

Long-time Salvation Army volunteer rings in hope in Idaho's Blaine County

Volunteer-led service extension units bring Salvation Army assistance to communities where it has no physical presence.

Twelve years ago, Richard Brown left Houston for a business opportunity in Ketchum, a mountain town in Blaine County, Idaho. His kids had just graduated from high school—the time was right. Soon after, he realized something important was missing from his life: his connection to The Salvation Army.



As a former board member and chair of The Salvation Army Houston Adult Rehabilitation Center (ARC), Brown had grown accustomed to seeing firsthand how the organization helps restore lives.

“I really missed it,” Brown said. “I missed The Salvation Army. I missed being part of that work.”

At the time, Brown was still commuting back to Houston regularly to complete his ARC board term. During that transition, he attended a national Salvation Army convention in Phoenix, where he heard a woman share a story that mirrored his own.

The speaker, who had retired and moved to a small community, realized she missed being involved with The Salvation Army. She saw a need locally and began a one-person service extension effort that eventually grew into a volunteer-supported program.

Salvation Army [service extension units](#) are volunteer-run outposts in communities without a local Salvation Army corps community center. Relying on community donations, they offer temporary emergency assistance, including help with rent, utilities, medical and dental expenses, food and other essential needs, helping bridge the gap for families struggling to make ends meet.

“After I heard the woman talk, I thought, ‘We can do that here,’” Brown said.

Despite the presence of the affluent Sun Valley resort, service workers in Blaine County’s rural small towns face significant need. A Wood River Valley [community needs assessment](#) found that about 41 percent of households fall into the ALICE category—Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed—meaning families are working but still struggle to afford basic living expenses. In a region where housing and everyday costs continue to rise, a single unexpected expense can quickly create a

financial crisis.

Brown contacted The Salvation Army Twin Falls (Idaho) Service Center to learn how to start a unit in Blaine County. Soon after, he was leading the all-volunteer Salvation Army Wood River Service Extension Unit, serving individuals and families throughout the Wood River Valley while continuing to run his oil and gas company.

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Lloyd Potter

“I’m thinking of recent needs we’ve filled—the last three or four have been rent assistance... And we’ve got a soft spot for kids. In some of these families, the kids kind of get lost in the mix,” Brown said, noting that children’s needs can be put on hold while parents struggle to pay for housing and food.

He said The Salvation Army’s [annual Red Kettle campaign](#), held each holiday season, is central to meeting these needs.

Brown leads bellringing efforts at locations including Atkinson’s Market in Ketchum and—new in 2025—at the Albertsons in Hailey.

With the help of volunteers John Dimant and Al Oliver—two deacons from his church—the two sites raised \$37,087 during the 2025 kettle season to support Salvation Army assistance throughout Blaine County. It was the most successful kettle season yet.

The bellringing tradition has become a yearly commitment for Brown—one he has maintained for the past 12 years. He said the kettles provide an opportunity to explain to people he might not otherwise encounter [how The Salvation Army uses their donations](#). And sometimes people tell him stories about The Salvation Army—stories he said motivate him to continue to serve.



Richard Brown with his dog at the Red Kettle. Courtesy Richard Brown.

“Richard understands that bell ringing is about connection as much as it is about donations,” said Lloyd Potter, Service Extension Director for The Salvation Army Cascade Division. “By taking time to thank donors and explain how the funds stay local, he helps people see the real impact their generosity has in their own community.”

Brown said he especially appreciates when people share how The Salvation Army helped them or their family.

“Sometimes a little old lady will wander up and say, ‘Can I tell you a story?’ Those moments really move you,” he said.

Serving at the red kettles defines the holiday season for Brown—it’s woven into the fabric of his life.

“I don’t know what I’d do during the holidays without it,” he said. “We start the week before Thanksgiving, and before you know it, it’s Christmas Eve—it’s just kind of a blur.”

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His faithfulness has not gone unnoticed.

“Richard Brown’s story is a powerful reminder that one person’s willingness to serve—supported by a team and a caring community—can make an extraordinary impact,” Potter said. “Through faithfulness, generosity and partnership, these volunteers help ring in hope for Ketchum, Hailey and beyond.”

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