
Owilya Dima, fifty-three, an Ethiopian Muslim, was a refugee to the United States almost thirty years ago. She led a nomadic existence with her family in Kenya and Somalia; they moved virtually monthly in order to avoid both the army and the militia groups. After moving to the United States with her husband and their daughter, Dima suffered from intense isolation and loneliness. A believer in “Naseeb” or fate, she vowed to help other refugees make the transition into this country and this culture more smoothly. Now a mother of four daughters, Owilya journeys in her mini-van constantly—taking with her when necessary a translator—and visiting the homes of the newly arrived refugees. She haunts garage sales for necessities (many of which she also supplies gratis). Over the years, her service to immigrants has grown from being a translator to four Orange County mosques to helping resettlement agencies (services which offer immigrants aid for three months) and to enlisting other volunteers in her cause.


Detroit Free Press columnist Mitch Albom profiles Bill Doebler, sixty-one, a former Viet Nam War veteran and a current highly popular Santa Claus. After returning from the war, the self-proclaimed introverted Doebler eventually married and pursued a career in running a carpet warehouse. Because of a violent reaction to the poisonous herbicide, Agent Orange, Doebler suffers from diabetes, nerve damage, and eye problems. His wife became gravely ill, and he suffered a job loss. Turning from despair, he decided to serve others in need—initially as a volunteer bell ringer for the Salvation Army and eventually as a Santa Claus. Equipped with a white beard, protruding stomach, and a Santa outfit, Doebler and his wife (Mrs. Claus) are frequent and highly popular volunteers for homeless shelters and old folks’ homes. He loves his work and the satisfaction it affords him in performing service for others.
This article highlights the five-part television program that debuted on the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., January 16. The series examines in great detail the federal programs on poverty instituted by President Lyndon B. Johnson in January of 1964. Among those revolutionary institutions examined in the series are the Head Start program in Mississippi and the Vista program in Appalachia. Henry Hampton, the executive producer of the series, opined that “We need to demythologize the War on Poverty, and to learn from its failures and its successes.

APICHA (Asian and Pacific Islander Coalition on HIV and AIDS) was formed in New York City by six Japanese-American women who sought to combat discrimination against those suffering from HIV or from AIDS and to educate a largely voiceless population. Comprising some ten per cent of the New York population, Asians and Pacific Islanders are largely immigrants—the figure cited in this piece was about eighty per cent of the total Asian and Pacific Islander populations. Volunteers serve a vast multi-language populace, about one hundred languages and dialects are spoken, and a wide array of nationalities, about forty-nine estimated groups. Because of cultural prejudices toward these afflictions, many of these people seek help much later than they should. The coalition offers three distinct areas for help: Client Services, Reta (Research Services) and Education.

Will Bardenwerper, a former army infantry officer who served in Iraq from 2003 to 2007, castigates a largely unaware and equally uninvolved American population that is focused on the Occupy Wall Street movement, and not on the war in Iraq and on the relative few who serve our country by fighting there. He condemns the relative lack of public engagement and general debate concerning this conflict, an indifference that is earmarked by a general divorce from reality regarding the great hardships visited on these military personnel and the equally great service provided by these people for the general population.


This article offers a historical overview of the service rendered by Blacks throughout the history of this country—from Columbus’ black crewmember, Pedro Alonzo Nino, through famous figures in American History, such as—of course—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The article briefly discusses the One Million Man March on Washington, D.C. and focuses as well on fifty prominent African Americans who serve the greater good in the Sacramento area.


Bracey appeals to members of the African American community to donate blood, citing the tremendous need within this population. He specifically calls for donations of rare blood types—found only in the black population—“U-negative and Duffy-negative, for example. And he adds that one of every six hundred and twenty-five Blacks suffers from Sickle Cell Anemia. Bracey further extols members of the community to donate by citing the statistic that Blacks make up about thirteen per cent of the total American population but comprise only about five per cent of the total donor population. He concludes with the reminder that a prospective donor must be seventeen years of age, weigh at least one hundred and ten pounds, and be in good health.

Chappell, Kevin. “A National Call to Action—Why We All Need to Volunteer.”


