

## Volunteers key to hospice, many other services

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### A Peace Before Sunset

The history of volunteerism runs deep and wide in America. This great land of ours was built on the backs of volunteers.

Winston Churchill once said in praising the beleaguered Royal Air Force, which in spite of great odds held off the mighty German Luftwaffe during World War II, "never in the face of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few." Churchill's sentiment can easily be applied to volunteers in this country today.

If you travel across this great land, including the Casa Grande Valley, you will see parks, buildings, ball fields, forests and lakes, all built by the sweat and labor of volunteers.

You will be served by thousands of organizations, like Hospice, Boys and Girls Clubs, United Ways, Chambers of Commerce and many more incredible non-profit organizations all run by volunteers.

You will find volunteer firefighters and ambulance personnel who risk their lives on a daily basis to protect people. You will find civic groups like the Rotary, Kiwanis and Lions clubs meeting the needs of their individual communities as well as the international community. You will hear of the great works of fraternal organizations such as the Elks and the Moose clubs and many others who - through the efforts of their volunteer base - help people every day and save the American taxpayer billions of dollars as well as contributing to the infrastructure of American life.

The bad news is that these volunteers are aging and while having the same heart and the same goals, they move a little slower and sport a little more gray hair every year. This "graying of the volunteer force in America" is a concern, but the good news is that we seem to be experiencing a new trend toward volunteerism among our young people.

Forty-plus years ago, when I first started my climb up the corporate ladder, it was expected that if you wanted a quick rise through that world, you paid your "community dues" by volunteering. Companies took great pride in advertising that they were good "community citizens" that handled their civic responsibilities well.

Since I was always eager to be successful in the corporate climb, I dutifully became the representative to United Way, organized blood drives, rang the bell for the Salvation Army at Christmas time, served as greeter for the local chamber, and raised money for organizations like the Red Cross and the Boys and Girls Club as well as other non-profit organizations. I became a Jaycee and then a Rotarian.

As my community service increased, I realized that my involvement was purely personal and was not the result of my desire to move upward in the corporate climb. Then I realized that I wanted to manage the organizations that provided community service. As a result, I spent a great deal of my volunteer time and efforts managing a number of non-profit groups.

We are indeed fortunate to have many very civic-minded individuals here in the Casa Grande Valley. From what I read in this newspaper, the spirit of volunteerism is alive and well here. The folks who were born and bred here

have it, because without that spirit our community wouldn't have such a positive, giving attitude. The people who are moving here have it, because many of them brought it with them.

Here at RTA Hospice, volunteerism is a core part of the hospice program. Hospice was "founded and fed" by volunteers. Being the volunteer coordinator at RTA Hospice means that I not only have the responsibility to manage and train RTA Hospice volunteers, but that on a daily basis I get to interact - in the most personal of ways - with people facing the final journey of their lives. Our volunteers have the opportunity to be "up close and personal" to this natural end-of-life experience called dying.

They visit patients in their homes providing much-needed breaks to the patient's care giver. They visit patients at the Hospice House, where they may hold a patient's hand or laugh or even cry with a patient. Often they provide support by being a quiet presence in the room. Sometimes they listen and in that process are privy to some of the greatest life experiences imaginable. Sometimes they sit with families to provide comfort and share experiences.

Other volunteers assist in our Bereavement Program, making phone calls to bereaved family members offering encouragement and comfort because the survivors are as important to us here at RTA Hospice as their loved one was. We also have volunteers with outgoing personalities who enjoy meeting and talking with people and who are excellent as greeters. Many of our volunteers help in the office with the monumental, but mundane, paperwork that is involved in providing health care today.

Our patients and staff enjoy music. We would welcome a volunteer to come to our lobby and play soft music on our grand piano. We have beautiful gardens here at the Hospice House; maybe you would like to use your volunteer time by tending those peaceful gardens.

As you can see, volunteerism is alive and well here at RTA Hospice, and we would love for you to join us. RTA Hospice volunteers are considered part of our staff, and we enjoy activities that foster that relationship. Our volunteers are active in the community and volunteer for other organizations too. We encourage them and are proud of their accomplishments. Our volunteers come from many backgrounds; they have served as nurses, managed companies, written books and were great homemakers; some are young, some are old; some have had their own hospice experience, but the common thread among them is that they care about people. I can tell you that there is no better feeling than holding the hand of a person who is approaching death and having him or her look into your eyes with love and an understanding that tells you they appreciate your presence.

I believe that the rewards of being a hospice volunteer are fantastic. It enhances your feelings of self-worth. You will truly feel you are "the wind beneath someone's wings."

Come and join us. Our next training class runs from Sept. 11 to 20 and will be held during the evening hours. Call me. I will be glad to visit with you to explain the hospice philosophy and the process necessary to become a volunteer. My number is 421-7143. Speaking of volunteers, we are available to come to speak to your group or organization about the hospice experience. Just give me a call.

Until next time ...