

A tribute to Charlie Wilson

West Women's and Children's Shelter volunteer

When told he was inspirational, Charlie Wilson would reply that the most inspirational people were those he helped daily. Wilson, known as "Grandpa Charlie," died in November 2014 at age 99 after decades of service to The Salvation Army West Women's and Children's Shelter in Portland, Ore. After celebrating his 99th birthday at the shelter with his family present, he continued to visit the shelter as often as his health permitted.



When Wilson retired from engineering in 1972, his wife asked him to take food donations to their church's Loaves and Fishes program. After that, the couple collected food and clothing for local charities, and several times a week Wilson carried 60 pounds or more of donations to shelters half a mile away. When the donations became too heavy, his daughter transported them in her van. Wilson is credited with an estimated 15,000-20,000 pounds of donations annually.

Of the many agencies where he volunteered, the West Women's and Children's Shelter was close to Wilson's heart. Every Monday and Friday, he walked from his apartment to the shelter and worked a full day performing general maintenance, fixing vacuum cleaners and other appliances, and most importantly being "grandpa" to the residents.

"Charlie demonstrated love and respect, and he treated everyone with the dignity they deserved," said Teresa Steinmetz, director of communications and marketing for The Salvation Army Portland Metro. "When someone struggled, he would encourage them, and at night he would light a candle for them. Everyone who met him was blessed to have known him."

Wilson credited all his work to Luisa, the love of his life, who inspired this legacy of love.