Chappell profiles Ray Wright as a fairly typical volunteer who serves his community after suffering from chronic unemployment and underemployment. Wright is a member of the organization VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) at a homeless shelter in Detroit named “Nia House.” After eight years of work at the residence, Wright began his own organization to combat wide-spread drug use and child molestation in the black community. Chappell opines, however, that Blacks need to do better for the community by citing the figure that of sixty-five million total volunteers, Whites comprise one of three volunteers while Blacks make up only one in five volunteers. He concludes his piece with a very helpful list of volunteer organizations and highlights their particular work for the prospective volunteer.
Dao, James. “For Injured Veterans, Healing in Service to Others: [Giving]”


According to the writer, Eric Greitens, a former Navy SEAL who served as an officer in Iraq from 2003 to 2007, disabled veterans adapted the best to their homecomings by volunteering to serve other returning vets in a variety of capacities. Greitens and his friends used their combat and their disability pay to help start a nonprofit organization they named “The Mission Continues.” Dedicated to serving the veterans of both the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, by offering stipends—limited to six thousand dollars and seven months, Greitens insists that the organization is not intended to be an employment agency, and veterans must develop “exit” strategies for the inevitable conclusion of their service—and involving them in various charitable organizations such as “Tempered Steel,” “Purple Hearts Homes,” and “Team Rubicon,” all dedicated to the service of returning military personnel.


In his essay, Christopher Dickey reminds his readers that, although Americans are traditionally very individualistic, they are also historically connected to each other. He offers a list of grassroots volunteer organizations and highlights their respective purposes. Given the governmental “gridlock” that currently besets the government in Washington D.C., Dickey cites a small-town police officer who claims that “If people want to the quality of life in their towns, they have the power to do it.” This power for change is, of course, manifested through volunteer service.


Despite the United States Embassy’s warning to a joint team of Doctors from America and the Philippines concerning their mission of mercy in Mindanao, these physicians, nevertheless, completed their objective of bringing medical aid to those Filipinos who would otherwise be without it. Many of the doctors were specialists and assisted the population by performing one hundred and twenty-eight major operations for myoma, thyroid problems, hernia issues, cataracts, harelip surgery, as well as another eight-four so-called minor operations during their four-day medical mission. The mission was headed by Dr. Juan M. Montero, II, a thoracic surgeon from Chesapeake, Virginia, and their objectives were fulfilled after the assurance from local governmental figures that they would not face undue risk.
The writer draws an interesting fact to the attention of the reader in the beginning of his lengthy piece, “Though the economy is slumping, volunteering in the United States jumped last year at the fastest rate in six years.” According to Gearon, at least sixty-three million Americans gave their time and energy to charitable pursuits. He offers a number of helpful suggestions for those considering volunteering their time and expertise by urging prospective participants to find the organization that has the best individual fit for them. Volunteers of all ages and all fields are desperately needed—he jokes that even graduates in the Liberal Arts field can be of considerable use by helping with teaching reading and writing and in tutoring youngsters. The possibilities for volunteer work exist from local activities to foreign enterprises, and from a few hours per week to a commitment of a couple of years. See the detailed list for the vast number of possibilities.

In a highly “academic” piece, rife with tables, graphs, charts, and statistics, the two physicians who authored the piece explored the depth of involvement on the part of medical doctors regarding volunteer service. They cited a figure stating that 95% of physicians queried thought that volunteering was important, but that only 54% of those participating in the study had done any volunteering the past three years. And less than half of these physicians, 38.8%, had volunteered in the past year. According to the authors, even those in the legal profession were more likely to undertake volunteer service.

Ericka Harney offers the amazing statistic that almost one-half of the total population of Utah is involved in some aspect of volunteerism, at least according to the “Points of Light Foundation.” Essential to the continued participation of this crucial involvement is the passage of the “Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act” passed by congress. The bill’s purpose is both to sustain and to enhance volunteer program offerings for prospective participants. Inasmuch as the current economic recession has impacted the nonprofit sector, thereby limiting potential service, the Kennedy Act will aid in the volunteer enterprise immensely, inasmuch as six billion additional dollars will be made available to organizations over the next five years.


Jacobson underscores the current dismal state of many public libraries, particularly in large urban areas such as Philadelphia, Boston, and Charlotte, which have suffered tremendous cut backs in both hours of operation and in services. He adds the sobering thought that library usage has skyrocketed, yet a full one-half of the states have reduced funding for libraries and a quarter have reduced hours of operation. The solution to this dismal state of affairs is to train a large number of volunteers to augment services provided by librarians and by libraries. He recommends that libraries undertake a rigorous process concerning the proper screening, training and communicating with prospective volunteers, and he suggests a volunteer “coordinator” be appointed for each library in order to enhance both the efficiency and the range of service of these volunteers. Jacobson concludes his piece by offering a practical guide of suggestions for the training of volunteer staff.


