



Albert Hinch

Volunteer

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Al Hinch is an avid traveler who describes the world as much smaller than the one in which he grew up. Even still there are divides, he says, adding, “My hope is that we can all get to the point of putting our differences aside and start having respectful conversations, but it starts with each of us.” Hinch has built his life around making connections where they’re needed most.

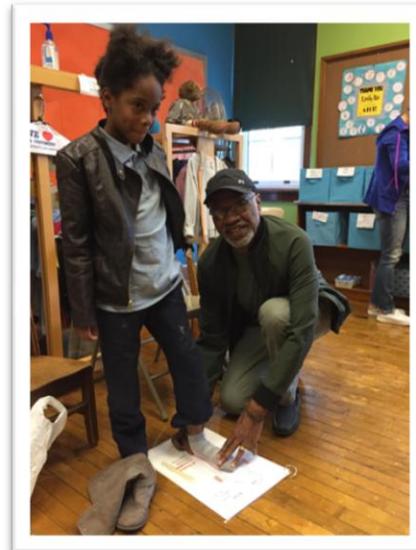
After graduating with a nursing degree, Hinch joined the old Lutheran Hospital in South St. Louis, where he spent the next 42 years. “In those days, we were very hands on. Nurses did head-to-toe assessments and really got to spend time with each patient. Technology has replaced much of that today.”

Eventually moving into management, becoming Director of Surgical Services, Hinch realized the difference he could make in building a team that worked as a cohesive unit. He insisted on staying connected with patient care, however, and would scrub in twice a month in the operating room. “I remember one patient in particular – Mr. Ronzio – who was a beautiful man with throat cancer that had left him basically unrecognizable. He came in for facial reconstructive surgery. It was heartbreaking, but felt so good to help him. When I retired, there was not one day I regretted being a nurse.”

The question was what to do now, says Hinch. “I went into retirement promising to ‘do nothing’ for a full month...it ended up being two weeks.” Hinch began volunteering for the Lutheran Cares hospice program, as well as at Cardinal Glennon Children’s Hospital. He also became a Big Brother to Mark, spending time with him twice a month for 10 years. “Single mom. Impoverished family. I found

myself taking all of the children with us when we went to the movies, swim lessons or wherever, because I just couldn’t leave them behind. It gave mom a break, too.” Hinch proudly reports that Mark graduated high school and is now gainfully employed.

Around 2013, Hinch was eating dinner when he says a news spot came on that caught his attention. It was about The Little Bit Foundation. “At the time, I was looking for something new to get behind and it struck a chord with me,” he says.



Hinch signed on as a school rep for Little Bit at Clay Elementary (now Clay Academy of Exploration and Civics), where he became part of a trio that have formed as strong a bond

with each other as the students.

“It’s because of how well we work together as a team that we’re able to spend real time connecting with the kids,” says Hinch. He and his team make the drive together to Clay every Thursday morning to meet with each student on the order list – seeing how well new uniforms and coats fit, sizing them for new shoes, helping them pick out scarves, socks and underwear, providing directions for using the hygiene products contained in their kits, and identifying any other needs. They chat about the students’ day, how they did on their last

assignment, what their plans are for the weekend. They know students by name, their interests and dreams. "Our hope is that what we do for them now will stay with them," he says.

Hinch continues to serve in ways that fit his basic principles, he says, volunteering for CHIPS' Health Care Beyond Walls program, which provides community health outreach screenings and education, and on Mondays with Food Outreach, where HIV/AIDS and cancer patients are treated to a three-course meal prepared by guest chefs from local restaurants. But Thursdays are reserved for Little Bit, he says.

"It's a chance to serve kids in their environment, and going to Clay is just fun."

