

Fundraising

Although it might at times prove uncomfortable or, inappropriately, become an end-in-itself, fundraising is essential to most not-for-profit organizations.

In the case of Care & Share of East Lyme, fundraising is directly responsible for stocking the freezer and refrigerator shelves with fresh food to distribute to clients. Most donated food collected is non-perishable, canned or otherwise containerized in the portion delivered to the client. For these latter items, Care & Share volunteer packers and delivery persons rely upon the retail or wholesale suppliers' freshness dating and package security. For fresh meats and, sometimes, produce, donated funds represent the means of Care & Share acquisition, direct purchase and chain of custody level transport to the pantry.

In the early days of the organization, the food quite often was delivered straightaway to clients, with little intermediary storage at a central pantry location. Certain events such as seasonal food baskets were exceptions and the original means of reaching the community.

Donated funds have also been used over the history of C&S to purchase food store gift cards given to clients for their shopping use directly.

Acquiring other-than-food services and materials also benefited from monetary donations over the years, including, but not limited to: scholarships and camperships, emergency financial assistance, designated assistance payments to vendors, gasoline cards, food cards, and the like.

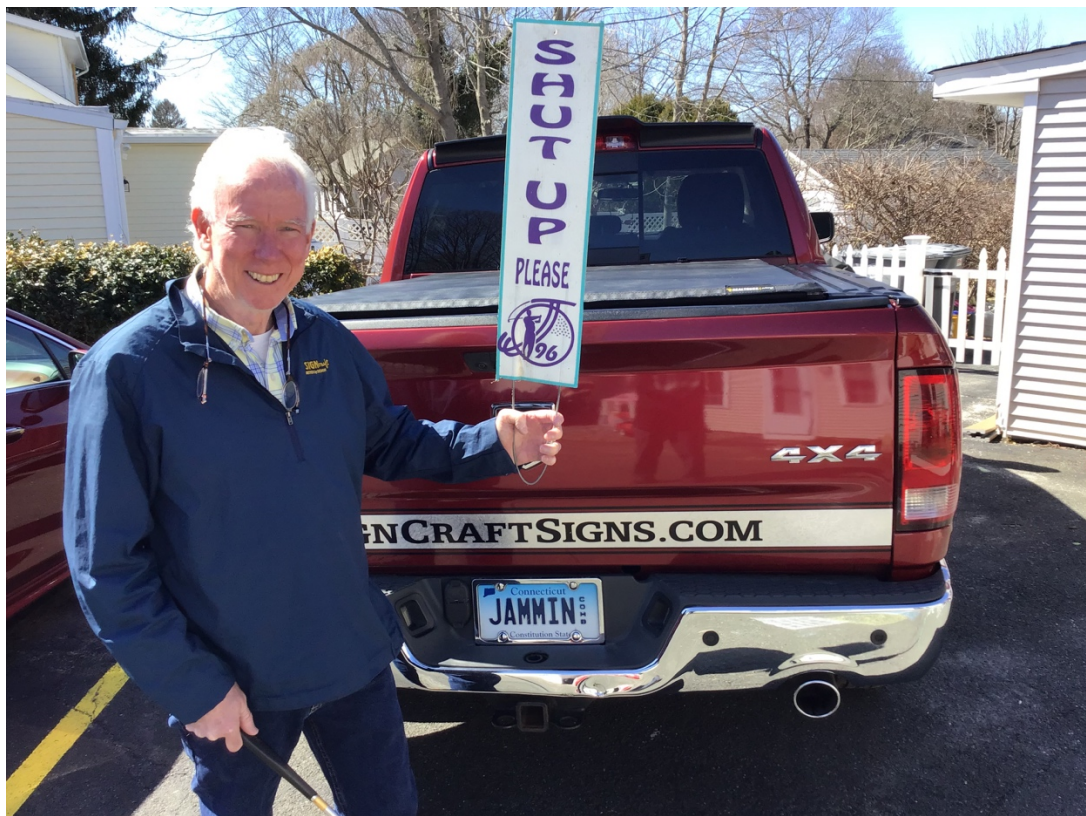
Overhead was and continues to be very low as a budgetary percentage for Care & Share, which maintains its perpetual volunteer characteristic. Pantry site utilities, pop-up site gear and supplies, clerical and office supplies required some funding, but oftentimes these needs were addressed through material donations and unreimbursed provision as well.

