

Albright community leader gives back

By Lauren Miller
UNC staff writer

Two men walk down a Durham street, stopping often. They pass a hot-dog back and forth, each taking a bite.

One hotdog is all the men could afford.

For Dorothy Kelly, president of Durham's Albright Community Association, the men epitomize love.

An accomplished organization

The Albright Community Association is a community service association of seniors aged 60 to 80 years old

"They weren't concerned about catching germs...he was helping his brother," Kelly says.

"That's love...that's what we need to show more of. That's what I'm hoping that I can show with what I'm doing and let [the community] know I'm willing to do whatever I can."

Kelly and the other members of the community service association are on a mission to better the community.

And with her help, the Albright Community Association, founded in 1983, has achieved a lot.

The group's achievements range from creating a community garden to adding a traffic light at a dangerous corner.

"There was an elderly lady living on the corner and the cars were running into her yard," she explains. "She used to love sitting on the porch and she had to stop because so many cars were running in the yard, and one or two hit the house."

A major part of Kelly's work is providing food for the community. She and her husband, Junior Kelly, usually hand out food to residents in the Albright community on Wednesdays.

She said it all started three years ago.

"We were invited out to Angier Avenue...and we met Pastor Terry and his wife," Kelly says. "I told him what we were doing...and he told me he would bring us some food...and he has been doing it ever since."

A hometown hero

Though she admits it is hard work, the 78-year-old, who has lived in Durham her entire life, finds it just as fun.

She grew up in the same community, and says her childhood was a happy one — though life was hard on her parents.

"I remember how my mom used to sit up at night and make dresses for my sister and myself so we'd have plenty,



Albright Community Association president Dorothy Kelly and husband Junior Kelly sit in Antioch Baptist church on Sunday for a service honoring African-American leadership in Durham. (Staff photo by Lauren Miller)

and we'd somehow always have plenty to eat," Kelly says.

Kelly, who attended Hillside High School, and her classmates often had to walk to school, as there were no buses to take them, and taxi money was kept for rainy days.

As a child, Kelly and her friends enjoyed playing outside, but always knew they had to be home before dark.

"Like [the] kids out on the street today, you couldn't do that," she says.

"It takes a village to raise children, and that's what we had growing up. Any adult could make you mind and do the right thing and if it got back to your parents, that was two whippings you got.

"But it makes good people. It taught you how to love and to share with somebody else and I think that's what got into us — to want to help somebody because somebody helped us along the way."

Kelly's service hasn't gone unnoticed.

In 1996, Gov. Jim Hunt visited her after Durham's Partners Against Crime organization recognized her efforts to better her community.

"When someone thinks enough of you to give you an honor like that, then that's saying that you've done a little bit to help somebody," Kelly says. "To me it might seem like I'm doing something small, but if I can help just one person, that's big."

Guiding a new generation

Kelly and her husband have three sons, Kelvin, Calvin and Donnie. She also has six grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

But she says they're not her only kids.

Many young people call her and her husband mom and dad, she says. The two have been married for 57 years.

"When you get that it makes you feel good," she says. "It makes you think, well maybe I have done a little something to help somebody — and that's mostly what I want to do in my life."

Kelly still lives on the same street she did 57 years ago and has watched several generations pass her by.

"It's changed from what it was when we first lived here, but it's home and I feel good here."

In addition to giving out food, Kelly and the community service association she heads are working on adding speed bumps in the community and pushing for a bus for the elderly.

"We all are put here for a reason on this earth and everybody has a purpose...we just have to keep working and looking until we find what we're supposed to do," Kelly says.

"When it comes to you, you'll know it," Kelly adds. "And you don't look for an award. You get it when you see a smile on an elderly person's face, on a child's face — you know, that's your reward."