

PHILADELPHIA DAILY NEWS

Group feeds the hungry with leftovers from Citizens Bank Park, Lincoln Financial Field

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WRITTEN ACROSS the door of the van were the words: The Welcome Wagon. Brotherhood Mission Ministries - and then in bold letters, HOPE-4-MEN. Behind the wheel was Butch Washington, who pulled into the parking lot at Citizens Bank Park just as thousands of cars were heading out. The Phillies had just beaten the Washington Nationals, 4-2, and it was getaway day, which is to say there would be extra items for him to pick up on this cool September evening. Washington backed up the van into the loading-dock area, unlocked the rear door and began sliding in boxes and trays.



Philadelphia Brotherhood Mission Ministries member Butch Washington gets basket of food from at the Citizens Bank loading dock.

In case you ever wondered what becomes of the unused food at Citizens Bank Park or Lincoln Financial Field at the end of a Phillies or Eagles game, this is what happens to it: It feeds the hungry. Working with the anti-poverty think tank Rock and Wrap It Up!, the Phillies and Eagles collect the unused food and hand it over to Washington, who ferries it to the Philadelphia Brotherhood Rescue Mission at 401 E. Girard Ave., in Fishtown. There it is unloaded, rewrapped and served that day or the following day to the 80 or so men who live there. Whatever is not eaten by them is set on tables on the sidewalk for people in the community to take.

"And people are *always* excited when we get a delivery from the stadiums," says Washington, 57, who has overcome alcohol and drug addictions. "They come up and say, 'What time is the Phillies or the Eagles food coming?'"

Crammed in the back of the van is a bounty of perishable items that otherwise would have ended up in a landfill: hot dogs, hamburgers, kielbasa, sliced turkey, popcorn and - Washington says if

it happens to be their lucky day - barbecued ribs. "Oh man, are they something else!" says Washington, who is joined on this pickup by Rock and Wrap It Up! volunteer Matthew Farley, senior vice president/investments with Wells Fargo Advisors in Doylestown. By the end of the evening, Farley would have loaded the trunk of his car with the fare that had been served to the players by clubhouse chef Joe Swanhart, an array of items that would include bread, fruit, cold cuts and cartons of milk. Because the Phillies were heading out on a 10-day road trip, Swanhart would clean out the refrigerator.

Farley looks on as Washington loads the van and asks, "Do you have enough room back there?" "Oh, I can take whatever they got," says Washington, who pauses, sniffs the air and adds with a smile: "I think I smell ribs! He-he-he-he-he . . ."

Unless you have ever been hungry yourself - which is to say, how-on-earth-am-I-going-to-get-something-to-eat hungry - it is hard to fathom the sheer joy that Washington exuded as he drove back to Fishtown with that van full of food. When you have been hungry the way Washington or some of the other men at the Philadelphia Brotherhood Rescue Mission have been hungry, you remember only too well how it feels, how you get to a point at which you become so unhinged by anxiety that you would do *anything* for food. Up at the Brotherhood Mission at 12:30 a.m., Frank Green says he had been there.

Helping unwrap the food that came in from Citizens Bank Park, Green spears a cold hot dog and places it on a bun. "Oh, there were plenty of days when I would eat out of a garbage can and pray to God, 'Please Lord, help change this situation,' " says Green, who came to the counseling program at the shelter in order to beat a drug addiction. "Being hungry is a hurting piece."

Until Rock and Wrap It Up! came on the scene a few years ago, the unused food at Citizens Bank Park and Lincoln Financial Field ended up exactly where the U.S. Department of Agriculture says 97 billion pounds of food goes each year: the trash. According to Syd Mandelbaum, the founder of Rock and Wrap It Up!, that staggering amount of waste is "enough to feed any and every one who is hungry in this country." To quantify just how steep the hunger problem in America is, Mandelbaum says there are 45 million "food insecure" people nationally - approximately 12 percent of the population. Mandelbaum says the remedy lies in "logistics, finding a way to get from Point A [where the unused food is located] to Point B [the hungry]."

"Gandhi said, 'Poverty is our worst disease and hunger is its worst symptom,' " says Mandelbaum. "Hunger is a sidebar to poverty, which explains why some children have trouble learning in school, or why some adults engage in antisocial behavior. But we can end that."

Thirty-one sports organizations in the United States have an affiliation to Rock and Wrap It Up!, which began in 1994 when Mandelbaum persuaded rock bands to send their unused food from the backstage and concession areas to churches and shelters. Because his parents had been survivors of Nazi concentrations camps in World War II, Mandelbaum says that he grew up hearing horror stories of how people starved to death and that it engendered in him a passion to help the needy. By 1997, he teamed up with the Department of Agriculture to form a program for schools to educate children in the value of feeding the hungry with unused cafeteria food. But it was not until 6 years later that he began establishing connections in sports.

