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## Minnesota's annual 'Giving Holiday' still strong at 10

GiveMN, a pioneer in internet nonprofit crowdfunding, gets ready for its big day

By Molly Guthrey  
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A man stood at the corner of Interstate 35E and Randolph in 14-degree St. Paul sunshine on Tuesday morning. He wore a light jacket and held up a cardboard sign with a message:

"PLEASE HELP!"

Sister Donna Williams did — by parking her Chevrolet and grab-

bing a Roadside Kindness Packet from Small Sums, a St. Paul nonprofit that helps people who are homeless.

"I have a little packet of things here," said the volunteer and Good Samaritan as she handed him one of the bags of granola bars, chapstick, hand lotion and resources that she carries with her for moments like this.

The man didn't know it, but these Roadside Kindness Packets illustrate the nonprofit's message for Give to the Max Day — Minnesota's "Giving Holiday" that will mark its 10th anniversary when the 24-hour online fundraiser takes place on Thursday.



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Sister Donna Williams gives a small care package Tuesday to Drew, a homeless man at the Interstate 35E Randolph Avenue exit in St. Paul.

GIVEMN, 6A

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## > GiveMN

"We focus on practical things that help people who are homeless," said Terre Thomas, executive director of Small Sums, the nonprofit that assists people who are homeless but who have found jobs, and now need specific items to help them get back to work, such as bus passes and work clothes.

Just last weekend, in the midst of the cold snap, the nonprofit sent out an email to supporters that was mostly about the kindness packets — with a p.s. about Small Sums' Give to the Max web page. It seems a perfect pairing.

"It just happens that the Roadside Kindness Packets,

which we feature when the weather gets cold, lines up with Give to the Max Day in November," Thomas says.

### GIVEMN AND MINNESOTA NICE

This version of Minnesota Nice started with a question back in 2009:

"What if giving was easier and more fun?" That's the simple question that launched GiveMN," states the nonprofit's website. "GiveMN launched in 2009 as a collaborative venture led by Minnesota Community Foundation and many other organizations committed to helping make our state a better place. To generate excitement for our launch, we organized a little something called Give to the Max Day."

Online giving wasn't a given

back then.

"To put it into perspective," says GiveMN's Executive Director Jake Blumberg, "GiveMN launched in 2009, while Kickstarter, GoFundMe and CrowdRise began in 2012 or 2013."

People were still learning their way around the internet; some advance work was needed.

"I remember doing a workshop for nonprofits," says Jen Ford Reedy, the president of the Bush Foundation who was the GiveMN spokesperson that first year. "One of the questions was, 'What is YouTube?' It was a different time for donors and nonprofits."

We figured it out, though — and fast.

"Within minutes," said Ford Reedy. "I couldn't believe the numbers on the dashboard."

Despite taking place in the

midst of the Great Recession, that first Give to the Max Day ended up raising \$14 million in 24 hours.

### FAST FORWARD TO TODAY

In 2018, Minnesota Nice is still going strong — over the past 10 years, GiveMN has generated nearly \$150 million (and counting) for Minnesota causes.

"It's almost like a statewide pep rally," Ford Reedy said.

These days, schools as well as nonprofits can take part; to ignite the excitement, there's a scavenger hunt, prize pools and other incentives, all in the name of supporting the good work happening in Minnesota. It's become a whole season now, including early giving options.

"Just yesterday, I was eat-

ing breakfast in a restaurant that's doing that's doing a Give to the Max match promotion for the month," said Ford Reedy. "It's a Minnesota cultural phenomenon."

But it's also a give that lasts more than a day or a month or a season: The giving website, GiveMN.org, is available year-round to link people with nonprofits and schools. More recently, RaiseMN, a special initiative to help smaller nonprofits move beyond simply accepting online donations, has been launched. The nonprofits get help with goals, strategies and ... fun.

Take Frogtown Farm, for example.

"We're a fairly new organization, and it's been helpful to get input on the work we've been doing," said Frogtown Farm Executive Director

Dave Colling. "We're getting creative in our communications — telling our story and not just asking for money."

This time, they've set a goal for Give to the Max Day: They hope to raise \$5,000 to purchase a cold-storage unit to keep on site.

If you think cold storage is boring, think again.

"Every hour on our Facebook page, we'll be posting a new veggie pun," Colling said. "You can post your own puns as well."

Their social media efforts are already taking off.

"We're seeing more engagement, rather than people just hitting 'like,'" said Colling.

Lettuce hope they can keep up the momentum through Thursday.

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