

# Volunteer Williams helps power 100 days of summer meal surge



## Veterans' Voice

Paula Pedene  
Guest columnist

Saint Vincent de Paul's (SVdP) 100 Days of Summer campaign is an annual initiative aimed at addressing critical needs during Arizona's hottest season. It's where you will find U.S. Navy veteran Donna Williams helping the team serve thousands of meals a day, including meals for many veterans who turn to SVdP for help.

Williams, a Bronx native, volunteers three times a week to help prepare meals for those experiencing hunger and homelessness.

"Anytime I have an opportunity to shine a light or be a positive role model or influence or be able to have people just laugh amid their storms, that's all I'm here to do," Williams said.

This isn't her first time serving others. She served in the U.S. Navy, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and as a nonprofit leader. Her experience directing a Meals on Wheels program allows her to understand the vital work of this program.

"I take it very seriously," Williams said. "It's not just, 'Oh, maybe I won't go next week.' If you commit, you have to follow through, right? That's how I am. I work with integrity, so whether I'm volunteering or being paid, I bring the same thing to the table: my integrity, my commitment, and my teamwork."

And our sweltering summer temperatures make it critical for shelters to continue as many vulnerable people are displaced by the ongoing homelessness crisis and the recent closure of unregulated sober living homes.

"At St. Vincent de Paul, all of our volunteers have the opportunity to serve others in meaningful ways," said Christina Gavin, Director of Volunteer Engagement at St. Vincent de Paul. "And for many veterans, that opportunity resonates on a deeper level. They come to us already carrying the spirit of service, and volunteering allows them to continue living out that purpose while helping meet the most basic needs of our community."



**Donna Williams (center) enjoys her time with St. Vincent de Paul with Dominique Montoya (left) and another kitchen volunteer.**

PROVIDED BY ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

Williams is one of the many volunteers supporting this campaign which focuses on one urgent area of support each month: water in June, food in July, and shelter in August. With July's emphasis on food insecurity, the work of SVdP's kitchen has taken center stage. The organization expects to serve thousands of meals over the course of the summer, reaching not only SVdP's four shelters but also eight additional emergency shelter sites and more than 30 community partners.

"Veterans like Donna bring a unique strength and spirit to our volunteer program," Gavin added. "Their discipline and compassion uplift everyone around them from staff to fellow volunteers to the people we serve. It's a reminder that the spirit of service doesn't end when the uniform comes off."

But her service doesn't stop there. Even outside the kitchen, Williams is looking for more ways to support SVdP — from its urban farms and dining rooms to its central food bank.

For her, service isn't a seasonal activity — it's a way of life.

"St. Vincent de Paul has an abundance of things that meet people's needs," Williams said. "If you come here, there's no need that won't get met and there will always be a way for you to help and serve."

To learn more about how you can help support and volunteer at the St. Vincent de Paul, go online to [stvincent-depaul.net](http://stvincent-depaul.net).

*Drew Smith contributed to this article.*