



MEDIA ALERT
For Immediate Release

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DEDICATED GOODWILL TEAM MEMBER LEARNS TO READ AT AGE 65
Goodwill Industries International Names Robert Frank its 2019 Achiever of the Year

Chicago, IL — Five years ago, Robert Frank came to his local Goodwill store looking for a job that would give his life purpose. Since then, he has excelled as donation attendant and utility worker, and, with the help of his Goodwill Way Guide, he has learned to read at the age of 65. For his dedication to the job and his eagerness to learn, Goodwill Industries International is honoring Frank as its 2019 Achiever of the Year. On Tuesday, June 25, he will receive this prestigious award at the Goodwill Industries International Delegate Assembly in Pittsburgh, PA.

Frank suffered severe physical and emotional abuse throughout his childhood, including blows to the head that left him with a cognitive disability. He tried to hide the fact that he couldn't read and write, and he struggled to find a job that made him feel useful and accepted. For many years, he worked as a coat check attendant, dishwasher and cook.

“I thought I could do more, and something told me to go to Goodwill,” said Frank. “My biggest goal is to be someone — and well respected. Everybody at the Goodwill never once put me down. Everybody is really supportive of me.”

At the Goodwill Store & Donation Center in Downers Grove, Frank enjoys cleaning, organizing and interacting with customers. He immediately impressed his supervisor with his hard work, but she noticed his struggles with reading and writing.

She referred him to Lauren James, a Goodwill Way Guide who works with employees needing support with child care, transportation and other services. James has no background in reading instruction, but she went online and printed out worksheets, then sat with Frank, working with him one-on-one. Soon he was able to write price tags and fill out forms. At age 65, he read a book for the first time.

“At first, Robert lacked self-confidence with reading and in the rest of his life,” said James. “Now he has such a positive outlook. He says his favorite new words are magnificent and stupendous. He has career goals and financial goals.”

“Robert is hard working and meticulous with any job he undertakes,” said Jacqueline L. Hallberg, president and CEO of Goodwill Industries of Southeastern Wisconsin & Metropolitan Chicago. “His enthusiasm shines through. Robert is flourishing because he found the support structure he needed to help him learn and grow.”

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Frank says his job at Goodwill makes him feel independent, trustworthy and happy.

“When you’re a nobody, then you become somebody. That’s an amazing feeling to have,” he said.

Goodwill Industries International’s Achiever of the Year is a person who has shown great progress and accomplishment in overcoming challenges to finding employment, and who still benefits from the Goodwill work environment or receives services to support employment at a community site.

ABOUT GOODWILL

As Goodwill Industries of Southeastern Wisconsin celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2019, the organization continues to work tirelessly to support job seekers with disabilities and disadvantages through training, placement and employment efforts. Last year alone, nearly 49,000 people received services and 9,473 men and women entered employment.

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