

# Get Up, Get Out, Volunteer!

*Leave your rocker behind and join the 89 million Americans donating their time and energy to worthwhile causes*

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by MARGARET OPSATA

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**I**'LL JUST WORK a little as we talk," announces Frankie Shoup of Sylva, N.C., her fingers flying over the woodland weeds she is crafting into a basket. The 50-year-old former bank manager has not decided which of her half-dozen charitable organizations will get this particular basket. Her prizewinning baskets and nature wreaths have been raffled off to help fund a new wing and CAT scanner at the local hospital, updated equipment for the volunteer fire department, and the activities of the Humane Society.

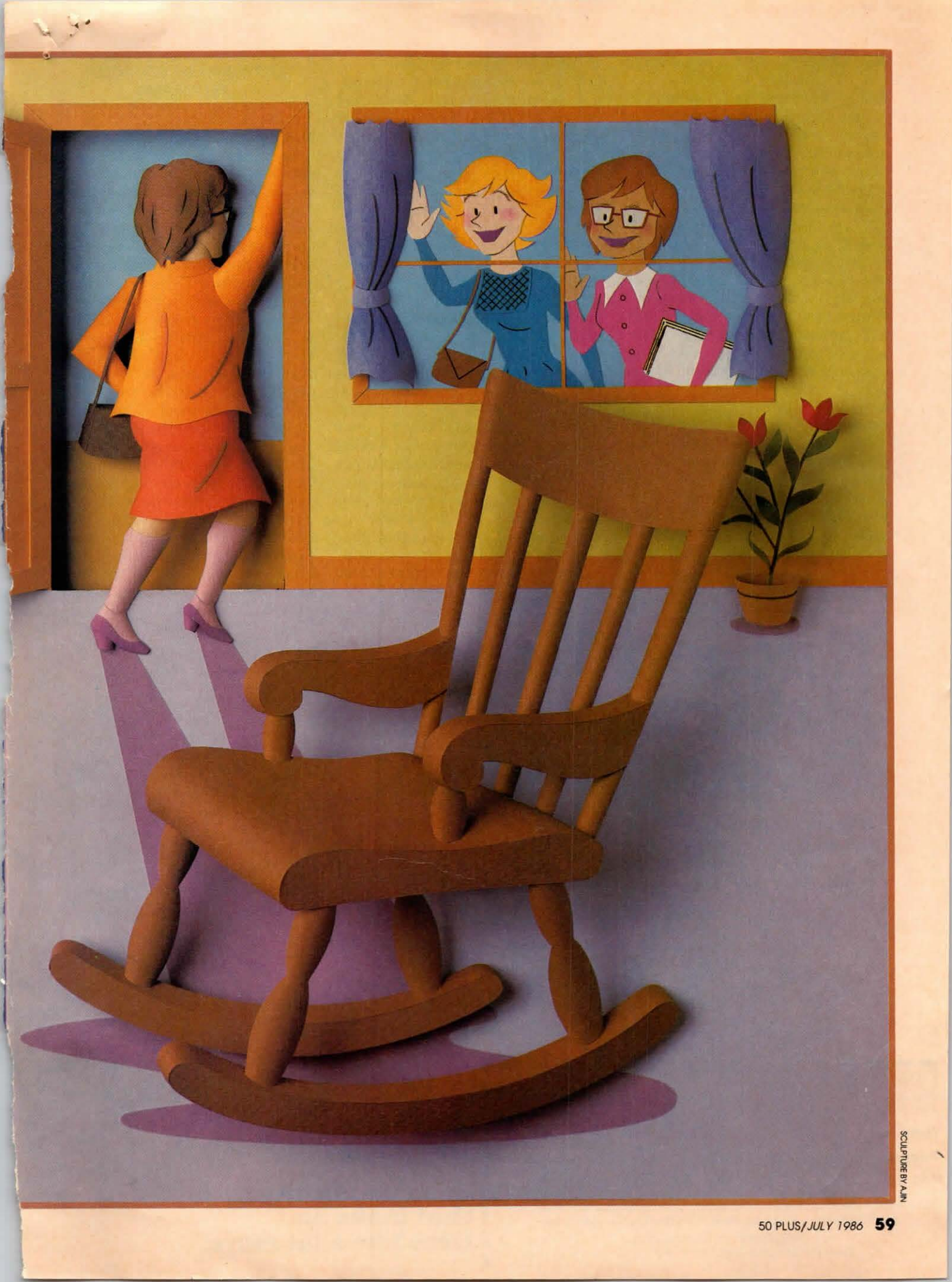
In a typical week, she drives a van ferrying homebound seniors to medical appointments and nutritious lunches at the community center, or on scenic day trips; supervises a pumpkin-growing project by 4-H kids or lectures children on ecology; teaches Appalachian handicrafts to help welfare recipients learn a marketable skill; and delivers day-old pastries to a nearby nursing home, where residents fondly dub her "the donut lady." (Of course, the pastries are given to her free; Frankie convinced the bakery it was the *right* thing to do.)

