

## Ben's Bells : It's this couple's nature 'to give, to love, to share'

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

The recipients of this week's Ben's Bell are Charles and Alice Washburn, who have spent their lives giving back to the community they love.

The couple were nominated by a fellow parishioner at Christ Church United Methodist, Ruth Crary, who said, "It's part of their nature to give and to love and to share and to do. I don't know anyone else who does more for the community than these two.

The Washburns met while attending the University of Arizona and married 58 years ago. Charles came here from Port Huron, Mich., because doctors said the desert would be good for his health. Alice came here from her family's Glendale dairy farm, where she grew up during the Great Depression and watched her family give food and odd jobs to the wandering souls who showed up looking for work.

Charles found his health improving soon after his arrival and wanted to give back to the community, and the faith, that saved him. Alice always remembered her childhood lessons and also wanted to help others, in appreciation for all she had.

So the couple always tried to find ways to give back. Alice taught preschool and first grade for about 14 years, when she wasn't staying home with the couple's three children, and Charles, an accountant by trade, was the organizing president of the Friends of the Tucson Public Library, now called Friends of the Pima County Public Library. He organized the first of the book sales still taking place now.

They also stayed involved through church and were founding members of Christ Church United Methodist, 655 N. Craycroft Road.

Their other involvements through the years are too many to list, and picked up in retirement. Now, they maintain three different aluminum-can-collection sites that benefit a Boy Scout troop, the church and their neighborhood swimming pool — and, yes, they also take off the tabs and give them to the Ronald McDonald House.

They also volunteer at their church's food distribution center, run in conjunction with the Community Food Bank, and collect damaged and returned items from an east-side Target, fix them and then donate them to Primavera to help the homeless.

In their spare time, Alice is part of the church choir and preschool council and Charles is church treasurer. He also taught adult Sunday school for years.

"We try to be organized," Charles said.

"Not as well as we should be," Alice chimed in.

"Not as well as we'd like to be," Charles finished.

The Washburns are like that, finishing each other's thoughts in a perfectly complimentary way, obvious that they love each other as much as they love helping others. And their motivation is obvious, too: genuine gratitude for their health, their family and their charmed lives.

"I was not well when I came here," Charles said. "They didn't think I'd live to see 21. So I feel that between God and the community, I was cured. And I wanted to give back to both. That's why I've been very active in my church and my community. That's why I'm giving back to both places what I received."

Crary volunteers next to Alice once a week at the food distribution center and has known Charles for years

### The project

The Ben's Bells Project began in March 2003, one year after Ben Maré Packard died of croup, just before his third birthday. His family hopes it reminds people to be kind, to help ease one another's pain. The latest phase of the project began in September 2005, weekly "bellings" for those among us who make our community a better, kinder place to live.

If you know people who deserve a Ben's Bell, go to [www.bensbells.org/Nominate.html](http://www.bensbells.org/Nominate.html) to nominate them. To learn more about the project, and find out how you can make bells, go to [www.bensbells.org](http://www.bensbells.org) or call 628-2829.

through that and other church work. She decided to nominate the couple for a Ben's Bell recently when she was reflecting on how much the Washburns have done for others.

"They help everyone they can," she said, "and what they do shows that an effort of just two people can affect so many others.

"They're just absolutely wonderful people."

The folks with the bells agreed and arranged a surprise bell on Monday, with help from Crary and the Washburns' family. One of their daughters-in-law told them she wanted to meet them just before a weekly exercise class they attend at church. Meanwhile, the others in the group gathered early with Ben's mother, Jeannette Maré-Packard, and waited for the couple to make an entrance.

They said they got a little suspicious something was up when their daughter-in-law met them in the parking lot with several of their grandchildren and then proceeded to tell them they all had to rush up to the class.

"I thought, 'Is she going to exercise class with us?' And then I thought, 'Why should she want to do that?' I couldn't figure out why she was so anxious to get up there," Charles said.

"And with the grandchildren trailing along," Alice added. "There were six of them there."

But before the couple could puzzle it out, they were walking into the room and the instructor was calling them to the center of the 30-strong group. Then Maré-Packard was telling them how they were being honored for their kindness and handing them a bell to share.

"We just melted," Alice said.

"We were both surprised and stunned," Charles chimed in.

"And we're thrilled to pieces," Alice finished.

They also were quick to praise Crary, saying they "can't say enough nice things about Ruth." And they said they couldn't do as much as they do without the help of their friends and relatives. Besides, their work is its own reward, they said.

"We enjoy life and we enjoy helping other people," Charles summed up.

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