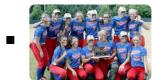
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