

Volunteer delivers meals for more than 20 years

William Hoffman, whoffman@gannett.com; 11:04 p.m. CDT May 29, 2014



(Photo: Submitted)

One of the best parts of 81-year-old Ellen Willis' week is when Barry Coggins and Betsy Canupp show up at her door with a hot meal, a helping attitude and jokes and laughter to go around.

"Well I'll tell you I look forward to seeing these people every Thursday, and it's like 'Here comes Christmas,'" Willis said, laughing.

Coggins has worked for the [FiftyForward](http://www.fiftyforward.org/) (<http://www.fiftyforward.org/>) meal program in Nashville for more than 20 years, delivering more than 7,500 hot meals to home-bound adults who rely on the program's services.

But he doesn't keep track of the number of meals, it's the personal connection with his clients that has kept Coggins coming back week after week and year after year.

"I think you get more out of it than the people you're bringing the food to ... we've met a lot of amazing people over the years," Coggins said. "When you get to know somebody for a number of years on a regular basis you get to become friends."

Coggins and Canupp have come to know Willis well over the past five years. The connection was easy given their musical background, Coggins as a guitarist and songwriter and Willis as a country singer.

The two occasionally break out in song, playing classic country tunes or harmonizing to "You Are My Sunshine."

Not only does Coggins deliver meals, but he also sits down with Willis for a chat each week and does odd chores around her house: carry in mail, change a light bulb or replace some batteries. This is a courtesy he extends to all his clients if they wish.

"Not everybody wants to chat," Coggins said. "Someone could meet you at the door and say 'thank you very much.' But some people are more sociable and that's as important, or more important, than the actual food and sustenance."

In April, Coggins was nominated as a finalist for the Mary Catherine Strobel Award from Hands on Nashville for his more than 20 years of service with FiftyForward, as well as his tireless fundraising efforts through sing-along "Barryoke," a writers night and a benefit golf tournament in its 15th year this September.

Through those three efforts Coggins has raised more than \$30,000 in 14 years for FiftyForward, an amount that equates to three months of service for 80 clients served by the program.

When it comes down to it, Coggins said people just need to put themselves out there and volunteer if they want to make a difference in their community, whether it's once a year or every week.

Reach William Hoffman at 615-259-8347 or on Twitter [@Wilbur_Hoffman](https://twitter.com/Wilbur_Hoffman).

Three ways to volunteer

Help with relocation

Christian Women's Job Corps of Middle Tennessee is moving its office space three miles down the road from its current location (128 Eighth Ave. S.) and needs help moving supplies, furnishings and records 9 a.m.-2 p.m. on Saturday. Volunteers will receive pizza. More info: www.cwjcmiddletn.org

Cheekwood Visitor Services

Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art (1200 Forrest Park Drive, Nashville) is seeking outgoing, art-loving volunteers who enjoy interacting with exhibition visitors. Volunteers are needed 1-4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday to help welcome guests, distribute wristbands and information about the new Big Bugs exhibit. On the days you serve, your admission and parking is free.

More info: www.cheekwood.org

Fun with kids at CMA Music Festival