

## Faith drives woman's desire to help others in need

By Michele Lynn, The Herald-Sun  
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CHAPEL HILL -- As a child, Irene Briggaman watched as her father -- the owner of a small grocery store and butcher shop in West Hazleton, Pa. -- regularly placed an extra dozen eggs or bag of candy into the grocery bags of his customers in need.

"I learned from a young age the importance of sharing your own blessings with others," Briggaman said.

It's clearly a lesson that she has taken to heart. Her volunteer efforts have been recognized with numerous honors including the Governor's Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service, the Jaycees Distinguished Service Award and the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce's Outstanding Volunteer and Community Betterment Awards.

The groups which have benefited from Briggaman's tireless commitment over the years include Estes Hills Elementary, Phillips Junior High, Chapel Hill High, the Girl Scouts, the Teen Center, American Red Cross, the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce, the Polish American Club of the Triangle, the Triangle Land Conservancy and the Inter-Faith Council for Social Service, to name just a few.

Briggaman first became involved with IFC through her church.

"St. Thomas More was looking for an alternate delegate to bring information back to the church about IFC," she said. "I thought this would be a good way to get a little bit involved with IFC. But being a little bit involved with IFC is like being a little bit pregnant. There is no end to the needs so I just pitched in and got involved."

That involvement included serving as the chairwoman of RSVVP from its inception in 1989 through 2000. On RSVVP day -- which will be held Tuesday -- 10 percent of each tab at participating restaurants is donated to local agencies, including the IFC, which feed the hungry. (For a list of participating restaurants, go to [www.ifcweb.org](http://www.ifcweb.org).)

"We have 103 restaurants participating this year," said Briggaman. "There's something for everyone -- every type of food and every price range is covered.

"I know that some families are just one paycheck ahead of their bills. Some have to decide between buying medicine or paying the rent. I'm involved with IFC because they do a fantastic job of getting the resources they have to the people who need it the most."

Briggaman finds inspiration for her community involvement from her Catholic faith.

"Father John Durbin, our pastor at St. Thomas More, said recently that if you can eat what you want when you want and you have a permanent roof over your head, you are in the elite 1 percent of the world's population," said Briggaman.

Briggaman and her husband Al moved to Chapel Hill in 1964 and celebrated their 43rd wedding anniversary this year. They appreciate their good fortune and each other.

"All these years later, we're probably getting it right," she laughed. "We're as different as people can be. He's an only child; I'm from a family of 6. I like the nighttime and he likes the early morning. The one major factor that keeps the marriage fresh and alive is a sense of humor. The fact that we are very different is very refreshing. It has turned out to be quite an interesting marriage."

Briggaman worked as a registered nurse before deciding to stay at home with her children, Kimberly, now 35, and Scott, 33.

"Some of the nicest people I have met have been through my volunteering," said Briggaman, adding that she has about eight different tote bags, each of which contains the paperwork for a different volunteer activity.

"As long as I can pick up that bag and head out the door to volunteer, I will," she said. "And I'll continue to encourage others so they can see how much their talents, whatever they may be, are helpful to our community."

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