

**Chronicle Profile**

**Volunteer offers a helping hand**

By IRENE PERRY  
Chronicle Staff Writer

"It's never too late to volunteer," says Johnie Shell, and at age 76, he should know.

For almost two years now, Shell has been a volunteer with the Food Bank of Northwest North Carolina.

A retired employee of R.J. Reynolds Tobacco, Shell learned about the program through Reynolds' monthly employee bulletin.

"The bulletin had an RSVP in one of the sections," says Shell. "I didn't know what it was about, so I called the number and a lady came to visit and told me that it was to try and get volunteers for the Food Bank. She then sent me to see the Food Bank's director."

He first worked at the Food Bank office on Polo Road, where Shell says he swept the floors and kept the place neat.

"The Food Bank moved to its new offices on Liberty Street," says Shell. "Now, we have 32,000-square feet and six offices, and it is a little harder to keep clean, but I do my best."

"I also put food away and help sort the food, but mostly I keep the place clean."

When the county Health Department inspected

the bank earlier this year, it issued a sanitation rating of 99 percent, of which Shell is extremely proud.

"I never heard of a place getting such a high rating before," says the Laurence, S.C., native. "I was glad to see it."

For 15 years, Shell swept floors in one of Reynolds' factories and he did it in style. He would go to work in a "one-day shirt" (a white shirt), and

*"I may not be able to get down on the floor and crawl like a young man, but I'm still able to get about."*

-- Mr. Johnie Shell

at quitting time the shirt would be filthy. But he wore white shirts everyday, anyway. He says he worked nine hours a day and a half a day on Saturdays back then, earning \$7.25 per week.

"I come up on the rough side of the mountains and I don't mind working," he says. "A young man I know, who works at Reynolds, told me it was people like me who laid the foundation for him at the company. All I can say is that I am glad I am one of the people who laid the foundation for them



Food Bank volunteer Johnie Shell: "Age is just a number in volunteering" (photo by James Parker).

(young people); it's good for them to go in and enjoy it. It was good us older people could help."

Shell first learned about helping out when he was a child. As the youngest child in his family, he often sat around the fireplace with his mother, a missionary.

"She would say 'so and so is sick, and I got to go

see her,'" he says. "My mother would go and see how she could help; she was very much a missionary. Anyone who got sick in the community, she would go and see about the person. She drove a horse and a wagon, since we could not afford a buggy."

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