



JAMES D. WILSON—NEWSWEEK

Cost-effective ways of helping one's fellow man: An Apple employee at a San Francisco hospital



# The New Volunteerism

High-paid Yuppies are penciling compassion into their calendars

**T**hirty-year-old Leonard Davidson holds impeccable Yuppie credentials. He owns a condominium in a tony Boston suburb, works at least 55 hours a week in one of the city's prestigious law firms and spends his spare time playing tennis with his buddies from the office. But outside the corporate world, Davidson has a secret life. Once a week he checks in at the volunteer headquarters at Children's Hospital in Boston. He dons an orange smock, arms himself with games and storybooks and heads off to entertain chronically ill children. Recently he read "Winnie-the-Pooh" to a perky six-year-old named Amelia. Such experiences, says Davidson, "make me feel lucky. When I go home and see what I have, it all means so much more."

BMW's and the Almighty Buck are out. The new Yuppie rallying cry is volunteerism. Tired of the excesses of the Me Generation and searching for balance and companionship, young professionals are penciling compassion into their appointment books. Nearly 50 percent of respondents to a recent Gallup poll say they are involved in charity or volunteer work, up from 31 percent in 1984. Of those, a growing number are professionals with incomes exceeding \$40,000. At least 600 companies have organized programs to encourage

worker involvement in community service, up from about 300 in 1979. According to Business Week's 1988 "Hip Parade" survey, volunteering and social commitment have replaced networking and materialism on the "What's In" list. Says attorney Suzette Brooks, founder of New York Cares, a group of 500 young professionals, "Volunteering has become trendy."

The new crop of do-gooders is a far cry from their predecessors of the 1960s. Gone is the starry-eyed idealism that marked that era of political activism. In its place is an M.B.A.-style pragmatism—and a more cost-effective approach toward helping one's fellow man. Workers at Apple Computer, Inc., in Cupertino, Calif., help children in hospital wards play computer games and draw electronic pictures. Professionals in Los Angeles renovated the area surrounding a skid-row park. Throughout the country, legions of young professionals assist in a program to eliminate illiteracy. The Literacy Volunteers of America, whose national ranks have swelled by 42 percent since 1986, now has a waiting list in New York City—even though tutors must undergo a 24-hour training program and stick with the program six months. Melissa Fetter, vice president at J.P. Morgan & Co. and a Junior League volunteer, often reads to children at the House of Ruth in Los

Angeles. "I prefer working on projects where I can roll up my sleeves and get directly involved," she says.

Many volunteers approach their projects with the kind of fervor normally reserved for mergers and acquisitions. Last August five young Wall Street analysts and consultants formed the Street Project, a clearinghouse for volunteer activities in New York City. They began by conducting a detailed survey of their target audience.

BART BARTHOLOMEW—BLACK STAR





PETER FREED

**'I have been freed':** Aspinwall with other volunteers at the Covenant House center

Through a monthly newsletter circulated in 11 investment houses and five consulting firms, they marshaled 200 to 300 volunteers to staff soup kitchens, cook meals for the homeless and take children from the city's welfare hotels to the circus and a Broadway play. The group "overbooks" its volunteers to make sure that unpredictable Yuppie work schedules don't undermine reliability. "We operate like an airline," says Goldman, Sachs analyst Kathryn Matthews, "except we never bump people."

**Adopt a kid:** When organizational and dealmaking skills are applied to volunteer work, the results can be dazzling. Faced with the prospect of bringing Christmas to children in a New York welfare hotel, the Street Project got a boost from a First Boston Corp. vice president. Using his contacts

at Mattel, the VP cut a deal for a discount on 750 toys. Dillon, Read president Peter Flanigan recently formed the Student/Sponsor Partnership, an organization designed to decrease the dropout rate of inner-city-school students. (He was inspired by the I Have a Dream program formed by Eugene Lang, the philanthropist who has promised to send an entire class of inner-city students to college.) Under Flanigan's program, 117 professional people each agreed to pay \$1,500 a year to send a child to parochial school. "Everyone doesn't have \$300,000 to adopt a class," he says. "This was an opportunity for the Yuppies who can afford \$1,500 a year to do the same thing for a kid."

What provokes such acts of altruism? Guilt is one factor. "There are so many social problems and so few ways to personally address them," says accountant Diane Solomon. "[Volunteering] makes you feel less guilty." Solomon isn't alone in her concerns. Since the October stock-market crash left many without jobs, "the term disadvantaged has taken on new meaning," says Shirley Keller, vice president of Workplace Programs for Volunteer—The National Center, a nonprofit group. "The new volunteers may be taking out a little insurance; the idea is that if they go from being a high-rolling investment banker to being a waiter, maybe someone will look after them, too."

Volunteering also fills personal voids. Take Alec Aspin-

wall, 24, who until December was on the fast track at a San Francisco development firm. On Christmas Eve he quit his job, sold his car and moved to New York to become a full-time volunteer at Covenant House, a New York crisis center for homeless street kids. "I had achieved the academic definition of success: I had the salary, the authority, the prestige from my job, but I didn't receive the fulfillment that I had hoped for," he says. In his new job Aspinwall earns a \$12-a-week stipend plus room and board. "I have been freed," he says.

If volunteerism can offer freedom, it can also provide friendship. Even volunteer coordinators admit that in monotonous jobs like telephone fund raising, socializing ranks higher than self-sacrifice for many do-gooders. "Why are they there?" asks Mike King, executive vice president of Volunteer. "To meet other Yuppies. It's better than a singles bar."

**Corporate sabbaticals:** Whatever the reason for the surge in volunteerism, corporations are scrambling to capitalize on it. Many maintain that encouraging volunteerism helps boost employee morale and improves the corporate image. At least 200 firms have sent workers into the community on company time. Their 50 million hours of labor are worth an estimated \$500 million each year. Three companies—Xerox, IBM and Wells Fargo Bank—have also instituted "social-service leave," a corporate equivalent of the sabbaticals granted professors.

Such programs can pay off in better community relations. But they can also backfire. At companies threatened by layoffs and other cutbacks, publicizing volunteer programs sometimes leads to angry reprisals from stockholders. Thus, when Atlantic Richfield Co. closed down operations east of the Mississippi River, it downplayed its volunteer expenditures and announced it would guard against any abuses of the program. The idea that employees may not be paying full attention to business at a time when a company is retrenching, says Volunteer's Keller, can cause shareholders to "scream like thunder."

More important than what the programs do for shareholders is what they do for the public and for volunteers themselves. A series of visits with a 12-year-old boy suffering from leukemia left its mark on hospital volunteer Davidson. "One day I had a very tough day at the firm, and I almost didn't come to the hospital because I was so tired. When I saw him, I said, 'Boy, did I have a hard day.' And he looked at me and said, 'Yeah, I had a pretty tough day, too.' Suddenly I realized I hadn't had a tough day at all." The boy has since died. "I still have his picture," Davidson says. It's there to remind him after tough days at work.

ANNETTA MILLER with CAROLYN FRIDAY  
in New York, SUE HUTCHISON in Boston  
and bureau reports



PETER FREED

**Getting directly involved:** Melissa Fetter and friend in Los Angeles, a food line in New York City