



Meet 2020's True Santas

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If you believe in Santa Claus, then you know his global distribution of toys and good cheer the night before Christmas is the culmination of year-round work.

It is the same in the real world.

We are filled with the spirit of generosity during the holidays, but to really make a difference, the heavy lifting goes on day in and day out, regardless of the season. This is a lesson reinforced by the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

Once again this year, The Sun Chronicle pays tribute to some of the many volunteers who make our communities better places in which to live — all year long.

In keeping with the holiday, because there are 12 days of Christmas, we present to you 12 categories that highlight some of the area's True Santas.

TRUE SANTAS: Visiting the imprisoned, and opening doors to their futures

By Kayla Canne kcanne@thesunchronicle.com



Diana Reeves of Mansfield, along with her husband Peter Kortright and former probation officer Paul Hodge, runs a re-entry program for prisoners from the Bristol County House of Corrections who are returning to communities in the Attleboro area.

Mark Stockwell / The Sun Chronicle

Diana Reeves is guided by scripture.

The seven corporal works of mercy in the Christian faith focus on healing the vulnerable — the hungry, the poor, the sick — with one of the final acts of grace, “visit the imprisoned.”

After several years of exploring the topic of restorative justice through the Society of St. Vincent de Paul District Council of Attleboro’s Voices of the Poor committee, that phrase stuck out to her.

“We hardly ever do that,” Reeves said. “Those people are warehoused and lost in the shuffle.”

So, the 73-year-old Mansfield woman set out to do it herself.

In 2016, Reeves, alongside her husband Peter Kortright and former probation officer Paul Hodge, started a re-entry program for prisoners at the Bristol County House of Corrections, returning them to communities in the Attleboro area.

The program meets with prisoners leading up to their release to plot key points for a successful transition into society, while also processing themes of identity, goal-setting and restoring one’s life.

It has graduated 90 people since its inception.

And after their release, the Immersion Reentry program sponsored by the district council provides assistance with finding housing, education, mentoring and advocacy.

And Reeves knows personally how that can shape someone’s life; she has had close relatives spend time in prison.

But she realizes she has led a privileged life.

So when the issue called to her, she felt she needed to answer.

She explains that Pope Francis once said, “The Lord is knocking at the door of our hearts. Have we put a sign on the door saying, ‘Do not disturb?’”

“Re-entry work inside and outside the prison frequently requires us to move from our comfort zone, question our opinions, obtain the facts and act,” she said.

“I have an active conscience. I want to do the next right thing. We’re very comfortable. The prison is down there and we’re up here. You don’t want to know. But if you look into it, it’s not rocket science to see what’s needed to do the right thing.”

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