

This Man Skips Lunch to Feed Hungry Kids. He Asks: 'Will You Join Me?'

by Melissa Binder

Anton Cobb likes to be productive.

The 32-year-old salesman spends most of his lunch hours walking the streets of downtown Portland, where he works, or squeezing in some heftier exercise at the gym.

Portland man skips his lunch to raise money, awareness for Oregon Food Bank Anton Cobb, 32, sits alone in Director's Park during his lunch hour every Wednesday at a table decorated with a red and white checkered tablecloth.

But on Wednesdays he sits. He doesn't catch up on emails or missed phone calls. He doesn't even eat lunch. It's his most productive lunch hour of the week.

He sits alone in Director Park at a table he decorates with a red and white checkered tablecloth. Atop the table a yellow flower stands up in a dress-shaped vase, which he said was painted by a friend's niece.

At his feet he places a chest decorated with robots, stars and rocket ships he purchased at Ross Dress for Less. A sandwich board to his left says: "I am skipping lunch so that 30 children won't. Will you join me?"

It's his one man, one hour, once a week campaign to fight child hunger.

About 20 people donate money each week, Cobb said. He passes the cash along to the Oregon Food Bank. He said he's raised about \$400 — or roughly 1,200 meals — since he started the weekly fundraiser at the end of July.

"People understand the concept of an empty table," he said. "It's a spectacle on purpose."

Christy Biron stopped by on her way to lunch with friends Wednesday and handed Cobb a \$5 bill.

"I think it's fabulous," she said. "It shows he's willing to sacrifice, and I think that proves dedication."

Cobb saw an online article earlier this summer by a girl whose family benefited from a food bank. He felt compelled to help others like her. "What if everybody was doing something productive?" he said.

He approached the Oregon Food Bank with the idea to raise money during his lunch break.

"We just thought it was such a great, creative, clever idea," said Laura Golino de Lovato, the director of development at the food bank. "It's a little bit different than what we usually see."

KGW featured Cobb two weeks ago. Cobb said after the story aired people came to find him with their donations. One person drove from Tigard, he said, just to hand him cash during his Wednesday lunch hour.

He was skeptical of his own idea at first, he said, and worried it would fall flat. But the food bank's enthusiasm and a great response from Portlanders have convinced him the idea is worth taking "as far as it can go."

Cobb hopes the campaign, which he calls hOURLUNCH, will spread around Portland and possibly to other U.S. cities. He dreams of working with a local game designer to develop a product that enables in-game donations.

"I look forward to this every week," he said. "It's a gift in the middle of the day."