Nicholas Kristof urges readers to consider giving a gift to a charity, rather than to provide another meaningless gift to another who has no use for it. He offers a startling array of possibilities for gift giving—ranging from those listed on major websites, such as International Rescue Committee, which buys a flock of chickens for a needy family for only thirty dollars, to the organization Against Malaria, which, for a five dollar donation, buys a mosquito net for a family that otherwise may suffer a sickness or a loss because of the wide-spread malarial problem.

Kwon, Chris. “Youth Group in Forefront of N. Korean Famine Relief Effort.”


Thomas Hong, Coordinator of Famine Relief for St. Raphael’s Korean Catholic Center in Cerritos, spearheads a movement in the community to aid starving Koreans of the North by raising funds in a myriad of ways and sending these monies via charitable donations to those in need. Two previous years of famine in North Korea have caused an astronomical shortage of 2.36 million tons of food, or about a 55% undersupply of food. By contrast
in the horrific 1985 Ethiopian famine, a 35% undersupply was recorded, a shortage that resulted in the deaths of over one million people. St. Raphael’s has had an outpouring of relief efforts on the part of those in the community, ranging from third graders to students in high school. Activities have included a sponsored twelve hour fast that raised eight hundred dollars, to a rummage sale that earned two thousand, eight hundred dollars, to a special collection in mass that raised three thousand dollars.


Retired management wizard Herb Johnson, sixty-six, is currently serving as president and CEO of the San Diego Rescue Mission, a faith-based recovery and rehabilitation program for the homeless. He oversees the ninety-employee and 14.5 million dollar operation, using his considerable business skills and great experience. Johnson is fairly typical of the “Baby Boomer” generation, which has increasingly eschewed a life of ease in retirement, preferring instead to remain actively engaged in some personal, meaningful activity (though more on their individual terms). According to this source, an estimated 14.6 million new jobs will be available by 2018, although there will be only 9.1 million new workers for these jobs. With this shortage in workers, qualified professionals in business, health care, and education will be a premium consideration. Clearly, boomers’ skills will be actively sought after by both business and charitable organizations, with the proviso, however, that “Boomers” become adept in social networking skills that will be a requirement for the changing employment market.


Although a somewhat dated article, the topic covered—the shortage in available blood supplies for patients needing transfusions—is highly relevant to the situation nationwide today. Eight million donors who supplied twelve million pints of blood were being honored by former President Bill Clinton in January of 1994, National Donors Month. According to Dr. Charles Roualt, ninety-five per cent of all donations are from voluntary donors, whose contributions enable about four million Americans nationwide to receive needed blood transfusions annually.
After twenty-three year old Erin Bingham was raped during her stint serving in the Peace Corps, she turned to Julia De Mello, who represented victims of assault who were serving abroad for the Corp. After a vigorous intervention on De Mello’s part—she hired a lawyer and went to the local police—Bingham received justice; the rapist was served a ten-year prison sentence. Unfortunately, after this 2008 intervention, the Peace Corps changed policy and “grounded” their advocates, turning instead to local Peace Corps security and local constabulary. 8,665 volunteers and trainees represent the Corps in seventy-seven developing nations; however, the Peace Corps is separate from local United States Embassies and, thus, not under their protection. From 2000 to 2010, more than one-thousand rapes, attempted rapes, and sexual assaults occurred (excluding the mysterious “disappearance” of a handful of other volunteers) but because of the policy shift, a drop in the sexual assault cases resulting in a successful prosecution, from sixty per cent to forty-six percent, has resulted.


Mark Meyers, forty-eight and his thirty-seven year old wife, began a rescue mission of one hundred and twenty donkeys from Hawai’i’s Big Island. Once used to haul coffee to the coast by local farmers, the donkeys have since been replaced by jeeps and are no longer of use. Abandoned by previous owners, they soon became a nuisance. Enter Mark Meyers who had the beasts sent to land he owns in Tehachapi, California. He and his wife have supervised the rescue, rehabilitation, and recovery of over two thousand donkeys, nation wide. At any one time, the Meyers may have up to three hundred and twenty-five animals living with them. Each year, the public can adopt a donkey for two-hundred dollars apiece at an open house on the ranch. Meyers bristles at the stereotype that donkeys are stubborn animals, insisting rather that they are highly tenacious—a quality much admired in humans.
Writer Michael Scherer explores both the complex and the widespread nature of President Barack Obama’s massive volunteer force—this one focused on his reelection in 2012. Jeremy Bird, thirty-two, the reelection campaign field director in Chicago, represents both the commitment and the technological savvy of many of these volunteers. Using a computer at his desk to access files, he makes “cold calls” to former volunteers who may have become disaffected with the campaign or with the administration for any number of reasons. Some eighteen months before the reelection date, the leadership—all intact—is shaping campaign strategy and engaging volunteers, encouraging them to work twenty to forty-hours per week in the reelection effort. The new campaign slogan is “Winning the Future,” and the organization relies heavily on technology to connect with potential volunteers and voters. A web site message asks the reader, “Are you in?” Workers in the campaign avail themselves to “facebook,” “Ipad,” videos, and other electronic media. Moreover, former Obama volunteers are encouraged to offer input to campaign officials, and even to “vent,” if they so desire.