Many volunteers did not have deep pockets, but they often seemed opened at the top and receptive to their hand searching for a few needed funds. Acknowledgements of donations populate the pages of Care & Share General Meeting minutes over the first two Care & Share decades.

1989-1999

One of the standout fundraising events benefitting Care & Share in its first decade was Sign Craft's John-and-Julie-Wilson's-sponsored annual golf tournament—always affectionately known as the Jammin Johnny Open. The JJO, a lightly disguised doppelganger of the PGA's Greater Hartford Open in Cromwell, shared its birthday with Care & Share—both coming into the world of East Lyme in 1989. DJ Jammin Johnny was John Wilson's alter-persona, appearing on the scene in 1988. He has entertained thousands beginning in that year, at the inaugural Niantic Light Parade, and the following year at the first JJO—as well as countless other venues and events since then.

Care & Share Founder Debbie Mandel characterized Wilson in a 2026 email to the historians preparing this website: "John is a great guy and did so much for EL over the decades!" He continues to do so to this day. Spirited and good-humored, he posed for a picture, next to his familiar red truck, while sharing his memories and photographs of events that earned Care & Share and its clients and volunteers much appreciated recognition and funding.



Gallery sign comically reminiscent of GHO & JJO from thirty years ago.

Jammin Johnny Open Golf Tournament

The event was masterfully orchestrated from the first registrations to the last table being folding up at McCook's. More than simply a round of golf, the fun event became a fundraising event in 1992. The JJO generated proceeds from registration greens fees through to the prize raffle during and following the dinner celebration afterwards. Each year, several charities or a specific non-profit received proceeds from the JJO. 1999 newspaper accounts leading up to the event that year related that in the first seven years the JJO donated around \$17,000 to community non-profits. An additional \$6,500 was raised that year, with Care & Share being the exclusive recipient of those proceeds.

As it matured, the JJO moved from the first events held at Pequot Golf Course in Stonington over to the local East Lyme-friendly, Cedar Ridge. The many anecdotes DJ Johnny shared with the historians portrayed the myriad ways Sign Craft and the Wilsons exemplified to their children, who helped in age-appropriate ways, and to the community, how they embodied the drive to help others while having fun and engaging hundreds of people each year.

One year a pair of young street musicians in Saratoga, NY, were fascinated by John's invitation to come to the shoreline and entertain the golfers and friends after the JJO. The buskers took him up on it, drove down to Connecticut, performed for free, and had a great weekend at the Niantic Inn and touring around Niantic.

Automobiles hold center stage in many JJO stories. For over a handful of times, the big prize in the raffle was a used car—twice being Lincoln Town Cars, an '86 and an '88. A random drawing distributed ten car keys to the dinner celebrants. One at a time the keys were tried. The holder of the key that started the car got to drive home their new/used vehicle.

One year, as the story goes, a 16-year-old accompanied his elders to the JJO to fill in a foursome missing a usual teammate. Turns out he won the car, a Chevy Celebrity. It was the first car this newly licensed young man ever had. He cared for it and kept it through high school and college, driving back and forth to Avery Point and Eastern in Willimantic. As fate would have it, as a young police officer he served on the Niantic force.

In his customary prankishness, Wilson one year advertised the JJO raffle winner would drive home in a Vette. Few people noticed the small lettering on the Sign Craft advertisements, that positioned the three letters “che” before the more attention getting “VETTE.” The winner was surprised twice—first to win and second to drive home a little red Chevy Chevette.

His energy and enticing fundraising were contagious. One year at the JJO, a staff member at Cedar Ridge signaled the “shotgun start” of the tournament by using a working cannon to fire a resounding “boom” that launched a small cannon ball safely in between two long fairways to begin the festivities.

John Wilson recalled many Care & Share events for which he helped raise funds. And he fondly recalled his “prime contact” at Care & Share. When he needed something, he’d ask her. When she was in need she came to John. The years provided them many chances—John Wilson and Mae Hills were respectful of each other and loved taking care of their neighbors-in-need in East Lyme.



The Wilsons making a Care & Share donation to (l to r) Betty Purvis, Deb Mandel, Mae Hills.