When praised for her accomplishments, she seems surprised. "I'm blessed to have these opportunities," she says.

Her husband Stan, 66, a retired retail appliance salesman, has been known to use his woodcarving and building skills to help

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local churches and community groups, as well. He could be speaking for any of the 89 million volunteers around the country when he says, "Each of us has accumulated knowledge and skills. We owe it to others to pass these on."

There's never been a better time to pass along your skills and knowledge to the less fortunate. Though 48 percent of the population volunteers, according to a 1985 Gallup survey, that figure is down from 54 percent in 1983. The percentage is lower among 50-plussers: some 44 percent of the 50-64 age group, and only 26 percent of those over 75. In President Reagan's view, we will be a better people if we can reverse that trend.

Meanwhile, the need for volunteers grows more acute with each passing month, as the deficit-reduction measures of the Gramm-Rudman bill impose funding cutbacks on practically every government program. With fewer dollars available, agencies that assist the poor, the homeless, the handicapped and the ill have been forced to

curtail many of their services.

Virginia Hodgkinson, vice president for research at the Independent Sector, a Washington, D.C., publisher of the most recent Gallup survey, says, "We are hoping that retirees and others in the over-50 group will be able to take up some of that slack. These are people with the time, experience and ability to make a real difference."

Those who do volunteer unanimously agree that the rewards far outweigh the efforts. Most tangibly, the actual costs of volunteering (transportation, phone calls, supplies and special uniforms) are tax deductible. Also, many sponsoring agencies honor their volunteers with pins, plaques and/or special dinners. Generally, though, volunteers are most taken with the intangible benefits that change and enrich their lives: finding new friends, remaining productive in retirement, discovering unknown personal talents, feeling wanted and needed. Above all, they point out, volunteers gain more than they give. "By helping others, we are really helping ourselves," says Stan Shoup. "All we have to lose is our boredom."

## GOVERNMENT VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

Many people thought it astonishing when Lillian Carter, mother of former president Jimmy Carter, went to India as a *Peace Corps* volunteer. Actually, more than 10 percent of the 5,000 volunteers serving the Peace Corps today are over 50. Director Loret Miller Ruppe confirms that a major goal of the Peace Corps is to increase its number of older volunteers.

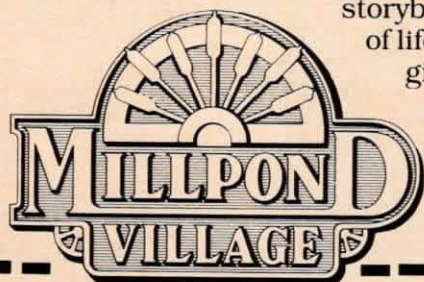
The distinction of being the oldest active Peace Corps volunteer goes to Vince Meyer, 83, of Chicago, Ill. A plumber for 66 years, he now teaches plumbing at a trade school in the Central American republic of Belize. "Young men trained by him are finding gainful employment all over Belize City," enthuses fellow volunteer Katy Perry. "Employers speak glowingly of their competence, but also of the work attitudes they learned from Vince's disciplined, professional approach." Vince is happy to be of help. "I knew I had something to give the world for all the good things that came to

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me over the years," he says.

For more about the Peace Corps' requirements, call 1-800-424-8580.

**ACTION** (American Council To Improve Our Neighborhood), the federal agency for voluntary service, sponsors three programs geared specifically to participants over 60: Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, and RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program). In addition, its **VISTA** (Volunteers in Service to America) program, which is sometimes described as the domestic Peace Corps, actively recruits older people. About 20 percent of its volunteers are over 55, giving the group a median age of 37.

