



# Contest Turns Volunteer's Dedication into Energy Savings for Helping Hands

Volunteers are vital for building and maintaining a strong, healthy community. When individuals donate their time and skills, they address gaps in services and support. Their dedication strengthens communities and improves the lives of those in need.

Efficiency Smart launched the Premier Volunteer Contest to recognize the efforts and impact of local volunteers while raising awareness about its energy efficiency services. Residents were encouraged to nominate deserving volunteers in their communities for a chance to win a free home energy efficiency check-up and up to \$500 for energy efficiency improvements.

Kathrynn McElroy emerged as the grand prize winner after being recognized for her years of volunteering at Helping Hands, a Georgetown, Ohio, nonprofit. The win ultimately brought with it more than just recognition—it removed barriers to energy-saving improvements for the nonprofit that has been a cornerstone of the community for decades.

## Community Rallies Behind Lifetime Volunteer

Founded in the 1960s, Helping Hands provides emergency food services through its food bank and affordable goods through its thrift store. The organization supports approximately 275 families weekly in Brown County and is staffed entirely by unpaid volunteers.

Kathrynn's connection to Helping Hands runs deep—her mother founded and led the organization for years. Kathrynn has been involved with Helping Hands since childhood, often accompanying her mother for volunteer shifts. In 2023, she stepped into the leadership role, continuing the family legacy.



Kathrynn was humbled when she learned of her nomination for Efficiency Smart’s Premier Volunteer Contest. However, she quickly shifted the focus back to Helping Hands, committing to donate anything she won to the organization.

Kathrynn was one of several volunteers nominated across nine Efficiency Smart communities. Following a public voting process, Kathrynn earned the top prize after garnering more than 40% of the total votes. The impact and depth of Kathrynn’s service to Helping Hands were evident from the overwhelming community support she received.

“I had co-workers, clients from Helping Hands, and people from all over the community telling me they were voting for me,” Kathrynn recalled. “It was exciting to see everyone come together to support the organization.”

## Efficiency Upgrades Help a Nonprofit Meet Growing Needs

Helping Hands had been interested in making upgrades at its facilities for some time. However, securing the funds has been a challenge, as the organization relies entirely on donations and grants.

With contest funds and Efficiency Smart’s recommendations in hand, the nonprofit was finally able to move forward with energy efficiency upgrades. The improvements began with installing LED lighting and replacing an aging freezer at the food bank.

The upgrades came at a perfect time, as the demand for Helping Hands’s services continues to grow. “Lowering our energy costs means we can direct more funds toward helping those who rely on us,” Kathrynn said. “It’s a win-win for both our operations and our community.”

Looking ahead, Helping Hands plans to utilize Efficiency Smart rebates to continue with additional upgrades to the thrift store building. This experience has also motivated Kathrynn to advocate for energy efficiency throughout her community.

“I’ve been telling others in Georgetown about Efficiency Smart and all the rebates and services they offer,” she said. “It’s eye-opening to see all the ways we can save energy.”

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**Kathrynn McElroy, Grand Prize Winner,  
Efficiency Smart Premier Volunteer Contest**

