

Joanne Hickox loves senior citizens, and she's spent the past ten years of her life, without pay, demonstrating it!

In the beginning, it wasn't easy. Seven years ago, having gained the trust of four skeptical senior citizens, Joanne encouraged them to attend a simple trip to the ice cream parlor. It allowed these four a chance, in a safe environment, to get to know one another, to build friendships and a sense of community. To her amazement, their comfort level increased, and they wanted to start going out on a regular monthly basis.

With every passing month, the seniors became more secure and more confident. Soon these first four live-alone-at-home seniors invited a few friends. In no time, the four had multiplied to forty. After another year, her seniors group numbered nearly one hundred. That's when they told Joanne that they wanted more than just social gatherings; they desired to have a real "purpose" in their lives again. So Joanne started with age-appropriate, team-oriented community service days.

At first, she used an old, borrowed church van, with just enough money from a couple of small local grants to cover the cost of buying groceries to cook lunch for her seniors. Then she could only schedule activities once a month. That soon became twice a month. Now five years later, ten times or more a month she takes her "Seniors on a Mission" into the community to help other non-profit organizations by stuffing envelopes for special mailings, repairing donated clothing for the city's homeless, or a myriad of other labor-intensive activities, all of which benefit the seniors, the non-profits, and the community as a whole.

She soon acquired a large bus, which she outfitted especially for her seniors, to replace the borrowed, old church van. Every week now finds Joanne organizing opportunities with local non-profits, driving her bus full of seniors from any one of her nine pickup locations to the non-profits, and cooking lunch for them. On every one of these daily mission trips she hugs and loves every one of her now over 350 seniors (and growing) currently involved.

Last year alone, she and her seniors contributed back to the community over 7,700 hours of service, valued at \$150,000 worth of volunteer labor, to 26 community organizations throughout Northeast Florida. Her seniors range in age from 55 to 104. Nina, her 104-year-old, rides her three-wheel bike to the bus pickup location and almost never misses an outing.

With Joanne, it's all about her "Senior Saints." Not once has she ever sought out or strove for awards or honors. She feels that the gratification she receives from seeing her seniors live healthier, more engaged, and fulfilled lives with new meaning, is sufficient.

Joanne has been volunteering over sixty hours a week for nearly ten years. Any of her 350+ seniors will tell you that she's a genuine uncommon hero in the most enthusiastic endorsement possible.

I'm her husband, and I feel honored to nominate my wife for your "Uncommon Hero" award.

Submitter: Bryan Hickox

Subject: Joanne Hickox