- **Foster Grandparents**, a favorite project of First Lady Nancy Reagan, has paired caring adult role models with 18,000 special children who have disabilities, are victims of divorce or child abuse, or have a history of drug abuse.

- **Senior Companions** matches volunteers with homebound elderly who need assistance with shopping, transportation to medical appointments, or just friendship. There are more than 5,000 active companions. Both the

Foster Grandparents and the Senior Companions seek volunteers with limited incomes. They receive an hourly stipend of \$2.20 to offset their expenses.

- **RSVP** has some 375,000 volunteers working with 44,000 community agencies in all 50 states. They serve as Meals on Wheels drivers, museum tour guides, classroom or health care aides, carpenters, electrical or plumbing contractors, credit counselors and tax preparers. Many also take part in RSVP's telephone reassurance and home visitation projects. "Basically, whatever you want to do is probably something that RSVP needs people to do in your community," says ACTION spokesperson Patita McEvoy. "If you're not sure what you would like to do, we can help you figure it out."

To reach any ACTION program, dial 1-800-424-8867.

**SCORE** (Service Corps of Retired Executives), which is sponsored by the Small Business Administration, provides free counseling to fledgling entrepreneurs in 480 chapters around the country.

Among the 12,000 retired executive

volunteers is 67-year-old Art Kalelian of Conover, N.C., a former director of industrial relations and safety for Ethan Allen Furniture. Art's most recent assignment was to help a young homemaker open a cake-decorating shop. Her ideas were excellent, and her product delicious, but she didn't know how much to charge and where to advertise. Art taught her how to do a market research study, and now, the store is thriving. "These people have the talent and drive and desire to succeed," says Art. "Those of us with business experience have been where they are going. Why let them get into trouble and have to bounce back? After all, small businesses have always been the nucleus of the American economy."

Check in your local telephone directory under "SCORE" or "Small Business Administration."

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#### PRIVATE SECTOR PROGRAMS

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A number of companies encourage employees and retirees to contribute their time and talents within the com-

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munity. Before the 1984 Olympics, Los Angeles sought to lessen its smog problem by planting 1 million trees to filter 400,000 pounds of pollution out of the atmosphere each day. General Telephone Co. contributed the cost of 250,000 trees, recruited 600 employee volunteers, and sent them to 300 local schools in search of 70,000 children to help plant the trees. The last tree was put in place five days before the Games opened—in fresher air.

In Philadelphia, Pa., Scott Paper's SERVE (Scott Employee Retiree Volunteer Effort) program uses a computer to match willing volunteers with local agencies. Levi Strauss (San Francisco), Dow Chemical (Midland, Mich.), and Honeywell (Minneapolis, Minn.) offer similar programs. If you think your employer (or former employer) might sponsor volunteer opportunities, check with the human resources department there.

Within your community, organiza-

tions that typically need volunteers include health care facilities, libraries, museums, historic preservation societies and performing arts groups. Your local public library can direct you to the nearest data bank. Or, to receive a free list of volunteer centers in your state, contact *Volunteer*—The National Center (1111 North 19th Street, Suite 500, Arlington, Va., 22209; 703-276-0542).

With 27 million functional illiterates (one in five adults) in the U.S. today, there is a real need for volunteer tutors to teach adults, one at a time, to read. The only requirement is the ability to read yourself; free training handles the rest. Call the *Coalition for Literacy* at 1-800-228-8813.

Perhaps you are aware of some need not being met by current volunteer efforts in your community. If so, why not organize your own program? That's exactly what Herman Skolnik of Wilmington, Del., did in 1984. The retired chemical research manager felt that young schoolchildren needed

more stimulation to consider science as a career. So he inaugurated a program to send retired scientists into grade school classrooms to perform a number of experiments for curious youngsters.

Whatever you consider, don't be intimidated by the fear that you have nothing to offer. Frankie Shoup has a ready reply: "Ask yourself, 'Can I talk? Can I smile?' If so, a nursing home would love for you to visit a resident who has no one to make him or her feel important.

"If you can drive a car, there's a shut-in who needs a ride to the supermarket or the doctor. If you can bake cookies, there's a community group that needs refreshments for its next meeting.

"In other words, everybody can do something." 59

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*Margaret Opsata is a former Fulbright fellow who has written hundreds of articles. She wrote "Learning By Degrees" in our June issue.*

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## The Charitable Chairmen

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THE WORDS "CHARITABLE" and "chairman" don't go together. Or do they?

