

## FOCUS FEEDING THE HOMELESS



CHRIS SWEDA/TRIBUNE PHOTOS

Dr. Patrick Angelo, right, makes a stop — one of 15 along a 3-mile circuit — to hand out burgers, coffee and keep-warm items last week. In the summer, he swaps Hi-C for hot coffee.

# Angel of Lower Wacker Drive

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less fortunate, he said.

In this season of giving thanks, the 61-year-old oral surgeon strives for a heightened state of gratitude year-round.

"I have a nice house, five healthy kids. ... God has given me so much. It seems unfair not to repay his children," he said.

Angelo's weekly routine has not been chronicled by media, and he was reluctant to let a reporter and photographer accompany him after one of his patients told the Tribune about his charitable acts. He agreed, he said, because he hoped his story might inspire someone else.

He ventures into this subterranean world, waiting until after "my guys" have hit the commuter rush on Michigan Avenue, the most lucrative time and place for panhandling.

Only then does he start his 3-mile, 15-stop circuit, eyes trained on every loading dock, underpass, trash bin — anywhere that blocks the wind.

What might appear to be a pile of trash bags suddenly stirs to life. When Angelo detects even the slightest movement, he throws his car into park and jumps out, dropping off hamburgers and coffee, complete with four sugar packets and two creamers. The order never varies, except in the summer, when he swaps the coffee for Hi-C, "so they can stay hydrated," he said.

As Angelo approaches, some people leap to their feet, running their fingers through their hair in a futile attempt at grooming. A few never leave their sleeping bags, accepting the provisions with barely a murmur. To Angelo, it makes no difference.

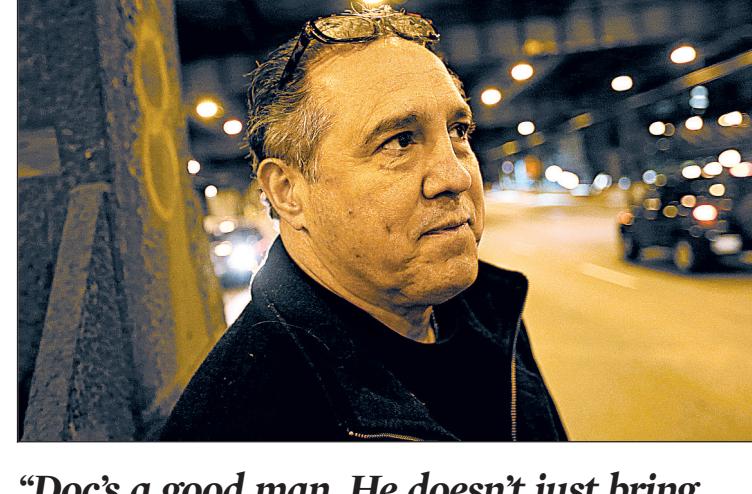
"I am here to serve them," he said. "I think when they see someone like me down here, it gives them a lift."

Like a door-to-door salesman, he flings open his merchandise-packed trunk. "What else do you need? Socks? Hats? Hand warmers?" Angelo grabs a couple of whimsical fleece throws emblazoned with cartoon characters — Hello Kitty, Tweety Bird, Daffy Duck — and wraps them around the twitchy shoulders of his recipients.

"Doc's a good man," said Brian Champ, 47, one of the regulars. "He doesn't just bring you food ... he brings companionship. You could call him an angel."



Angelo begins his twice-weekly routine with a pickup at a McDonald's on Ontario Street in Chicago, where his order is ready and waiting.



**"Doc's a good man. He doesn't just bring you food ... he brings companionship. You could call him an angel."**

*— Brian Champ, 47, one of the regulars seen by Dr. Patrick Angelo, above*

get a job — short-order cook, maintenance, washing dishes. "I'd do anything ... including cleaning toilets," he said.

Darnell Owens, 38, said he was staying with his uncle until he discovered bedbugs. Owens preferred the pavement to "getting all loused up," he said.

Others attribute their homelessness to foreclosure, parental death and bad breakups.

Angelo listens respectfully, but he's heard it all before. There was a time when he tried to get everyone into a shelter or a treatment program, but they refused. Something — mental illness, drug or alcohol addiction, an "anti-social" attitude — is keeping them stuck, he said.

"I'd give them all this in-

formation until I was blue in the face. ... So now I just focus on basic needs," he said. "They're cold and hungry, and that's my mission. On everything else, I can't make much of an impact. I've tried, and they don't want to hear it. Other groups want to get them rehabbed and get them to Jesus, but they want to be left alone and live independently. They know I accept that ... and that's why they accept me."

A native of the Northwest Side, Angelo attended parochial schools and had a "strong vocational push" to be a priest. His heroes were Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa and Nelson Mandela.

Instead he followed a different career path, but his desire to boost the underdog never wavered. He



A group huddled in the cold accepts food and coffee, including Codrick Spralls, right. It is estimated that 100 people live on Lower Wacker.

set up a scholarship from 1988 to 2011 at his alma mater, St. Patrick High School, in the name of a cousin, but something was still missing.

"I was looking for that personal interaction," Angelo explained.

He found it in 2001, he said, sitting in his Jacuzzi on a bitter February day. "I thought, 'How can I sit here, in this warm bath in my beautiful home, when I know people are hungry and cold?' I got up, got dressed and went downtown ... and I've been doing it ever since."

Some days are more challenging than others. Occasionally, someone will hit him up for a bus pass or money.

Other times, someone will be coming off a bender or in the grips of a manic episode. Someone might be angry because the police have come through on a periodic sweep, destroying their meager possessions. Instinctively, Angelo knows when to reach out and when to steer clear.

Ed Shurna, executive director of the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, estimates the Lower

Wacker population at about 100 people, including one man who has lived there for 30 years. "It's a hard number to calculate because it's so fluid. ... But it's a significant number, and it's growing."

Such philanthropy is unusual, said Shurna, who was unfamiliar with Angelo's generosity. "Others do it through a check — and that's totally necessary. But the fact that he gives alone and so directly is exceptional."

Angelo estimates that he spends about \$200 each trip downtown on food. So far this fall he's spent an additional \$800 or so on blankets and \$400 to \$500 on socks, hats and gloves. He's handed out 80 sets of hand warmers at \$1 a pair.

"I'm not saving enough for retirement ... but my kids understand," he said. "The way I look at it is they need it more than I do. I have a chance to work harder; they don't. That's why I get out of the car and serve them. What could be better than giving people hope?"

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