



THE KINDNESS  
PROJECT

HUNGER HERO

WomansDay

# FOOD *for All*

After retiring, Charolette Tidwell put her pension—and her heart—into nourishing her community.



The founder of a Fort Smith, AR, food pantry on her delivery route.

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 22 →

KENNETH M RUGGIANO, HAIR & MAKEUP: PAMELA STEWART FOR ZENO BIA AGENCY.

Six days a week, 70-year-old Charolette Tidwell wakes up at 5:30 a.m. to work 12 hours at Antioch for Youth & Family, the food pantry in Fort Smith, AR, that she founded 16 years ago.

With the feisty 5'5" Charolette at the helm, Antioch is a hub for the community. When children stop by (a frequent occurrence in the summer), she cooks them lunch. When an elderly man can't get to a doctor's appointment, she drives him. She helps the unemployed find jobs, mentors at-risk youth, and sometimes holds Saturday distributions so the working poor still have access to fresh vegetables.

### Growing up poor

Charolette's giving nature stems from her family, particularly her mother, who, while raising 10 kids, made time to care for others. "We were very poor, but she was always helping somebody," says Charolette. "I watched her navigate her needs, her family's needs and the needs of the community." This ultimately inspired Charolette to become a nurse, a job she held for 32 years before retiring and starting the pantry.

### Expanding the cause

With her background in healthcare, Charolette always knew nutrition was a problem for many low-income households, but she didn't realize the extent of it until 2009. While grocery shopping, Charolette asked the cashier why the senior in line in front of her had bought pet



Charolette packing food.

“Charolette loads her truck with 50-pound bags of produce, then distributes them to seniors who have no way to get healthy food on their own.”



food. When she was told it was the person's dinner, Charolette decided to expand Antioch for Youth & Family by creating a senior mobile pantry. "Seniors don't want handouts, but they're often forced to choose between buying medicine and food each day," says Charolette.

"I try to build a relationship with them and get them what they need."

So every week, Charolette loads up her truck with 50-pound bags of produce, then drives to a local retirement home and distributes the fresh fruits and vegetables with a group of volunteers. The largest complex she delivers to has 288 residents,

most of whom have no means of transportation and no way to get healthy food on their own. She tries to give them enough supplies to last three weeks. "We want the residents to cook their own meals and maintain their independence," Charolette says.

### On a mission

Charolette lives frugally in order for her money to go toward food for the pantry. Churches donate what they can, and she visits grocery stores to collect the items they're taking off shelves. She even started a community garden to grow her own fresh produce. Antioch feeds more than 7,000 people each month, but to Charolette that's not nearly enough.

"My sisters call me the Energizer Bunny. People tell me I should take a vacation, but I truly love what I do. I grew up helping people, and it gives me a sense of purpose. I'm looking to make an even greater impact," she says. "And I can't think of another way I'd rather spend my time."

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Woman's Day and Feeding America (the nation's largest network of food banks) have joined forces to fight hunger across the United States. Visit [womansday.com/hunger](http://womansday.com/hunger) to read more about Hunger Heroes like Charolette, and go to [feedingamerica.org/womansday](http://feedingamerica.org/womansday) to make a donation. Every \$1 helps provide 11 meals. To learn more about Antioch Youth & Family, search for them on Facebook.