



September 10, 2009

Volunteer push speaks well of our community

When a storm blows through, it's easy to see the signs. Downed trees, power outages, debris on the roadways are obvious clues.

The opposite of a storm blew through these parts last week.

Day of Caring, coordinated by Hands On Asheville-Buncombe, the volunteer program of United Way, saw some 1,400 volunteers representing the general public and nearly 60 companies participate in more than 90 projects involving 70 nonprofits and schools.

Whereas a storm leaves destruction, these volunteers left in their wake building, healing, mentoring and caring.

Trees were planted, weeds were pulled, toys at day care centers were sterilized, classrooms were painted and special meals were served up.

The volunteer push paired with a new United Way focus; while still working to raise money for community efforts, a new focus on volunteerism and advocacy has found a seat at the table.

Campaign chairman Dr. Leon Elliston said, "Giving continues to be important; it takes money to bring about community change — we know that. But giving is a tool, a means to reach our goal, and we know dollars alone will not overcome the barriers we face in creating opportunities for everyone in education, income and health."

That call was answered impressively in this community. There were large volunteer turnouts from Mission Hospitals, which fielded 312 people — 22 percent of the turnout — in the effort, had volunteers doing work with ABCCM including at Medical Ministry and Steadfast House for Women and Children and at an array of other sites such as Goodwill Industries, Three Streams Family Health Center and Western Carolina Rescue Ministries.

Other large turnouts included the Christ School contingent, which fielded 260 students and faculty.

Crunching the numbers, the impact of this type of volunteerism is huge. Last year's Day of Caring saw volunteers put in 5,500 hours of service with a monetary value in excess of \$100,000.

In addition to the Day of Caring, United Way's Hands On Asheville-Buncombe reported success with its annual School Supply drive, which provided fully stocked backpacks to 500 local children being served by the Salvation Army, Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Children First. That's up from 325 last year; Mission employees played a big hand there as well, contributing 205 of the backpacks.

Volunteerism is the rule, not the exception, in this city. The Corporation for National and Community Service recently reported Asheville stands 12th among 75 mid-sized municipalities when it comes to the numbers of people volunteering. Here, more than 37 percent of people reported volunteer service, compared to the national average of 26 percent.

Opportunities for — and the need for — volunteer service are abundant. One such opportunity comes Friday, Sept. 11, with the National Day of Service and Remembrance. The day honors the spirit of service many felt compelled to demonstrate after the tragedies that occurred on that day eight years ago. (Service opportunities are also slated for Saturday, Sept. 12).

Hands On Asheville-Buncombe has an impressive array of activities planned for this weekend and throughout the year.

Here's to those who help others weather their personal storms, and help all of us weather the current stormy economy.

We are surrounded by unsung heroes. Today, we sing their praises.

For more information, contact:

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Or go to www.handsonasheville.org.