

# GOOD NEWS

SUMMER 2019

CHANGING LIVES THROUGH THE POWER OF WORK

## THE GOODWILL LEADER FROM DISMAL HOLLOW

**G**rowing up in the early 1960s in a spot called Dismal Hollow, just miles outside of Front Royal, Virginia, Donnie Tolson rose in the early mornings to attend to the responsibility his parents had assigned him: taking care of his family's flock of chickens.

"Are my chickens okay?" he'd ask, as he walked the chicken pens, shaking feed out for them.

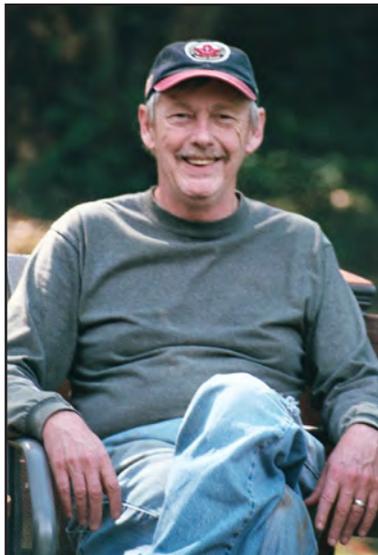
Later, Donnie graduated to picking apples for 75 cents an hour, tucking his money away every week in his first savings account at the local bank. In quiet moments, he would pull out his passport savings book to study how much bounty he had tallied.

"Those early years hooked me on work," he said.

And, fortunately for so many, the beneficiaries of his decades-long commitment to work have been the clients and staff of Goodwill. Donnie has worked with Goodwill since 1976, mentoring, guiding, and growing the Goodwill enterprise of connecting people—many with disabilities—to jobs.

With Donnie's retirement in September, his era of active leadership will come to a close; however, the legacy of this

leader from Dismal Hollow will long be felt in the family of Goodwill.



After earning his bachelor's degree at Virginia Tech in 1976 – the first in his family to get a college degree – Donnie attempted some entrepreneurial ambitions, including a worm farm. Soon after, he joined Goodwill Industries International (GII) and has never looked back. When a middle son was born with a disability, Goodwill's mission to "put good people to work," and helping those with disabilities find jobs, really struck home.

For 27 years Donnie worked for GII, developing along the way as a charismatic and strategic leader. He retired in 2003 – only to come out of retirement seven years later to join Rappahannock Goodwill (RGI) as chief administrative officer and chief financial officer.

Woody Van Valkenburgh, then RGI's President and CEO, encouraged Donnie to return to the world of Goodwill when he needed a CFO. Having known Donnie for many years, Woody was confident he was the leader needed to help guide Rappahannock Goodwill's financial and strategic directions. After Woody retired in 2015, Donnie became RGI's President and CEO beginning in January, 2016.

*Continued on page two...*



**DONNIE'S COLUMN****MY GOODWILL JOURNEY**

By Donnie Tolson, President &amp; CEO

My Goodwill journey began over 43 years ago at Goodwill Industries International. My three decades there were filled with pride at the hundreds of thousands, indeed millions, of people who found a better life through the Power of Work. It was a vicarious pride, as I read the statistics of resilient men and women who chased their dreams, despite barriers to employment.



My last decade at Rappahannock Goodwill has taken me from that arms' length pride to a close-up view. I am amazed by the people we serve, the skin they put into their futures, and the incredible skills and talents of the Goodwill professionals who help them. What we call the "Goodwill burn" has been white-hot because although we don't help millions, just ten thousand or so, I personally know those we serve. People like Chris (intellectual disability), Emmetri (traumatic brain injury), Virgil (chronic poverty) and Chuck (debilitating physical injury) who have been our Achiever/Graduates of the Year during my time as CEO. They are better described these days by their accomplishments – lead custodian, vocational services specialist, CDL driver, and business owner. Wow!

