

Nobody pays it forward more than Union Grove

McDonald's sets drive-through record

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UNION GROVE — When it comes to paying it forward, customers at a McDonald's restaurant have joined together to take a giant leap onward.

Twenty-three customers in the restaurant's drive-through lane took turns Thursday paying for the person next in line behind them — a new record-high number at the restaurant.

"It was kind of unreal," said employee Sharlene Wincek, who was working the drive-through lane at the time.

The spontaneous gesture of goodwill toward strangers impressed the McDonald's crew so much that Wincek posted it on Facebook, congratulating Union Grove for the community's generosity.

It also turned an average day at work into a memorable and heartwarming experience.

Restaurant manager Tyler Gaethke said he was amazed to see so many people reach into their pockets and connect with total strangers through mutual benevolence.

"Sometimes you have good days and bad days," Gaethke said. "But that was a great day."

The concept of "pay it forward" — popularized by a 2000



Customers in their cars wait in line Saturday in the drive-through lane at a McDonald's restaurant in Union Grove.



Employee Erika Guzman waits for the next customer Saturday in the drive-through lane at a McDonald's restaurant that serves about 900 people a day in Union Grove. The establishment usually sees at least one "pay it forward" request each day.

movie with that name — involves random acts of kindness toward others, typically by buying their coffee, meal or groceries. It is

often done anonymously, so a recipient never knows who their secret donor was.

At the Union Grove McDon-

ald's restaurant, 835 15th Avenue, which serves about 900 customers a day, employees usually see someone pay it forward in the drive-through lane about once a day.

A recipient has the option of grabbing their free lunch and leaving. But frequently, when someone discovers that their meal has been paid for, they continue the spirit of giving by anonymously paying for the person in line behind them. And so on.

The previous record-high streak at the restaurant was 15 people in a row.


Bob Wright of Burlington was No. 8 in the sequence Thursday. When Wincek told him that his Big Mac meal had been paid for, Wright smiled and took care of the next customer.

Even though it ended up costing Wright a few dollars more than his own lunch would have cost, he said, it felt good to help someone else.

"It seemed like the right thing to do," he said. "Someone buys you lunch — why not?"

Wincek said she is always careful not to pressure people into continuing a pay-it-forward streak. She realizes that money is tight, and that even just a few dollars can make a big difference for some families.

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 **WATCH:** Union Grove McDonald's breaks record for 'Pay It Forward' customers, told in video **NEWSVU**