

HELPING *the* HOUSEBOUND

Store to Door engages volunteers to take orders, shop for those who no longer can do it themselves

By **MAGGI WHITE**
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"You're an earth angel, I don't know what I'd do without you," a housebound, disabled elder told Kiersten Ware on a recent visit to deliver groceries.

This type of comment helps Ware fulfill her mission "to serve" as the executive director of Store to Door, a Portland nonprofit that not only delivers food but is "a friend at the door."

When she heard the comment, Ware was filling in for an ill driver. But it was not atypical of the statements made from the more than 300 people who depend on Store to Door for their basic necessities.

Founded in 1989, Store to Door supports independent living for Portland-area seniors and people with disabilities by providing a low-cost, volunteer-based grocery shopping and delivery service.

More than 250 volunteers and community partners serve these vulnerable elders in Multnomah County and Beaverton. In this way they help them maintain their independence, increase their social supports, and access other services that support aging-in-place.

An army of volunteers calls and takes orders from each client and another army of volunteers shop for groceries at the Hollywood Fred Meyer.

Among those taking orders is 101-year-old Eleanor Rubinstein who, with her dog Sophie, a 6-year-old Dachshund, reports for duty every Tuesday. Sophie, she says, sits on the chair beside her and listens to her calls.

Rubinstein volunteered as "something to do," but her history of volunteerism is a part of her life, having started with the Girl Scouts "100 years ago," she says. She describes the other volunteers at Store to Door as "just amazing," and she has made telephone friends with the clients she calls. Rubinstein hopes to be able to do the rounds with a driver, although she admits she wishes she was a driver herself so she could meet the people who benefit from the service.

"They are so grateful," she says, describing her own life as "wonderful," and "I've loved everything I have done."

In addition to groceries, Store to Door also delivers prescriptions and household items. Clients reimburse for the groceries (about \$50) and pay a 10 percent delivery fee for the service. However, the service costs more than what is charged so donations from grants, foundations and individuals are imperative every year to keep the program functioning.

Ware's personal mission to serve others comes from the memory of her grandparents, who played a big role in her life as she grew up. "They spent time with me, talking to me, introducing me to arts and culture, giving me insights on education," she says. "One grandparent was a champion water skier with a gregarious, outgoing personality who took me camping, swimming and water skiing. On the other side were immigrants who taught me the manners, about etiquette and culture. That grandmother was a volunteer her entire life."

Elders, she says, were examples of lives well lived "and made aging look attractive. I was drawn to being around older people because they took time with me, gave me attention and care."

When in college and away from family, Ware volunteered as



a friendly visitor and adopted a grandparent. "And the rest is history," she says, adding that she has served with nonprofit organizations for 20 years.

Her passion and commitment is to the field of aging and supporting multi-generational communities. "Too many Americans live alone due to the divorce rate and we have a very segregated society," Ware says. "In cities, from 40 to 50 percent of all households are single families. Store to Door clients are 80 percent female, low income, with physical disabilities and food insecurity and they live alone."

With the increase in the aging population and decrease in the birth rate she says there needs to be community connections and engaging with this population to preserve their dignity.

"Ninety percent of elders do not want to be in an institution," she says. "The expense is so high. We need more resources for them."

Store to Door is an advocate for this age group.

Ware says all volunteers are screened and trained. No volunteers are given face-to-face encounters with clients until they have passed review taking orders and shopping. Consistency is a key factor, especially drivers who will see the same clients every week and establish trust. Their high-

est need is drivers who can commit to weekly deliveries for as little as one hour and up to four hours.

"These clients have no technology in their homes," Ware says. "Our delivery people fill a huge gap including socialization. They are also the eyes and ears for their clients, noticing changing habits that might need further services, getting to know their client's lifestyles and being patient enough to sometimes linger to hear their stories."

"The stories are amazing," Ware says. "We should hear them. These people have contributed to the fabric of our society. They have a perspective on life but no one to share it with. The woman who called me an 'earth angel' had moved to this area to be with her children and now they're all gone. She would be lost without this service."

Ware says the desire to connect is a two-way street. "I told



Left, Eleanor Rubinstein, a 101-year-old volunteer at Store to Door, calls a homebound client and writes down a list of grocery items for that person at the Store to Door location in Hillsdale. Rubinstein brings Sophie, a 6-year-old Dachshund, while she makes phone calls. While there are volunteers to take orders, there are others who do the shopping, like Liz Lippoff (top), choosing the freshest produce for their clients. Other volunteers, like Pamela Wright (above), deliver the groceries to housebound clients.

Of note
Store to Door is eager to visit companies, clubs or neighborhood associations to talk about the mission and ways for people to make a difference.
Other volunteer opportunities are administrative and special projects. Volunteer inquiries can be made through Barb@storetodoororegon.org or by calling 503-200-3333.

clients, "You're helping us. We have a desire to connect with you." The relationship is reciprocal."

She's also a gerontologist so her knowledge of aging is an advantage in her work. There are internships available and some people who take orders are mothers with babies, half are 50 years of age or older and they stay

mitment of one to three hours weekly. Ware says doing something like this builds teamwork. In addition, school groups have ways to participate and get exposed to multi-generational experiences. ■

Did you know ...

- Drivers must be at least 21 years old.
- In 15 years from now, nearly one in five Oregonians will be over the age of 65.
- Between 2001 to 2011 the number of "food insecure" seniors has doubled to one in 12.
- In the next 10 years the number of elders experiencing poverty will increase to one-third. (Multnomah County Age Wave Planning Report)

the longest. One order-taker has been with Store to Door for more than 20 years and arrives every week. A big priority now is getting company support for deliveries. Businesses can deliver as a group directly to clients' homes. It is a way for a group to know clients on a personal level with a com-