2004

On May 15, 2004 at the Niantic Center School a co-sponsored fundraiser occurred, entitled the Niantic Baptist Church Music of Magic--Caring and Sharing. This event benefited Care & Share of East Lyme and the Local United Network to Combat Hunger.

Stop & Shop and Peoples' Bank coordinated fundraisers inviting their patrons and townspeople to contribute to supporting Care & Share.

Care & Share volunteers learned from their partners in other non-profits and began to make investigations in 2004 into grants the organization might qualify for from the Community Foundation of Southeastern Connecticut.

Another co-sponsored event became immediately popular and was repeated several years in a row in the pre-Thanksgiving November time period. Carmine's Package Store held a Wine Tasting at Constantine's on November 8, 2004 and raised \$ 1,200 for Care & Share. Both businesses combined efforts again in 2005 and raised an additional \$ 1,840.

2005

As word spread, several businesses and organizations in town and the larger region included Care & Share in their altruism. In April of 2005 Boats, Inc donated \$1000 from their fundraiser.

An awareness of C&S organizational needs grew as well in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century. It became clear that C&S was committed to its expansion of community service well beyond the holiday seasons of its origins. A landmark example of that recognition came when the Southeastern Connecticut Community Foundation awarded \$3,000 to put toward a freezer and refrigerator purchase for the Care & Share Pantry.

And to the amazement of many volunteers and townspeople, in September of 2005, clients who had previously, and continually, benefitted from Care & Share approached the organization and asked if they could initiate and help with fundraisers like dinners, walk-a-thons, etc.

Then late in 2005, with its first winter approaching at Hope Street, Care & Share perceived its own fuel assistance was to become a factor and began seeking donations – getting \$1000 from the Chelsea Foundation and then emboldened, asking Liberty Foundation for \$3500. Not neglecting to seek help from its fuel supplier, C&S sought and received NU's confirmation that

the Hope Street Pantry was indeed paying the lowest rate in Northeast Utilities' pricing structure.

Care & Share's end-of-the-year 2005 reported-upon support included monetary donations from: Niantic Rotary, Leos Club of EL High School, Lions, Shoreline Triathlon, and Diastole Wealth Management.

2006

The 2006 holiday season occasioned several food-themed fundraisers, including the auction of 32 dinner seatings at Constantine's, overseeing the Light Parade, the fourth annual Wine Tasting, and donations from sales of Waterfront Marina's "Favorite Recipes" cookbook. New and eager supporters joined returnees in showering seasonal blessings upon Care & Share.

By the end of 2006, C&S had a solid financial basis to continue growing and serving the community—a community that responded to an annual mailed appeal for support by contributing an astoundingly unanticipated amount of almost \$ 30,000.

2007

The holiday season of 2007 featured the Auction for dinner seating for the Light Parade (\$ 1,200) and the Wine Tasting sponsored by Carmine's (\$2,115) both held again at Constantine's.

Based on their success, the following holiday season of 2008 featured the same two events at Constantine's—An Auction for dinner seating for the Light Parade and Wine Tasting sponsored by Carmine's.

As well, Mermaid Liquors and Smith's Acres hosted their inaugural Wine & Beer Tasting in the Greenhouse at Smith's. New that 2007 year was a "Weekend of Giving" put together by Holdridge's, a fund raiser combining discount coupons and a C&S information table.

2009

A bulk mailing campaign had become an annual town-wide fundraiser. In 2009, Care & Share acquired its own bulk mailing permit because the US

Postmaster indicated it was no longer appropriate for EL schools to allow theirs to be used by C&S. Over 1,800 letters were sent in that year's appeal.

Care & Share was grateful again in 2009 holiday season for fundraisers held by Smith Acres with Mermaid Liquors, who added a Silent Auction and Holdridge's, who returned for a second year.

2010

While most of the corporate fundraisers in town were holiday time celebrations, to open 2010 co-sponsors the Polar Bear Swim and The Black Sheep held a March fund raiser that raised \$ 350.

March through May of 2010 abounded with fund raisers and food drives greatly needed and appreciated heading toward, and for restocking after, Spring Baskets assembly and distribution the last weekend of March. Springtime donors from the community included: St Agnes Life Teen Group, St Vincent de Paul, Curves, Scout Troop 66, St Matthias Church.

