

## Celebrating Service: Meet KRTA's 2026 Volunteer of the Year, Greg Gierhart

Each year, the Kentucky Retired Teachers Association honors one member whose volunteer service stands out for its impact, dedication, and lasting contribution to their community. This year, KRTA is proud to recognize Greg Gierhart as the 2026 recipient of the Frank R. Hatfield Volunteer of the Year Award.

Greg's decades of service in Calloway County reflect the very spirit of this award—quiet leadership, tireless commitment, and a deep belief in helping others. From leading large-scale food distribution efforts to supporting a wide range of local charities, Greg has made a meaningful difference in the lives of countless Kentuckians.

We caught up with Greg to learn more about what drives his commitment to service, the work he's most proud of, and his advice for others looking to give back.

Greg's story is a powerful reminder that retirement is not an end, but a new beginning for service, leadership, and impact. KRTA is proud to celebrate Greg and all of our members who continue to give back and strengthen communities across Kentucky.

### Q&A with Greg Gierhart

**Q:** First, congratulations on being named KRTA's 2026 Volunteer of the Year. What was your reaction when you learned you had been selected?

When Greg Roush, KRTA Executive Director, called me to congratulate me, I was surprised, grateful, and humbled to be honored for the Frank R. Hatfield Volunteer of the Year Award for 2026. I know there are many others who are just as deserving of this prestigious award. To me, it is always a special award when given by your peers, and I thank KRTA for this recognition.

**Q:** You've dedicated thousands of hours to volunteering. What first inspired you to get involved in community service?

It was my grandmothers who first taught me the importance of service above self, a value they instilled in me from an early age. As a retired educator, I carried that lesson throughout my career, knowing that teachers must go above and beyond to truly make a difference in a child's life. Service becomes part of who you are. It's also what drew me to the Rotary Club of Murray, Kentucky, whose motto—"Service Above Self"—so strongly reflects the values I've lived by.

**Q:** Much of your work focuses on addressing food insecurity. What motivates you to focus on this issue, and what impact have you seen in your community?

I have been involved with Murray Calloway County Need Line for many years, and it continues to puzzle me that food insecurity exists in our county, region, state, and country. This is especially striking given that the United States produces more food—and wastes more of it—than any other nation. That waste is astronomical, yet much of it could help those who are struggling.

I became especially aware of this when I sponsored a group of students to attend the Kentucky Youth Assembly Convention. They used loaves of bread as a visual to show global food production—representing the United States with many loaves, while some countries had only a few slices. That image stayed with me.

It also reminded me of my grandmothers, who kept gardens and always shared their extra vegetables with those in need. Their belief was simple: no child should go hungry. That lesson continues to guide my work today.

So, I dare to care when it comes to food insecurity.

Q: Your nomination highlights your leadership and ability to bring people together. How do you approach organizing and motivating volunteers?

Throughout my work with Murray Calloway County Need Line and other organizations, I've learned that real impact is never achieved alone. My approach to organizing and motivating volunteers centers on building strong relationships and partnerships. When people feel connected—to the mission and to each other—they are far more willing to step in and help.

That mindset was shaped in part by leaders like Rechelle Turner and Monica Evans, who exemplify how powerful relationship-building can be. They reinforced for me that there are so many people willing to give their time and talents—you just have to create meaningful ways for them to engage.

A great example is Project Sprout, an initiative we launched to provide laundry basket gardens—simple, affordable ways for individuals and families to grow their own vegetables, even without access to land. What began as a small idea quickly grew into a true community-wide effort. We brought together partners including the Hutson School of Agriculture, Walmart, The Stella Market, The Farmers Market, The Murray Bank, Calloway County FFA, and several Murray State University organizations. Through donated funds, supplies, and volunteer time, we were able to serve a large number of community members. The response was incredible, and we are already planning an expanded Project Sprout 2.0.

That same collaborative spirit drives all of our work. We partner with local schools, businesses, churches, civic organizations, and government entities on initiatives like Tackle Hunger, Stamp Out Hunger, Empty Bowls, and our Christmas box program. These partnerships allow us to maximize resources, reduce costs, and ultimately serve more people in need.

At its core, motivating volunteers comes down to connection and purpose. When people see the tangible impact of their efforts and feel part of something bigger than themselves, they stay engaged. I'm proud to be part of a community like Murray and Calloway County, where that spirit of generosity and service continues to make a real difference.

Q: What has been the most meaningful or rewarding moment from your volunteer work?

There have been many rewarding moments, but the work with the backpack program is especially meaningful to me. Seeing our community come together to provide students experiencing food insecurity with bags of food is incredibly impactful.

Another meaningful moment is hearing directly from those we serve—receiving a simple thank you and learning how much Need Line has helped them.

I also value volunteering at Angels Attic Thrift Shop, which generously donates a portion of its proceeds to Murray Calloway County Need Line. The people there are wonderful to work with, and we are united in a shared mission to help others.

Q: What advice would you give to other retired educators who are thinking about getting more involved in their communities?

Something I learned at the 2026 KRTA Convention really resonated with me. The motivational speaker, Ms. Merlyna Valentine, said it best: “I am retired, but I am not tired.” That perfectly captures how I feel, and I know I’m not alone.

I volunteer because it keeps me connected, needed, helpful, and purposeful. I still have a strong desire to serve others, and volunteering allows me to continue living out that purpose. To my fellow retired educators, I would say this: there is something in your community you can do to make a difference—and you will feel better for it.

In addition to my work with Need Line, I’m also involved with another wonderful organization, MKYCare, a group within the Murray Calloway County Community Education organization that raises funds for local nonprofits. Being part of this effort has only deepened my commitment to helping others.