



Alumni volunteers Jon Giberson and Kay Wilson-Bolton collect and distribute food, provide housing assistance, mentoring and other services to help people in their community.

The Spirit of Service

Alumni Siblings Deliver Hope to Their Community

BY MARY SHUBERT BENDER

It's a call to action often attributed to Gandhi: "Be the change you wish to see in the world."

That describes the volunteerism of two Cal Poly Pomona alumni — **Jon Giberson** and sister **Kay (Giberson) Wilson-Bolton** — who tirelessly devote themselves to community service.

Wilson-Bolton ('68, business administration) is the volunteer director of Spirit of Santa Paula, a non profit that provides showers, meals, housing assistance, utility payments, mental health referrals and laundry service to homeless residents of that Ventura County city.

Every Wednesday, the group prepares 600 dinners at First Presbyterian Church in Santa Paula and provides free diagnostic screenings, tuberculosis tests and mental health consultations.

Wilson-Bolton, a real estate agent for 40 years, makes it her off-duty mission to advocate for those without a roof over their heads. In 2002, she and five other Santa Paula residents established the charity, which broadened its outreach after a tragedy on Christmas Eve 2008.

"We found a homeless man dead in one of our churches," says Wilson-Bolton, who

previously served as city mayor. "He lived in Santa Paula. He was only 37 years old."

Spirit volunteers, among them her husband Howard, also pinpoint what each homeless client needs to regain stability and order.

Years spent untangling their chaotic circumstances have shown Wilson-Bolton that the roots of homelessness run the gamut, from substance abuse and incarceration to crumbling family structures, precarious finances, minimal education and a lack of job skills.

For someone teetering on the brink of eviction, rental assistance or help paying a utility bill can halt their downward slide. Addicts and former inmates are often harder to turn around, Wilson-Bolton says, because they've usually burned bridges, squandered opportunities, betrayed and alienated friends and relatives.

"They've stolen the rent money. They've siphoned gas out of the car," she says.

Childhood encounters with homeless people at their house in rural New Hampshire may have planted the seeds of Wilson-Bolton's advocacy work.

"My mother was always one who would feed what we'd call the 'hobos,'"

she says. The men sat on the back steps of their home while her mom prepared meals for them. "They would never look at me, so I always had a sense of their shame."

In Santa Paula, Wilson-Bolton collects surplus food for the hungry. Spirit volunteers are certified to reclaim items that supermarkets and students would otherwise throw away.

"We pick up un-served food from schools. It's the unbitten apple, the unpeeled banana, the unopened carton of milk."

Wilson-Bolton, 71, recalls living "on a shoestring" during her college years at Cal Poly Pomona.

"I worked in the engineering department, I worked in the financial aid office, and I worked in one of the big department stores," she says.

She enrolled at Cal Poly Pomona at the urging of her older brother, who already was a student there.

"Jon encouraged me to join him at Cal Poly Pomona. His wife Gail worked there and introduced me to the financial aid office," says the business alumna, who also joined the Rose Float committee and served as the senior class secretary.

Jon Giberson ('67, marketing

management), who is six years older, graduated from Redlands High School in 1958 and served four years in the U.S. Coast Guard. After his service in the military, he attended San Bernardino Valley College and worked at a small business in Yucaipa. He began dating the boss's daughter, Gail. Soon, they married and both landed at Cal Poly Pomona — he as a business student and she working in campus administration.

As an undergraduate, Giberson served as ASI vice president and, with Gail, chaperoned the men's basketball team to a tournament in Phoenix. "We rode out on the bus," he says. "That was quite an adventure."

After graduation, Giberson was recruited by Xerox Corporate in Orange County. He moved to Orange, and, with a co-worker, joined a philanthropic organization for young men. Eventually they aged out of that group, so he joined the Roosters Foundation in 1989.

Every year, the nonprofit provides about 20 to 35 grants to small, local charities, Giberson says. The Roosters select recipients that effectively fill a specific need, such as after-school tutoring, art therapy, advocating for crime victims, and career mentoring for youths leaving

the foster care system. Each cause receives \$5,000 to \$10,000 in cash grants.

"Our mission is to support needy and at-risk children in Orange County who are at risk of going hungry or at risk of having no place to sleep," he says.

The Roosters' biggest endeavor is the annual holiday food drive that Giberson, 77, chaired for 10 years.

"We fill 3,000 boxes with a frozen turkey, fresh produce and canned goods — enough to feed 10 people," he says.

Rooster activities are often a family affair: Gail, their daughter Amy, her husband Tony, and grandson Spencer, now 17, helped fill the food boxes. The Roosters rely on the Boys & Girls Clubs and 50 other organizations to identify families in need and distribute the food boxes.

"It has been a great joy of mine to teach my grandson from the age of 5 to give back," he says.

Fellow volunteers were a godsend when his wife fell ill. Rooster members and spouses visited and brought over meals.

"She passed away from brain cancer in 2016, and my fellow Roosters have been great support."

In recent years, the number of homeless encampments has ballooned, from Anaheim to downtown Los Angeles to Ventura. The sheer scope could discourage and overwhelm those on the front lines, leaving them to wonder — as the adage goes — whether they're trying to empty the ocean with a teaspoon. Not so with this brother and sister.

"We know we're making a difference, and that keeps us going," Giberson says. "We see the joy in the people who come to pick up the 40-pound food boxes and see how our grant checks are being used to help the less fortunate."

Wilson-Bolton harkens back to a Cal Poly Pomona philosophy class. Her professor assigned an essay topic that crystallized her worldview: "What should you do when you see somebody who is hungry?"

"I remember writing that our world would be a better place if we saw ourselves as our brother's keeper," Wilson-Bolton says.

"I got an A, and I never got A's! That one assignment shaped my memory and my preparation for what I would be doing in the future."