We've increased revenues to be sure, but more importantly, we've grown in impact. Job placements have tripled to 1,500. Neither happens without an engaged Board of Directors, a talented leadership team, our 555 employee family, and a dazzling array of partner agencies. I am grateful to all of them for allowing me to serve and hopefully enable their ongoing excellence.

"Our responsibility is not discharged by the announcement of virtuous ends." That quote from JFK has hung on my office wall for 41 years. As I look back, I like to think that I've lived up to that quote, not only talking the talk but walking the walk. As I look forward, I see nothing but positives for Goodwill. Godspeed. ■

**THE GOODWILL LEADER***...Continued from page one*

Over his years of work at Goodwill, Donnie looks to a few accomplishments as some of his most lasting achievements, including defending Goodwill's donated goods program from a potential tax reclassification, professionally mentoring colleagues whose careers are flourishing, and, most profoundly, "putting good people to work."



For Donnie, Goodwill is a proven brand. "I was fascinated from the start by Goodwill's business model, which is to earn money through social enterprise—our stores—that is then applied to our



charitable purpose of putting folks to work. I later became enamored of the mission, and since 1976, I've never looked back," he said. "I'm proud of this organization and the work we do. Guided by a powerful vision and led by an outstanding team of professionals

and fantastic board of directors, RGI is unwavering in its commitment to serve the community. I look forward to seeing continued progress of RGI's mission."

His impact has been profound. Each year, a survey is conducted by the Pollack Company on the impact RGI has on the local economy. The most recent results showed that RGI has an impressive \$80.8 million in economic and fiscal benefits to the local economy. "What these numbers can't tell you is the positive impact having a job has on individuals, their families, and our community. We refer to this as the Power of Work," Donnie said. Indeed, last year RGI helped 9,481 people and was directly responsible for placing 1,451 individuals into new jobs. Both of these figures were record numbers of people served by RGI.



As he retires, Donnie says he will stay in the area and remain invested in the future success of Goodwill. “The Rappahannock Goodwill Board of Directors is grateful to Donnie for his service and appreciative of all of his efforts to move the organization forward,” said Bruce Barnett, board chairman. “Donnie’s extensive experience at Goodwill Industries International, his keen business knowledge, and his love for the work of Goodwill

have made him an outstanding leader for the organization, and we wish him well.”

Fortunately for the people and clients of Goodwill, Donnie plans to stay connected by making his metaphorical rounds, as he did as a boy walking the chicken pen in Dismal Hollow, making sure all is well. ■



## A HAND UP AWARD RECIPIENTS HONORED

A back injury ended a 20-year career in carpentry for Mr. Chuck Green. Not sure what his next career would be, he met with a Case Manager at Rappahannock Goodwill (RGI) in Culpeper and decided to become a home inspector. With funds provided by the Department of Labor’s Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act through the Virginia Career Works—Piedmont Region, Chuck was able to take an online course through Germanna Community College. Today, Chuck is the owner and operator of Granite Home Inspections, LLC.

Chuck received RGI’s “A Hand Up” 2019 Graduate Award for making significant improvement in his life using RGI services.

“A Hand Up” awards are presented annually to exemplary individuals helped by RGI services, community members, and volunteers.

The Central Rappahannock Regional Library (CRRL) was recognized as RGI’s 2019 Community Partner of the year. For more than nine years, RGI and CRRL have worked

together on behalf of the community, providing volunteer literacy tutoring and job seeking assistance to any who are interested. Ms. Martha Hutzel, Executive Director of the Central Rappahannock Regional Library, accepted the award.

The Volunteer of the Year Award was presented to Ms. Bernardine Miles. Bernardine participates in the AmeriCorps Goodskills Literacy program at RGI. She has also worked in the RGI Job Help Center assisting individuals with resume writing, conducting mock interviews, and sharing her life and career experiences.

“A Hand Up” event sponsors included The Media Partners, Proxios, and Hirschler. ■



From L-R: Donnie Tolson, Martha Hutzel, Chuck Green, and Bernardine Miles.

