

# Oregon's 2023 Immunization Champion

## Nurse receives national immunization award

By BEVERLY CORBELL

Betty Brown, who heads a free food program at Portland Open Bible Church, has received a national award for staging Covid vaccination clinics that saw about 1,000 people get the shot between June of 2021 and March, 2023. About 4,000 also received free hot meals or food boxes during that same period.

Brown, a registered nurse, who has headed up a free food service at her church for the past nine years, was named Oregon's 2023 Immunization Champion by the Center for Disease Control and the Association of Immunization Managers.

Brown had already served a culturally diverse community in southeast Portland through the church's food pantry, but said many were hesitant about the vaccine.

To help allay their fears, she began by getting medical professionals, speaking in their language or with interpreters, to come to the church to



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explain how the vaccine was created, how it works and its risks, but she didn't stop there.

"I applied for grants and got community members to help stage weekly vaccination clinics," she said. "We also made them fun and offered culturally-specific food boxes." The church also offered housing resources and harm reduction supplies to our unhoused neighbors.

Brown said she also worked with Multnomah County to provide wrap-

around services during the pandemic. "Whenever someone diagnosed with Covid was isolated, the county would call us to provide food services to deliver," she said.

She also created videos about the vaccine in several languages, she said, which people could view before or after they got free food at the church's twice weekly food pantry.

It helped that she got grants from the Oregon Food Bank and the Oregon Health Authority, she said.

When the pandemic hit, the number of people coming to the food pantry doubled to about 4,000 people a month, Brown said, but many were still hesitant about getting the Covid vaccine, she said.

"Over my career as a nurse I've seen way to many people die unnecessarily, essentially from lack of information or bad information," she said.

Brown said community members asked a lot of questions and the medical professionals listened with empathy, answered their questions, and slowly, trust and confidence grew.

The church, on SE 92nd Ave., serves a large immigrant community, Brown said.

"We have a huge amount of Chinese and Vietnamese," she said, as well as a recent influx of Ukrainians.

With the help of her son, Aaron Brown, senior pastor at the church, the food bank was founded in 2015 after

a string of break-ins at area churches, when it was discovered food was the main thing that was stolen.

Many organizations helped with the food pantry, but it soon became evident that people preferred food that suited their ethnic tastes.

"You can't just give Chinese and African Americans the same food," so she and her son created, with input from the Oregon Food Bank, made-to-order food boxes that can be ordered ahead of time.

Now that the need for mass vaccines is over, Brown is focused on expanding the food pantry, which served 6,200 people last year, and she could use some help, with more volunteers as well as donations to the program.

"What people need to know is that our communities become healthier when those who have help those in need," she said, and monthly contributions would be greatly appreciated.

She also hopes to get more grocery stores involved.

"We have a lot of stores that help us, but we could double that," she said. "Starting in September we will try to get more grocery stores to provide us with fresh foods and vegetables."

To learn more about Portland Open Bible Community Pantry, visit the website at [www.pobcpantary.com](http://www.pobcpantary.com), send and email to [pantry@pobcpantary.com](mailto:pantry@pobcpantary.com), or call Brown at 503-442-8228.

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