"Actually," says Mandelbaum, "sports found me, not the other way around."

It happened in a curiously offhanded way, ironic given that nothing good seemed destined to come out of the 2003 season for the Detroit Tigers. In a year when her husband, lefthander Mike

Maroth, would lose 21 games for the 43-119 Tigers, Brooke Maroth happened to be browsing through a magazine and came across an article on the work Mandelbaum was doing. It intrigued her enough to ask her husband: "What do the Tigers do with their leftover food in the clubhouse?" Told that they throw it out, she contacted Mandelbaum. Eventually, the Tigers became the first sports franchise in America to participate in the program.

"Our thinking was, 'With all of the hungry people out there, why throw this food away?' " says Mike Maroth, who pitched from 2002 to '07 with the Tigers and St. Louis Cardinals, and spent spring trainings with Kansas City (2008) and Toronto (2009) before being released. "What we found was, it was such an easy process to get it to people who needed it. All someone had to do was wrap it up, and Syd sent one of his local reps around to pick it up."

It comes down to helping someone fulfill "a basic need," says Brooke Maroth, a board member of what is now called Sports Wrap! "As Americans we are so privileged to live the culture we do, that we can go to the grocery store and stand there choosing between what type of pasta we want to buy," she says. "I stopped to give a box lunch to man on the street the other day and you could not believe the look of gratitude he had in his eyes that someone stopped and paid attention to him. Usually, people lower their eyes and turn their heads."

To the surprise of the Maroths, what began during that woeful season in Detroit has been embraced by other organizations in baseball and in other sports. In 2006, the Phillies began wrapping up leftover clubhouse food. When the Eagles heard what the Phillies were doing, they hooked up with Mandelbaum before the 2008 season and, in conjunction with ARAMARK, donated unused food from concessions. Hearing what the Eagles had done, the Phillies stepped up and, also in conjunction with ARAMARK, began including boxes of unused concession food in their shipments to the shelter. Mandelbaum says he hopes to work out an arrangement with the Flyers and Sixers, an overture that Comcast-Spectacor president Peter Luukko says he would look upon favorably.

"Oh, sure," he says. "Sure, we would be interested. And not just for the Flyers and Sixers, but for whatever events we have at the Wachovia Center."

Looking on as his staff helped Washington load up his van, David Lippman, the director of concessions for ARAMARK at Citizens Bank Park, says his company takes "tremendous pride in being able to give back to the community." While he says he is not sure how big the donation will be on this evening - it tends to vary with crowd size, the weather and even if the team is winning - Mandelbaum says that sports teams give between "500 and 1,000 items per game, with a value of between \$5,000 and \$10,000." But Farley says it is worth far more than that to the people who get the food.

Farley volunteered to repay society for the good fortune he has had. "I wanted to give in a way that I could touch and feel," says Farley, who says it is disturbing to him when people overlook the hungry because some of them happen to be alcohol- or drug-addicted. While he does not show up for every game - he has three other people to help him, in addition to Washington - he says he spends just a few evenings each month helping out and says it is enormously fulfilling.

"Ninety-eight percent of us are pretty darned well off and can afford to give a little back," Farley says. "This is good because we are helping someone who needs food while addressing the problem of waste."

He stands in the lounge reserved for players as Swanhart wraps up food for him to take along. Only a few moments before, the Phillies had boarded the team buses to head to the airport for

their trip to Atlanta. Packing up whatever he had that would spoil during the 10-day road trip, "Swanny" helps Farley load his trunk, shakes his hand and says: "See you in a couple of weeks." Farley eases his car from the tunnel beneath Citizens Bank Park and follows the van back to the shelter, where the word is even then beginning to spread: The Phillies food is on the way . . .

Boxes and trays were being set out on a long table in the kitchen as men inspected the contents, tearing back tinfoil coverings on the latter to reveal pieces of barbecued chicken and sliced turkey. Washington came in from the outside, placed a box on the table and announced, "We got stuff from the players tonight!"

"Oh, the players!" exclaims Green. "Good eating tonight! God blesses us, and then we can bless somebody else."

A 20-year-old man named Andrew Drennen retrieves a cold cheeseburger from one of the trays and says: "When you live on the street, you find food anyway you can, even in the garbage if you have to. So we appreciate this. And whatever we have left goes to the community. Nothing ever goes to waste."

Chewing on a length of kielbasa, Keith Schofield, 45, says between bites: "Mmm! Very good." He swallows and adds, "This is not the place to be hungry."

By the following morning, the food would be gone, heated over and eaten by the men for breakfast or picked up by people up and down the block and eaten later for lunch. That is just the "immediacy" that Mandelbaum intended when he founded Rock and Wrap It Up!, the motto of which is so poignant in its simplicity: "Just take it and use it."