

The Great Paper Caper

Submitted by Karen Jolly Davis, Shore Delivery Service Marketing

COVID-19 hit the Shore hard. Outbreaks in 2 chicken plants and a nursing home exposed low-income employees – and their families and friends, mostly minorities – to the virus. Then they were deemed “essential,” and encouraged to work.

Basic supplies, like toilet paper and paper towels, became scarce. People stood in line near dawn on days that paper products were delivered to Food Lion, hoping to get a few rolls.

“One older woman got her paper products, turned around, and her cart and purse were gone,” said Jeff Holland, with Shore Delivery Corps. “She went to the manager and her purse had been returned. But they took the toilet paper.”

Shore Delivery Corps stood up to fill that need, offering free paper products to anyone who called. In short order, Corps volunteers took 12,623 rolls of toilet paper and 5,340 rolls of paper towels to people in the community.

“The people I was delivering to were definitely the people who needed it,” said volunteer Taylor Dabney, who drove more than 100 miles one day to drop off big bags of paper.

Shore Delivery Corps was organized in March to protect Shore neighbors, especially those who were most vulnerable to the virus, by helping them to stay safe at home. Volunteers would pick up food and medicines at local stores, then deliver them, for free, to the doorstep of anyone who called.

They made 150 deliveries in April, which was much slower than expected. People wondered if the lack of computer knowledge, or lack of internet service, kept the elderly and other vulnerable populations from knowing about the service.

In May, Dr. Betty Bibbins, chair of the Corps’ Needs Committee, told other volunteers about the dire lack of availability of paper products in the community. Accomack County supervisor Ron Wolff, with the Supply Chain Committee, contacted Holt Paper Company.

The Holt representative said the Corps could get as much product as necessary at pre-pandemic prices. So an anonymous donor bought a truckload.

On May 15, Shore Delivery Corps announced its paper-products giveaway. The phone banks exploded, logging as many as 68 calls a day. In one week, volunteers made 565 deliveries.

“We’re gradually papering the Shore,” said organizer Pat Coady.




Shown in the Shore Delivery Service’s distinctive red t-shirt, Dr. Betty Bibbins hands out flyers at local grocery stores, informing people about the organization and the paper product giveaway. Photo by Paul Bibbins.

In the process, Corps volunteers got a good look at local poverty.

“The majority were poor people who didn’t have credit cards to order stuff from the grocery store,” said delivery volunteer Karen Parker. She took bulk orders to a housing project for low-income, elderly people. And in Onancock, an old couple –both on walkers – waited for her on their porch, a tear in the woman’s eye.

“Some people said, ‘I don’t know what I would do without your help,’” reported Grace Pratt, another delivery volunteer. “It makes it all worthwhile.”

Although the paper-products giveaway has been rolled back as supplies have increased in local stores, Shore Delivery Corps is still serving the community, albeit with fewer hours. More than 100 volunteers are ready to gear up and serve on a larger scale should their services be needed. 

ShoreLine comment: *The speedy mobilization of this organization is a great example of how community activism can work to help area citizens. SDC has been and continues to be an important part of the mission to protect the vulnerable among us. CBES is gratified to join others from around the Shore to assist in this effort. PLEASE CONSIDER VOLUNTEERING! Many SDC volunteers are teachers who are returning to work. For information on Call Center and delivery hours, go to www.shoredelivery.org*