• Paul Woolard, 62, president of the Revlon Group, has spent many days fending off takeover attempts. But one night a week he abandons the corporate wars, dons the uniform of a cook's helper, and ladles out soup to homeless men on New York's lower East Side.

• Bob Seymour, 70, retired as chairman of the board of Consolidated Natural Gas Co. in Pittsburgh in 1981. But he went back to work as chairman of the Pittsburgh Brewing Co.—for \$1 a year—to salvage it from bankruptcy. In a town already hard hit by unemployment, he saved 450 jobs.

• Former Chief Executive Jimmy Carter, 61, helps Habitat for Humanity improve poverty housing not only by serving on its board of directors, but also by pitching in, with wife Rosalynn, to help renovate buildings—a real hands-on approach.

According to Harvard psychiatry professor Robert Coles, who does much of his work among the poor,

"Executives tend to be a lot more generous than most academics give them credit for—or are themselves."

Despite a slight decline in volunteerism nationally during the last two years, Coles believes we are bottoming out of a period of "narcissism and indifference" to moral issues. Leading the way are groups as varied as university students, business leaders and, as we have seen, even ex-presidents.

Typical of the trend is William E. Simon, 58, who served as Secretary of the Treasury under presidents Ford and Nixon. Simon, whose personal worth is estimated in excess of \$150 million, regularly puts in 60 hours a week as chairman of the Wesray Corporation, a private investment company in Morristown, N.J. Yet, he also finds time to counsel teenage drug addicts, prostitutes, and runaways who seek shelter in New York's Covenant House, the refuge a priest created for them in frantic Times Square. Normally a reserved man, Simon tells the shelter's kids—loudly—what they need to hear: that they can make it in

America, no matter what their beginnings, or false steps, along the way. Even on Christmas, he and his family leave their 60-acre New Jersey estate to serve brunch to the rootless youngsters, who have come to regard them as a substitute family.

Others have carved out different niches. The chairman of the Barnett Bank of Jacksonville, Fla., Hugh Jones, 55, was deeply moved by the death of another executive's son during heart surgery. Jones already chaired many charities, including the local United Way. But he was determined to keep the boy's memory alive by saving the lives of others in similar straits.

With the bank footing the bill, he flew eight Korean children in need of heart surgery to Jacksonville, put them up in his home, and arranged for them to have operations. Afterwards, he comforted them in the hospital until they were strong enough to finish their recovery in his home. He still keeps in touch with the children (some of whom call him granddaddy), and

has plans to bring eight more over this year.

Kenn Allen, president of Volunteer, a Washington-based group encouraging volunteerism, sees executive involvement in volunteer work as having a ripple effect. Because executives are often viewed as leaders in society, others—particularly within their companies—take notice of what they do. "Corporations are much more interested in promoting volunteerism for all their employees than they were 10 years ago," he says. "They're beginning to realize that resources made available to the community also have a positive effect on the corporation."

And it has a positive effect on those who serve. Jones says that he gets a "deep, psychic income" from his volunteer work. Simon, who also became president of the U.S. Olympic Committee to help "save" youngsters through amateur sports, has been described as a devout Catholic who believes in living his deep convictions. Though back in his U.S. Treasury days he was taunted with the moniker "Simple Simon," he's not afraid to talk simply about the satisfactions of repaying his country for giving him so much. "I'm grateful for breaks I got as a kid, and I want to share my success with these kids," he says.

William Woodside, 63, is another executive who believes in nurturing children through volunteer work. As chairman of the Greenwich, Conn.-based American Can Co., he presides over a foundation that will disperse almost \$4 million in grants this year. Not content to leave his educational commitment at that, he also does career counseling for students at the inner-city Martin Luther King High School. For him, a large part of the kick may well be the chance to boast, "I know half the kids there."

Yet recognition is something charitable executives don't generally seek; they don't want to be seen as exploiting a charity for publicity. According to Jim Harnett, chief operating officer of Covenant House, "Most of these kids have no idea what a Treasury Secretary [like Simon] does anyway. But Simon provides a layman's enthusiasm that gives the kids a different kind of encouragement from what the professionals offer."

"Look," he continues, "Simon could salve his conscience by writing a check. But to him, the personal touch is more important." —RUSS HODGE

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