



American Kidney Services

ARTICLE BEN WALKUSKI

JUST 4 SQUARE FEET IN A PARKING LOT. NEVER HAS AN ORGANIZATION DONE SO much with so little, but this is what keeps American Kidney Services alive. As a partner of the American Kidney Fund, American Kidney Services (AKS) collects used clothing and household goods in these modestly sized donation bins, sells all donated items and provides millions of dollars in direct financial support to kidney patients and their families. In 2011 alone, American Kidney Fund provided more than \$211 million to people whose lives have been touched by kidney disease. With just 4 square feet in a parking lot.

This impact is just part of the appeal for AKS board member, businessman and longtime Buckhead resident Edward A. Zito. One common misconception that fuels Mr. Zito's passion is this: "I was surprised to learn that most of the clothing bins we see are actually for profit. Like most of the general public, I thought any clothing donation bin I saw was for charity...they are not!" As Zito points out, AKS is a registered, certified 501(c)(3) organization that has, since 1981, devoted itself to collecting used clothing and household articles. Since 2004, AKS has donated all of its net proceeds to the American Kidney Fund. And their donation bins? Unmistakable—they bear the organization's name, logo, and the name and logo of the kind, generous company or organization whose parking lot hosts the bin.

As one of the highest-rated and most highly regarded charities in the country, the American Kidney Fund is proud to spend 97 cents of every dollar on programs and services focused on direct monetary support, education and prevention of kidney disease.

With friends who have lost family members to the disease, and a wife who is a cancer survivor, Zito is no stranger to the kind of fear and uncertainty that can come about as a result of chronic illness or disease. "If a person needs dialysis treatments, there is no normal life," Zito says. "Going to dialysis three times a week is life changing. I learned that more people die from kidney disease

on Mondays than any other day. Why? Doctors say it's because dialysis is typically done on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. That one extra day (Sunday) of missing dialysis apparently is enough to cause death."

As an AKS Board member, Zito makes frequent public appearances and often gives speeches promoting the organization and soliciting support. "Every time I make an announcement at Chamber of Commerce and other functions, people come up to me and say our trucks have been picking up at their homes for years. They say they are grateful for the service and happy to be helping." Zito is confident that AKS has been getting a very good response from businesses, churches and schools as well: "For example, the Sandy Springs property management and development company, Newburger-Andes, provided a list of 40 of their properties where we could place donation bins." Additionally, businesses such as Cornerstone Bank, Allstate Insurance Company and others have allowed AKS to place bins in their parking lots. Zito goes on to tout the interest and enthusiasm of the religious community: "Churches are getting involved, too. We have been introduced to many churches through the Concerned Black Clergy of Metropolitan Atlanta."

Thanks to a partnership with Value Village, a local chain of thrift stores, AKS has a source for all of its donated and collected goods. Clothing that is not suitable for sale in the United States is shipped abroad for use in other countries, so there is virtually no waste. "That, too, is a reason I like representing AKS."

For Zito, who enjoys bicycle riding and seeking out Atlanta's smaller, independent restaurants, everyone who benefits from a community as great as ours must give back however they can. "We hope researchers find a cure for kidney disease," Zito says, "until they do, these people need help and support. Our goal is to increase our collections of used clothing and household goods so we can provide more financial help each year than we did the year prior."

Details

AKSPickup.org
KidneyFund.org
ValueVillage.com