Although to care for 2.3 million inmates the United States spends eighty billion dollars annually on the system (or about thirty-five thousand dollars per inmate) some of the best rehabilitation work is being done by volunteer inmates who are serving life-time prison sentences. In a documentary called “Saving Life,” these prisoners who care for fellow inmates with terminal AIDS are being profiled. One such volunteer claimed that in the Hospice tradition of helping people to die with dignity, he was trying to help folks live with dignity. Talcott argues that Christian Scientists have done amazing work in getting hardened criminals to recognize their humanity and to recognize that they too are created in the “image and likeness of God.” An invaluable asset to prison reform is to get prisoners to accept this image and to act on it.


Between 2008 and 2009, over 13,000 individuals volunteered through faith-based programs, according to the Corporation for National and Community Service. However, the problem rests with the decline in numbers of programs available to potential
Volunteers 10

Volunteers. Since 2004, these faith-based organizations’ numbers have dwindled from two hundred and thirty-six to one hundred and eighty-two. In contrast, secular volunteer programs are growing. One of the largest and the oldest of the faith-based volunteer organizations is the Jesuit Volunteer Corps (JVC) which is located in Baltimore, M.D. In the past year, JVC received over six hundred and fifty applications for three hundred and seventy volunteer slots. However, the financial “resources” to accommodate would-be volunteers has diminished considerably, thereby resulting in this unfortunate glut of volunteers and the equally unfortunate inability to place them. According to Kerry Weber, most young, potential volunteers learn of programs via word-of-mouth or the internet.


The newspaper makes a broad appeal to its readers to volunteer themselves and their time in one or more of a myriad of ways, in order to serve their respective communities (in keeping faith with the President’s Summit for America’s future). Such possibilities include tutorial service to enhance literacy in the community, food delivery for shut-ins and the disabled, cleaning and repairing homes for those who cannot do these activities, teaching lessons in religious institutions, volunteering in homes and hospitals, and engaging in any number of counseling possibilities. The article concludes with the reminder that many social ills and evils have been combated by volunteers, among these ills have been crime, racism, poverty, disease, and homelessness.


Bebe Fitzgerald, 83, says of her volunteer work of twenty years, “You want to reach out and do what you can.” Fitzgerald is representative of some eighteen million senior citizens who volunteer in quite varied volunteer activities. And, according to a University of Michigan study, 1986, which traced the life expectancy of both volunteers and non-volunteers, over an extended period, those seniors who volunteered added years to their life expectancy. For those individuals who do not know where to turn, Woolston suggests beginning with a local church, synagogue, or mosque. From there, they may also turn to the telephone directory, as well as other sites.
Volunteerism 11


Barbara Yost reviews a book written by Jeffrey and Craig Weiss, who extensively researched the North American (Canada and the United States) volunteers who aided Israel in its 1948 war of independence some fifty years after the conflict, in time for the 1998 celebration of Independence. Some one thousand volunteers, ranging from pilots to smugglers and from Jews to Gentiles, participated in the struggle for national autonomy. The Weiss brothers interviewed a number of participants for their book and profiled a number of these fighters, chronicling their respective stories. According to figures, Arabs wiped out about one per cent of the 600,000 Jewish population; about four per cent of the volunteers were killed in the conflict.


According to the writer, only about five per cent of all young volunteers are involved in “political policy” or “action.” But volunteering in public work can lead to a healthy activism, inasmuch as volunteers gain and awareness and an appreciation of the reasons for larger social, political, and economic conditions which besiege so many Americans. Volunteers may come to a true understanding of the “poverty issue,” for example, and may then be prepared to work actively toward a solution for this issue. Youniss argues that active participation in public work leads young volunteers to take charge and not to accept situations as they are. These individuals come to see themselves and significant beings in their actions, getting a broader picture of culture, taking charge, and becoming involved via donating blood, protesting against clothing produced by sweat shops being hawked on campus, volunteering in the presidential election, teaching or tutoring underprivileged children, or any number of crucial social services. Youniss also maintains that the digital revolution, familiar to most young people, allows for a broader range of communication and a greater avenue for exchanging and for critiquing ideas. Political relationships may then be “clarified” through discussion and through dialogue.