

Giving a Hand with Sand: Freeport area ‘Sand Bucket Brigade’ comes to the rescue

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By Alex Lear The Forecaster

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Pat Potter, at right, who has mobility limitations that make it difficult to sand her walkway, has benefited from a new “Sand Bucket Brigade” program. Tawni Whitney, at left, is a member of the Age-Friendly Freeport & Pownal network, which launched the program this winter. *Alex Lear / The Forecaster*

FREEMPORT — Pat Potter has lived by herself for more than 30 years in a trailer park in the western part of town. A tumor causes issues with her vision that throw off her balance, she has degenerative disc disease, and she depends at all times on a walker or a wheelchair.

“I have arthritis in so many places,” the 85-year-old said, then joking, “‘Arthur’ came to stay, he didn’t come to visit.”

It's little wonder why, when the long ramp leading up to her door ices over, the idea of trying to balance herself while spreading sand over the walkway can be terrifying.

"I wouldn't dare do it, because I'd be afraid of falling," Potter said. "I can fall very easily."

Enter the Sand Bucket Brigade – a program supported by volunteers and donations, and launched this winter by the Age-Friendly Freeport & Pownal network. Reading about the effort, Potter contacted network member and Town Councilor Tawni Whitney, and a 5-gallon bucket of sand was delivered to her home at no charge within two hours. It sits right inside her door.

"The added sand on the wooden walkway is a big help, because that could be like a skating rink," Potter said.

The service is available to people unable to pick up their winter sand. When Potter has expended the 50 pounds of sand provided, a volunteer will pick up the bucket and leave her with a full one.

"We know that navigating icy driveways and walkways during winters in Maine is a big challenge, especially for older adults and people with mobility issues," said Paula Paladino, executive director of Freeport Community Services, which provides staff and support to the network's steering committee.

The brigade has drawn help from all ages, with area students decorating the buckets. About 30 people have been helped so far, but Paladino looks to aid more. Sand buckets can be donated at Freeport Community Services, 53 Depot St.; the town provides the sand.

Those interested in volunteering or having a sand bucket delivered can reach Whitney at 774-212-0269.

"Every little bit makes a huge difference in seniors' lives," Whitney said. "I'm just thrilled to work with this population."

She recalled meeting an elderly couple during her run for the council, who told her "'(A)s you start to get older, you start to feel invisible.' And those words I will never forget."

People like Potter "are very valuable to us," she added.



Deliveries by the Sand Bucket Brigade are a huge help for Pat Potter, whose mobility issues make it impossible for her to sand her mobile home's ramp on her own.
Alex Lear / The Forecaster

"I'm invisible to a point where I can't do some of the stuff I used to do," Potter said, such as frequenting a local elders' association and going to church.

To that end, she agreed the brigade serves a dual purpose.

"It's important for safety ... it helps you know that you can get out without falling," Potter explained.

And, she said, it brought a friendly face to her door.

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