



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BELTONE HEARING PRACTITIONER NAMED AUGUST 'FACE'

Uniontown, PA – Debra Conn loves helping people, whether it's aiding people in improving their hearing or feeding the hungry. For the last several years, she has been able to do both.

Conn, the lead hearing care practitioner at two Beltone offices in Fayette County and a third in West Virginia, spearheads an annual food drive that brings in thousands of food items and also provides free hearing aids to some lucky recipients.

For her dedication to the community and love of helping others, Conn has been designated August's Faces and Places honoree.

Beltone's Fayette County offices include one in Waynesburg and a new location on Daniel Drive in Uniontown. Conn said the Uniontown office relocated from its former space on Morgantown Street.

She noted that the local Beltone offices had been family-owned since 1947 and had dealt in Beltone goods before selling to the corporation in 2017.

"I've been with them for 26, going on 27, years," Conn said. "When they went corporate retail in 2017, that September, they told me they were going to do a food drive."

The food drive was a competition among Beltone offices to see which could gather the most food items. Winning offices also would be permitted to fit a customer with a free set of hearing aids. Conn said she is a competitive person and has experience with food drives through her church community, so she was excited about the event.

"The joke was, they told us they were going to put a box in our office to collect food, and I said, 'I'll put a truck on the lawn,'" she laughed.

Conn's experience paid off, as she has won the contest each year. And word got out, as Beltone's corporate finance officer reached out to Conn concerning the food drive.

"I said, 'Please, don't do it in December,'" she noted, saying that many people and organizations choose that time of year to give. "I tried to encourage them to do it as part of the Souper Bowl of Caring."

Souper Bowl of Caring is an event sponsored by Fayette County Community Action Agency Food Bank as part of a national movement that uses the excitement and energy surrounding the Super Bowl to

encourage people to donate non-perishable food items for the hungry and poverty-stricken in the community.

Conn liked the idea of tying the Beltone food drive in with the Souper Bowl of Caring because it would benefit the local community. So, she approached FCCAA Project Manager David Bork.

"I said to David, 'My idea is, I would like to benefit all the food pantries in Fayette County,'" Conn said. Bork told Conn her goal was "very ambitious" because there are 41 of them.

"So, as I took on this undertaking, I thought, 'How can I coordinate this?' Dollar General came to mind," Conn said.

Conn approached local Dollar General stores to inquire about partnering with Beltone for the Souper Bowl of Caring food drive, and she said 22 stores agreed.

"And truly, we were thrilled because we were branded in these 22 Dollar Generals," she said. "They were happy because it all stayed local."

Conn explained she stayed as local as possible and tried to choose locations with food pantries nearby that could benefit. For instance, she matched up the Dollar General on Connellsburg Street in Uniontown with nearby Calvary United Methodist Church.

"We benefited three food banks – Washington County, Corner Cupboard in Greene County, and Fayette County. And we worked with specifically 11 food pantries that we were able to tie in with a local store," Conn said.

Originally, the idea was for the Dollar General store that was the top food collector to receive a free set of hearing aids for a designated individual.

"Then my boss, who is the director of sales, said, 'Debbie, let's do the top four stores,'" Conn said.

The food drive lasted for two weeks, and when it was all over, the stores had managed to collect more than 13,600 food items. The top collectors were Dollar General locations in Confluence, Carmichaels and Smithfield, as well as the store on Route 51 in Uniontown.

Conn said the Smithfield store collected 2,500 food items in two weeks, a number that brought her to tears.

Each of the stores selected an individual to receive a new set of hearing aids, including the father of the Confluence store's manager and the grandmother of the manager in Carmichaels. The Smithfield store provided a set for a manager in Dearth who suffered from COVID-related hearing loss, and the Route 51 store provided hearing aids for a former manager.

Conn said picking up all of those food items was a challenge, but she was blessed to have "unbelievable support" from Beltone customers and patients, as well as her church community.

"It's not just me," she said. "It takes a lot of people to keep this together."

She said though Dollar General recently hired a new general manager, the food drives will continue.

"The new general manager wants to do it next year, with the Souper Bowl of Caring again," Conn said.

She joked with the manager that working on these food drives is going to prohibit her from taking her retirement.

"To help hungry people though, I'm okay continuing to work," she said.

The Fayette Chamber of Commerce helped Beltone celebrate its new location on Daniel Drive in Uniontown with a ribbon cutting on August 1. To Learn more about Beltone Hearing, visit their Facebook page at www.facebook.com/BeltoneUniontown.

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