

# The President's Page

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## Volunteerism: Alive and Well

**L**OOK AT the clubwoman and you are looking at the quintessential volunteer. Service to each other, to our communities and to our nation has been our stock in trade since the founding of the General Federation of Women's Clubs in 1889.

Yet what we see as we look at the individual clubwoman is the Volunteers in Action feature of this *Clubwoman* (p. 16) and what we see as we look at ourselves and our own club friends is not a single "type" but many. We are old and young, broad and lean, married and single, mothers and aunts, full-time homemakers and full-time employees. We wear tennis shoes and we wear high heels.

The projects we are involved in range in complexity from baking two dozen cookies for a tea to organizing the baking of cookies to fill nearly 21,000 cannisters for delivery to as many individuals in public hospitals across an entire state. The breadth of our concern includes art exhibitions and energy conservation, abused persons and an abused economy, trash cans and libraries, fashion shows and seminars, stranded motorists and starving children.

We are diversified women with diversified concerns united in service; truly Unity in Diversity.

**V**OLUNTEERISM—the joining together of people to do what needs to be done—is characteristic of America and Americans. We have believed that this is the best way to get things done since the days of the first settlers when everyone pitched in to help raise a barn. De Tocqueville remarked on this unique trait in his classic 18th century description of the American people. We have changed very little in this regard since then. Being willing to work together for the common good is the essence of community. Without community we each live alone, left to fend for ourselves.

**T**HERE ARE those who say that volunteering is dying. They cite changed roles for women and a "let the government do it" attitude as two reasons among many. Perhaps.

Women's changing expectations have certainly affected some willingness and ability to volunteer. There was a time when it was considered inappropriate for women to work outside the home and volunteering offered a scope for women's talents as well as taking care of community needs. This is no longer the case, as the rush of women into the job market attests. For some of them, in fact, volunteerism has

proved to be a good training ground for employment. As women, we are rightly concerned that we be able to choose work outside the home and that we be equitably paid for it. Being properly paid for employed work and offering to do other kinds of work for free—volunteering—are not the same thing. Equal pay is recognition of the validity of the employee. Volunteering is recognition of a responsibility to participate in the broader community.

Even though an increasing number of clubwomen are joining the labor force out of choice and necessity, we continue to find the time to volunteer. We do so out of a sense of obligation to serve; for the special fulfillment that service brings; for experience that sharpens old skills and teaches new ones; and for enriching friendships built on working together.

Government at all levels has taken over much of the social service once done by the family and the church. And people do rely on government for many things. But inflation is rising. Many of us feel there must be a cutback both on government spending and on government encroachment in our lives. Yet we want to maintain community services. Therefore, we all have to pitch in. That means that volunteers and volunteering are more important than ever.

Volunteerism, it seems to me, is not dying as much as changing. It is no longer—if it ever was—synonymous with little old ladies in tennis shoes or Lady Bountifuls presiding over the tea table. As I see volunteerism in action around the country, volunteers are increasingly professional in what they do and in how they do it. They bridge the gaps between the proper governmental sphere and the world of business. Without volunteers there are many necessary things that simply could not and would not be done.

Clubwomen, therefore, face renewed challenge. With increasing limitations on our volunteer time and money, we must consider carefully what we are able to do and then we must follow through "professionally." It is incumbent on us to train ourselves well, to plan thoughtfully, and to act creatively. This kind of commitment to excellence should not scare off anyone. There is a need for the hour that one woman can spend on the telephone committee as much as there is a need for the many hours another puts in to run a national project.

Look around. Volunteerism may be changing, but it is alive and well and living in communities across the land and around the world.