

Community Connections Food Bank

For Roger Bertrand, it all started seven years ago during Christmas Hamper season at the Food Bank. One busy day, Food Bank Coordinator Patti Larson realized they needed a driver for people who had come to pick up a hamper and had no way to get back home with the heavy parcel. She asked Bertrand if he wouldn't mind helping out for a few hours and gladly, he complied.

That few hours turned into 7 years of committed volunteer work for the Food Bank and Bertrand is still going strong. Bertrand uses his own vehicle to pick up all local items donated to the Food Bank, including regular trips to Salmon Arm, Vernon, and Kelowna for distributions from the National Food Sharing System. He also delivers food stuffs to those who cannot get to the food bank yet are in need, and (he laughs), "whatever else Patti asks me to do!"



ROGER BERTRAND AND KAREN CARTER

Four years ago, he recruited his good friend Karen Carter to become involved. For Karen, "volunteering is one of (her) favorite things to talk about!" and she now manages the off-site food storage warehouse for the Food Bank with meticulous organization. All donated items are packed in numbered boxes, with the lowest numbers being the oldest stock, and the contents are listed so Larson knows exactly how much and what items are in stock and ready for distribution. In a regular week, Bertrand and Carter spend around 20 hours per week helping out. During Christmas Hamper season, from December 1st to the 23rd, it's a 6-day a week, 9 am to 4 pm commitment.

For both Bertrand and Carter, volunteering at the Food Bank has had a huge positive impact on their lives. Both have fought battles with chronic illness and disability, and are no longer able to work at regular employment. "We've both been hard workers all our lives, so to be suddenly cut off working was really tough" says Bertrand. "At the Food Bank, it's meaningful. I can still contribute to my community in a positive manner. We (he and Carter) make a good team, as we seem to think alike when it comes to getting things done and following up on any commitments or promises we have made. We both have a great feeling of accomplishment and much of our self esteem has been returned to us in our daily lives as a direct result of the people we have met through volunteering." Carter, who suffers from rheumatoid arthritis, feels that her mobility has improved through the necessary activity of going up and down stairs, and managing the boxes.

Both are amazed and heartened at the generosity of Revelstoke, and feel that volunteering at the Food Bank has been a great way to get to know the community. "It fills me with a tremendous sense of pride to know that I live in a community where people genuinely care about the welfare of those less fortunate" says Bertrand. Many businesses, like PT Farm Market, contribute on a regular basis. "And it's all fresh stuff", Carter emphasizes.

In the past few years as the cost of living has risen, Food Bank usage has steadily increased. For Patti Larson, her volunteers are critical. "I don't know what I'd do without them!" she exclaims. In addition to Bertrand and Carter, she has a core group of about 15 to 20 volunteers including a number of residents in the Community Connections Community Living program. As well, other people donate services if needed. Having people volunteer allows her to focus on other necessities like fundraising and managing the Food Bank. All food bank recipients have to register and apply and all are treated with respect and dignity. Many recipients are seniors and single people as well as many families with children.

Carter says, "It's great to watch the kids come down at Christmas. People don't take advantage." There is much sharing and camaraderie that goes on. Bertrand adds gruffly, "It's nice to be recognized, but that's not what it's all about! We're doing it for the Food Bank, not for ourselves...I'm proud to be contributing as a volunteer in any way I can!"

For more information on volunteering in Revelstoke, visit www.revelstokecf.com/volunteers or call the Community Centre at 250-837-9351.

Submitted by Jill Zacharias, Photo courtesy of Cathy Burke, CFDC Volunteer Committee members