Stop & Shop EL donated \$ 3,130.60 through its Food for Friends program.

A wide assortment of food drives and fundraisers formed an all-star calendar constellation in the late Spring and Summer months of 2010:

- Carelot child care EL held a fundraiser.
- The LEOs and East Lyme Oral Surgery Group conducted a car wash.
- The 4th grade Leader's Group at Niantic Center school held a special food drive that yielded 187 items for the Pantry.
- Once again, the US Postal Workers in Waterford provided two truckloads of items from their donations received at their "Stamp Out Hunger" Food Drive.

- Food Drives continued into the summer season of 2010, with the first sponsored by the Board of Realtors of Southeastern Connecticut and held at Tri-Town in early June.
- The Masons held a pancake breakfast with proceeds and informational good will accruing to Care & Share

Meanwhile, within the volunteer committees of Care & Share itself, plans were underway for the seasonally anticipated College Scholarships, Youth Camperships, and the Diamond Dig on Main Street during East Lyme Days.

Additionally, a new idea for a fundraiser debuted Autumn 2010. ELBO (East Lyme Business Organization) proposed “Bend an Elbow,” for which participating restaurants would donate some percentage of their proceeds on a given night to Care & Share. This would hopefully join the increasingly popular Wine and Beer Tasting being sponsored again in November 2010 by Mermaid Liquors and Smith Acres. As it turned out, ELBO altered its plan to a food drive in 2011.

2011

Corporations and organizations filled the first two-thirds of the 2011 calendar with significant fund-raising activity.

In the Spring of 2011, Stop & Shop Corporation presented C&S with a \$ 6448 donation—as matching funds to what the local Stop & Shop donated in 2010.

C&S benefited from three fund raisers and donated food collections in May 2011, including: Meyer’s Deli in Crystal Mall’s first annual Food Fight, to which customers brought non-perishable foods for donation to local food pantries The Postal Workers in Waterford repeated their “Stamp Out Hunger” program, which yielded a panel truck of food for C&S. And, as it was accustomed to doing periodically, The Lions Club presented C&S with a \$ 250 check at its monthly luncheon.

In that season, Care & Share was the recipient of a generous “re-gifting.” The Rotary Foundation presented Dominion Nuclear Connecticut with \$1,000 as a community service award in Spring 2011. Magnanimously, the local power plant operator turned that check around and signed it over as a donation to Care & Share. It was a graphic demonstration of Dominion’s community service, for which C&S was very grateful.

In mid-July 2011, Trakas Sunoco on Pennsylvania Avenue marked its 80th anniversary and donated all its profits from the two-day celebration to Care & Share, a total of \$ 340. George Trakas invited C&S to have a presence during those days to promote the organization and to hand out brochures.

2012

C&S announced to all members in Fall 2012 that yet another area industry leader, Pfizer, had a fundraising incentive for its employees who volunteered in their communities. Those who volunteered for more than 6 hours a month for 6 or more months could apply to obtain a \$ 1,000 donation from Pfizer to the event or organization.

In closing the accounting books for the time on fundraising, one poignant note sounds true to balance the books.

Some of the most touching fundraising stories involve members of the community who themselves once received help from Care & Share and then returned to help others. Appropriately, working backwards in time:

As 2011 dawned, the general meeting minutes referenced C&S VP Sally Bender relating how a former client “organized a very successful food drive and money collection in her new place of employment.”

Among the many heard over the years, and the many not heralded, . . . was a man, sustained while he was out of work with a broken truck. Some time later, in 2009 he visited a Rocky Neck Craft Show. He related how difficult it was for him to ask for help—but because of the help, he was back to work, his truck was repaired, and things were looking up. He took money from his pocket and donated to Care & Share.

Founder Gail Lundin related the experience that most tugged at her heartstrings. One of the first times that Care & Share had gifts that clients could come and select at Christmas, there was wrapping paper and tape and bows for clients to use, after they could see an unwrapped present was for them to choose. A woman asked for help, saying she did not know how to wrap a present, since she never before had a present to wrap for her child. Two years later, the woman returned and was so thankful. She donated \$ 5.00 to Care & Share. Gail recalled that volunteers who recognized her from that earlier day had to turn away so their tears did not embarrass her.