

A Great Gift

In the Christmas classic movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*, Clarence Oddbody (angel second class) tells George Bailey, "You've been given a great gift. You've been given the chance to see what the world would be like if you'd never been born." It is a simple line of dialogue in a seventy-year old film. Yet it is arguably one of the most thought-provoking statements ever written.



Imagine for a minute that you are George Bailey and that you have been given this great gift. How would you feel about the life you've led? Would you see the positive influence that you had on the lives of others? Would there be large and small sacrifices that you made for mere acquaintances? Would you realize that all of the faults, flaws and challenges of your life were simply tremendous opportunities to grow as a human being? Like George Bailey, would you understand that you are living a wonderful life? I believe that the answer for all of you reading this newsletter is a resounding, "Yes!"

In spite of an economy that was hemorrhaging jobs, incomes and wealth, all of you helped hundreds of hungry men, women and children across Wisconsin. In fact, Buckets received requests from more food pantries than ever. We heard from pantries that were running out of food and money. Most pantries reported usage increased by 50% while donations dropped 30% or more. A number of those pantries told us that without our matching program, they would have had to close their doors.

Our efforts started with the annual dinner and auction on April 16th. The theme was "The Ice Bowl Cometh." It was a reunion of Green Bay Packers and Dallas Cowboys who participated in the epic NFL Championship game over forty years ago at frigid Lambeau Stadium. Packers stars Donny Anderson, Boyd Dowler, Ken Bowman, Dave Robinson and Jerry Kramer joined with Cowboys legends Jethro Pugh, Cornell Green and Mel Renfro to share stories and laughs. Paul Hornung served as master of ceremonies for this great gathering. It was obvious by the demeanor of these gentlemen that both Vince Lombardi and Tom Landry coached them to be people of strong character and great generosity.

Two hundred attendees showed their benevolence by bidding high and often during the evening. Ron Krantz, of UW Provisions, stood out with his generous bidding of over \$6,500 during the live and silent auctions. Dr. Jim Bowers chipped in strongly with a bid of \$4,000 on the "Great Sports Memories" item. Once again, Beverly Lynde was a strong supporter of Buckets for Hunger with a live auction bid of \$3,500 on the Packers/Cowboys Ice Bowl football signed by sixteen Packers and Cowboys.

Buckets moved into the twenty-first century when former Badger football star, Joe Thomas, joined the festivities via a live Skype connection. His donation of tickets to a Packers/Browns game brought in almost \$1,000.

For the seventh consecutive year, Alliant Energy served as one of the major corporate sponsors of this event. They have been doing so for all fifteen years of our existence. In addition, MassMutual Financial Group was another major corporate sponsor for the fifth straight year. All told, the net proceeds for the evening amounted to just under \$40,000.



For the first time in many years, Buckets' Board of Directors approved a large-scale raffle of a major item.

The item was a set of ten Packers figurines mounted on a cherry wood base with a custom-made acrylic cover. The figurines included Packers Super Bowl I legends Bart Starr, Jim Taylor, Paul Hornung, Forrest Gregg, Jerry Kramer, Willie Wood, Herb Adderley, Willie Davis and Ray Nitschke along with Coach Vince Lombardi. Original autographs from each of the players were mounted to the base along with a check with an original signature from Coach Lombardi. Buckets is very thankful to all of you who purchased and/or sold raffle tickets across the state. When the final tally was taken, Buckets showed a net profit of over \$12,000 on the project. On November 15th, Wayne Stapleford from the Wisconsin Dells area had his ticket drawn as the lucky winner of the figurine set. Ten other lucky people won the remaining prizes from the raffle.

In late July, Buckets presented Michael Finley with a plaque commemorating the delivery of over \$1,000,000 in grants to food pantries. Buckets also presented him with a plaque from Wisconsin Governor James Doyle honoring him for his NBA career and for his fifteen-year involvement with Buckets. Michael has been involved with Buckets from the very beginning.



In the fall, Buckets did two more fund-raising events. The first event was the annual invitation to watch a Packers game with Packers players. This year Zeke Bratkowski, Dave Robinson and John Brockington joined us on October 18th to watch the Packers beat the Lions. Then on November 7, we held the "Second Annual Adam Burish Thanksgiving Challenge" auction at the Kohl Center. Adam brought in a vast array of game-worn items from

his friends and colleagues around the league. UW men's hockey coach, Mike Eaves, was more than generous with his donations of Badger items and tickets. For the evening, Buckets showed net proceeds of just over \$5,600.



But the ultimate fund-raising event again this year was the Food Pantry Challenge. It is held each year from November 1st through December 15th. Buckets provides food pantry personnel with a letter to send out to their local donors. It asks them to make a donation check to Buckets. We promise to return that money to their local pantry and add fifty cents per dollar in matching funds. Due to overwhelming responses, Buckets sets a maximum matching amount of \$5,000 per food pantry. Buckets

provides the matching dollars up to the point at which we simply run out of matching money.

This year, twenty-six food pantries raised over \$140,000 in donations for Buckets to match. Seven different pantries ended up receiving the maximum matching amount of \$5,000 from Buckets funds. Consider these facts. With the generosity of our volunteers, our individual donors, our athletes, our Board of Directors and the attendees of our events, we had just over \$53,000 to use for the matching funds. That means that between our matching money and the food pantry challenge donations an extra \$193,000 was donated to food pantries across this great state of Wisconsin. That could help purchase nearly 1,350,000 pounds of food for hungry people. That is truly meeting our mission to "...wipe away the tears of hunger and to replace them with a glimmer of hope in the eyes of the needy."

All told, Buckets had net proceeds of nearly \$60,000 for the year. Our operational expenses during the year amounted to approximately \$6,000. That left around \$53,000 to use for matching money for the food pantry challenge program. In fact, Buckets used up nearly every dime that we had in order to satisfy our promise. We now have a meager \$1,400 to cover our operational expenses for the entire year. That means that Buckets is now about \$5,000 short of covering our expenses for this coming year. Yet, I know somehow we will make it work.

You have all been given a great gift. Your gift was the opportunity to help hundreds of people (that you probably will never meet) to the simple pleasure of enjoying a decent meal with their families. Thank God you all accepted the opportunity.

May God be with you always.

Wayne D. Bisek, President and Founder
Buckets for Hunger, Incorporated

From left to right:

Picture one: Mel Renfro, Ken Bowman, Dave Robinson, Boyd Dowler, Ron Krantz, Jethro Pugh, Deborah Jensen, Cornell Green, Paul Hornung, Donny Anderson and Jerry Kramer.

Picture two: Bertha, Michael and Rebecca Finley. Wayne and Cole Bisek, and Paul Lynde.

Picture three: Jerry Kramer and Wayne Stapleford.

Picture four: Dave Robinson, Adam Warriner, Zeke Bratkowski and John Brockington.