

Goodwill Industries — 100 Years of the Power of Work

At the turn of the century, a Methodist minister in Boston's South End pioneered an organization that gave people hope, dignity and independence. Rev. Edgar J. Helms' original concept was visionary, for it is just as relevant today as it was 100 years ago. His social innovation set in motion a worldwide movement that would transform more than 5 million lives over the course of a century — all through the power of work.

1863

Edgar James Helms, founding father of Goodwill Industries, was born in Malone, NY, in January 1863.

1889

Helms enrolls in Boston University Theological School. Helms had tried his hand at law and newspaper publishing, but felt "called to the ministry."

1892

Helms marries Jean Preston, his childhood sweetheart.

Helms and two fellow students request that the City Missionary Society support them in opening a full-scale settlement house in the North End. Instead, Helms is offered a struggling inner city mission in Boston's South End, Morgan Chapel, established a generation earlier by Henry Morgan.

1896

Helms meets Fred Moore, a young man on his way to becoming a business executive. Moore volunteers to help Helms' efforts, and begins a lifetime of service to Goodwill. Moore is the first of many attracted to Goodwill by the sheer force of Helms' personality.

Using burlap bags from Thomas Wood and Company, Helms goes door-to-door in Boston's wealthiest districts asking for donations of clothing and household goods.

Goodwill differs from many charities of the day, emphasizing that donated goods could be sold for profit and that money would be used to pay workers who helped refurbish those goods.

1898

Helms' wife Jean dies of tuberculosis, leaving behind three children.

1901

Helms marries Jean's sister, Grace.

1902

Although the incorporation of what would come to be known as Goodwill is a few years off, the organization's work is well underway. 1902 would become known as the year Goodwill Industries was officially born.

1905

Relief efforts grow so much that Helms and Moore incorporate that phase into "Morgan Memorial Cooperative Industries and Stores Inc." to be run as a nonprofit, charitable corporation.

1909

Four-wheeled motorized trucks are first put into service for Goodwill.

1915

Representatives from a workshop in Brooklyn, NY, come to Boston to learn Helms' techniques. They adopt the Morgan Memorial way and Helms adopts their name —Goodwill Industries.

1918

The Vocational Rehabilitation Act becomes law. It aims to assist veterans with disabilities returning from World War I.

1920

With the Methodist church backing expansion, by 1920 there were 15 Goodwills, including Morgan Memorial. In subsequent decades, the relationship with the church would gradually lessen as Goodwill sought leaders from outside the ministry, and as federal funding requirements made it necessary for Goodwill to become a more secular organization.

1921

The slogan — Not Charity, But a Chance — is used to publicize Goodwill's efforts to give people hope and independence through work.

Store receipts top \$1 million for the first time.

About a decade after Helms had warned Goodwill Industries to prepare for the day of economic reckoning, Wall Street crashes. Goodwill helps thousands of people who become destitute.

1926

Helms spreads the message of Goodwill around the world. In August, his travels take him to Australia, Japan, China, the Philippines, Malaysia, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), India, Egypt and several European countries. While on these travels, Helms writes much of the book, "Pioneering in Modern City Missions."

1934

Helms realizes Goodwill needs to have a bigger hand in rehabilitation. In a prophetic letter, he writes, "Goodwill will be out of business if it does not take over work with the handicapped people."

1941

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor galvanizes Americans and Goodwill. Goodwill adopts a new slogan — Salvage for Victory.

1942

Helms dies on December 23 leaving behind his second wife and 12 children. An estimated 1,500 people throng Boston's Morgan Memorial Church of All Nations to pay final tribute.

Goodwill participates in the "Bundles for Europe" program, sending used clothing to Allied countries hardest hit by the war.

1945

Goodwill becomes known for helping people with disabilities through job training.

1950s

A Goodwill public relations director asks Milton Caniff to draw a cartoon. The result is "Good Willy," which becomes a beloved and well-known symbol of Goodwill efforts.

Along with its rehabilitation work, Goodwill stores continue to flourish. Various celebrities appeal to the public to donate items to Goodwill. And the public heeds their pleas, bringing tons of goods to collection boxes and donation centers.

As collections pour in, those needing work sort, clean, price and display items in Goodwill thrift stores. The organization opens its doors to anyone with a willingness to work.

1958

Norman Rockwell gives Goodwill the much-loved painting, "The Paycheck."

1960s

Goodwill becomes the uncontested leader in vocational rehabilitation.

Boston designer Joseph Selame creates the universally recognized Goodwill logo.

1970s

Goodwill creates thousands of jobs and raises thousands of dollars in revenue by contracting with federal and state governments, as well as private industry. From janitorial services to manufacturing, Goodwill finds workers to take care of industry's needs, and puts people to work.

1980s

A technological revolution sweeps the globe. Seeing a major shift approaching, Goodwill becomes computer savvy, emphasizing technology in its career services.

Goodwill provides childcare, transportation and financial management assistance along with a host of other support services.

1990s

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is signed into law on July 26, 1990.

Goodwill continues to evolve to address other workplace barriers such as welfare dependency, lack of work experience, illiteracy and past criminal histories.

The United States launches an initiative to move welfare recipients into the workforce. Goodwill offers those trying to get off the welfare rolls the kind of training and support services that lead not just to jobs, but careers.

2001

Helms' dream of launching Goodwill around the world is realized — 36 associate members operate in 25 countries.

Goodwill members top \$1.85 billion in revenues and serve close to half a million people with their programs.

2002

Goodwill's 100th anniversary in Milwaukee, WI.

Tomorrow

While Goodwill Industries has an amazing history and record of accomplishment, we cannot be satisfied while so many still need our services. Through the 21st Century Initiative, the organization seeks to improve the economic self-sufficiency of 20 million people and their families by 2020. Times have changed, but Helms' vision remains constant. "We have courage and are unafraid. With the prayerful cooperation of millions of our bag contributors and of our workers, we will press on till the curse of poverty and exploitation is banished from mankind."