

How does volunteering pay off?

by Deirdre Berzok

If you read this column with any regularity you will probably be surprised to learn that there are, within our community, people who are unaware that volunteerism exists. Not only that, but that when they learn about it the reaction is sometime disbelief, or as one man put it, "Oh yeah, how come?"

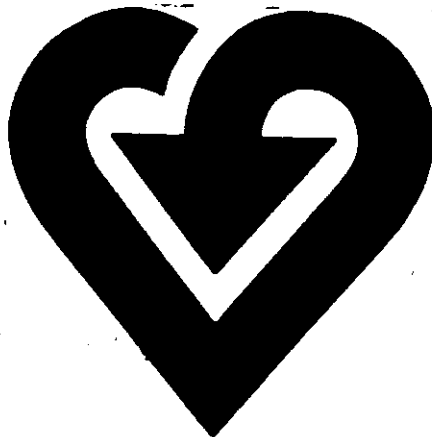
The man's question was quite genuine; he really had no idea why anyone would do something without getting paid. I'm sure he would consider helping a relative or a friend, but a stranger, not likely. The reason of course, boils down to what's in it for me thinking. And that is ironic when you consider that people volunteer for themselves.

Volunteering is not a selfish act; selfish means to be concerned only with oneself. But volunteering is something that someone does because they want to help, they want to make a difference, they want to feel important, they want to learn a new skill, they want to make friends, they want to be busy, they want experience, ad infinitum.

Whatever the motive for volunteering, it's never absolutely selfless and why should it be? People should be getting something from what they do. Since there is no pay involved in terms of cash, then why not be paid in terms of feeling good? Too often of course volunteers do not get all the recognition they deserve, but hopefully they get something else. It may be intangible and it may be something someone else wouldn't understand, but if it's something they want that is all that should matter.

People who do not understand volunteering are people who have never considered how an act of giving could also be an act of taking at the same time. These people are probably unaware of the many different types of volunteer opportunities that exist and the many different rewards one could receive.

Right now within our community, there are volunteer opportunities for someone who wants to learn a new skill



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— it may be anything from office work to counseling, from conservation management to first aid, from child care to library science. There are volunteer jobs that are perfect for revitalizing and refining old skills. There are volunteers needed to work with children, teens, older adults and the infirm. There are volunteer opportunities that offer exposure to the corporate, business and governmental worlds.

There's no question but that volunteering means giving — time, energy, caring, expertise. But ask anyone who does it why they do and you'll probably discover a reason you might never have thought of before.

If you haven't tried volunteering, maybe it's time you should. The Voluntary Action Center of Southwestern Fairfield County will help you explore the possibilities and find the ones that are best for you.