

## Crystal Lake man helps nation's homeless one sock at a time

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CRYSTAL LAKE - When it comes to helping the homeless, Tom McNamara never gets cold feet. And he does his best to make sure those he helps don't get them either.

The retired special education teacher is ditching his Crystal Lake home for an RV that he takes around the country to provide the homeless with new, dry socks. McNamara has already



Tom McNamara is a retired special education teacher from Crystal Lake. He sold his house and bought an RV that he drives around the country to give homeless people socks. He has already helped people in 15 different states.

distributed thousands of socks to people from Mississippi and Missouri to Arizona and New Mexico.

"The smiles you see when a kid gets a pair of dry, clean socks are incredible," he said. "It is definitely a need and most people look by that. All our other organizations do a great job, but they get jackets, hats, scarves, gloves; we forget socks."

McNamara was inspired to start his one-man charity tour after discovering the Joy of Sox - a Philadelphia nonprofit dedicated to giving socks to the homeless

in the region. But the outgoing personality that gave him a passion for teaching also made him want more from his experience than giving socks.

So he sold his house, bought an RV and took his dog and Chevrolet Spark around the country in a tour he never plans on stopping. A year into his journey, he has heard heartbreaking stories from a 16-year-old Californian who was trying to make his way to New Orleans after his parents divorced and sent him away, to a veteran jailed one day for vagrancy then given a one-way bus ticket to become another city's "problem."

"I think some of the most heartbreaking have been the teenagers and veterans I've met," McNamara said. "Teenagers have kind of quit on society. They hear their parents and older adults giving up and don't see a future. They feel disposable and so do the vets. A lot of those veterans don't even want to be found."

McNamara's experience has only fueled his desire to increase his efforts. His next trip will be to Phoenix where he will park his RV and then travel within a 350-mile radius in his small Chevrolet handing out the 5,000 socks he plans on bringing.

He said he has received great support early on including from teachers who have held class collections for socks and from families he has met on the road such as one in Louisiana that has started collections of its own. Any monetary donations he has received have only gone to buying more socks when he gets low, he said.

"Teaching to me was a great profession, but you never got that immediate feedback. It would take years before maybe a kid or two would come back and say you changed my life," McNamara said. "With this it is instant gratification. You hand them a pair of socks and they are jumping for joy. Right now I just see this going on until the end of my life."