

Honor health care advocate with gift to fund for nurses



A Christmas light display shines Dec. 14, 2011, at 2234 W. Congress St. in Allentown. Douglas Kilpatrick/Special to The Morning Call

When I first began using my annual Christmas Lights Tours as a charity fundraiser in 2003, I had serious doubts about whether it would work.

I asked readers to offer a donation in return for a guided tour to see the best lights, with the highest bid winning the tour. But would anyone be willing to pay anything substantial to ride around with me and look at crazy displays? It seemed unlikely.

The people who gave me my answer were Rob and Fran Sadler of Lynn Township, my first bidders. They offered \$1,150 and said they would make the donation even if they didn't win the tour. I'll get back to them.

As it happens, I got four substantial bids — including a woman who asked her family and friends to donate toward her bid as her 40th birthday presents — and I took all of those groups on tours. We end up raising \$3,813 for the Salvation Army.

From there, the project grew far beyond my expectations. In addition to offering tours to the highest bidders, I began choosing another tour group from anyone who donated at least \$25 to Second Harvest Food Bank, which became our beneficiary. By the time I retired in 2018, we had raised more than \$213,000 and lots of contributed goods for the food bank — several of the biggest displays added collection bins for food donations — as well as money and items for other local charities.

Fran and Rob Sadler played a big part in that, and not just because they were the first. They were the only charity contributors who took a tour with me every year from the time we started, and I always looked forward to our time together.

I know there are people out there who look down their noses at the over-the-top tackiness of some of the displays I loved. Not Fran. The bigger and crazier the displays, the better she liked them, and I prepared our routes accordingly, grateful for every delighted “Oh My!” I drew from her. There were other reasons I enjoyed our trips so much. We had great conversations about whatever happened over the past year, in our families, in their travels, in their community, around the country. Plus, Fran was a great baker, and I always was the recipient of one of her amazing nut rolls.

Still, I haven’t seen them for several years. So why am I writing about this now? Fran died in January after a 3 1/2-year battle with ovarian cancer. But the former nurse lives on, through the Frances Sadler Award Fund. Rob explains:

“In 2020, we set up an award to a recent nursing grad who is working in the Lehigh Valley. The nurse needed to be highly recommended, have good academics and have student debt. The other criterion was that the nurse work in an area of women’s health.

“Fran felt quite correctly that women’s health doesn’t get the respect and resources it deserves. The same goes for nurses. Talk to pretty much any women and especially those in the medical field and you should find this out.

“The grant was set up as an annuity through the Lehigh Valley Community Foundation. It has given out \$5,000 a year for the last five years to a very deserving group. If the economy doesn’t totally crater, I plan on continuing to add to the annuity in the years to come. With luck, the grant will either double or go to two people next year.”

This is a cause I really appreciate. My daughter graduated from the University of Pittsburgh School of Nursing and worked in emergency rooms in Honolulu and at St. Luke's before transitioning to a focus on virtual care. I also became close to several nurses in my early days at The Morning Call, when the hospitals were one of my coverage beats. My late friend Bill Kordilla, a St. Luke's nurse back then, became one of my Christmas Light judges with his wife, Carol.

And we need more nurses, desperately. According to a recent study, Pennsylvania could have a shortfall of 20,000 nurses by 2026.

Here's how the fund is described on the Community Foundation website:

"The Frances Sadler Award for Nursing is awarded in appreciation of the critical work performed by nurses in the Lehigh Valley. A former nurse, Frances Sadler knew that nurses perform extraordinary work every day. She had a desire to recognize and help support her colleagues as they begin their nursing careers.

"Mrs. Sadler, a native of the Lehigh Valley, acknowledged that there's a chronic need for trained nurses, especially in the area of women's wellness. As Mrs. Sadler had explained, 'There have been many times when women have been unfairly treated by the medical profession. I want to see women have the health care they need for themselves, and by extension, their families. That is why the nursing award recognizes an individual who has given time and talent to improving the lives of women.' "

At www.lehighvalleyfoundation.org/frances-sadler-award-fund, you'll find more information about the fund and how you can contribute, as well as Fran's wonderful obituary. Her fund is a great way to remember her.

This is a contributed opinion column. Bill White can be reached at whitebil1974@gmail.com. His Threads handle is whitebil2000. Do you have a perspective to share? Learn more about how we handle guest opinion submissions at themorningcall.com/opinions.