

ACFAS Member Helps Those in Need Stay on Their Feet

Shoe Pantry Plus, a nonprofit organization founded by Anthony Weinert, DPM, FACFAS, began with a promise he made to his mother before she passed away. As one of 15 siblings growing up in a rural town, Dr. Weinert's mother and her brothers and sisters often wore hand-me-down, holey or ill-fitting shoes or went barefoot, even to school.

Based on his mother's experience, Dr. Weinert knew in his heart that he would one day create an organization to help those in need have access to new, properly fitting shoes. That moment came when he and his son went to a Detroit Red Wings game.

"We were walking to Joe Louis Arena and saw a homeless man wearing shoes with holes in them and no socks," Dr. Weinert explains. "My son saw that the man wasn't wearing socks,

and he was distressed to think how cold the man's feet must have been. I then started researching how to start a 501(c)(3) nonprofit the next day."

Today, Shoe Pantry Plus provides free, brand-new properly sized shoes and socks to thousands of low-income and homeless men, women and children, including veterans and people living with disabilities, in the Detroit and surrounding communities. Last year, Shoe Pantry Plus distributed more than 5,000 pairs of brand-new shoes, boots and socks to people in Detroit and the surrounding area. Dr. Weinert's goal for 2018 is to distribute 10,000 pairs of shoes and socks by the end of this year.

Donations come primarily from local shoe companies and the public, and all shoes and

socks received must be in new condition. "This is important to me as a foot and ankle surgeon," says Dr. Weinert, "because your shoes should be broken in according to your own foot structure and biomechanics and not another person's. This improves comfort and helps you avoid any potential foot, knee, hip or back problems." He also takes time to measure the feet of each shoe recipient to ensure a perfect and comfortable fit.

The overwhelmingly positive response to Shoe Pantry Plus's efforts to help local communities has motivated Dr. Weinert to expand the organization's reach nationally. Shoe Pantry Plus was featured on the front page of *Detroit Free Press* and on ABC, NBC and Fox 2 local news stations as well as WWJ and WJR radio. Dr. Weinert would like to



Mrs. Weinert & Dr. Weinert as an infant.

“My family and I are so fortunate to be able to support our community in this way.”

— Anthony Weinert, DPM, FACFAS



establish Shoe Pantry Plus facilities in all 50 states, with hopes to extend into Canada, and is working to secure donations, sponsorships and financial support to do this and to also purchase other mobile vehicles.

“I’m searching for a mobile van with shelving units for shoes and socks that has ample space to conduct foot evaluations and measurements so my volunteer team and I can serve other areas in need and provide foot health education,” he says. “We would eventually like to have a fleet of mobile units that would travel weekly to other communities and help more people.”

Long term, Dr. Weinert would like Shoe Pantry Plus to connect with other podiatrists as giving partners to ignite what he calls a “sole movement” that would provide shoes to a million people nationwide. This would

also include working with major sponsors, as well as shoe suppliers and manufacturers, that could regularly donate new shoes in exchange for advertising opportunities on the Shoe Pantry Plus website and tax-deductible charitable incentives.

Some may wonder how Dr. Weinert strikes a balance between managing his practice and overseeing the activities of Shoe Pantry Plus, but his passion and drive for helping others allow him to combine the two. “I truly enjoy helping people and putting a smile on their face with them knowing that someone cares,” he says.

While finding balance may also mean earlier mornings and later nights for Dr. Weinert, he appreciates how much his wife and son pitch in to keep Shoe Pantry Plus running smoothly. “My family and I are

so fortunate to be able to support our community in this way,” he adds.

For those foot and ankle surgeons who want to volunteer in a similar capacity for those in need, Dr. Weinert recommends offering free clinics or shoe drives and volunteering at local shelters, rescue missions or soup kitchens. “Giving is the secret to spreading love and compassion to others,” closes Dr. Weinert. “It brings me such joy and happiness to help families and to honor my mother through Shoe Pantry Plus. It’s true what they say: the best things in life aren’t what you hold in your hand, but in your heart.”

To learn more about Shoe Pantry Plus, visit shoepantryplus.org.

“I truly enjoy helping people and putting a smile on their face with them knowing that someone cares.”

— Anthony Weinert, DPM, FACFAS