

# An avenue to give back to the community

Macon, GA - The week of April 23 through April 29 has been designated as National Volunteer Week. What does this mean to the general public? Is the public aware that this national observance even exists? This week is a time to appreciate and be thankful for our blessings. It is also a time to consider those who are less fortunate. This week should be one of action. Now is the time to make a commitment to get involved and offer to aid those who are in need of our help.

A few years after Sept. 11, I visited Ground Zero in New York City. A big sign painted on the side of a building caught my attention. It read, "The human spirit is not measured by the size of the act, but by the size of the heart."

As I looked around and saw so much devastation, I questioned, "How was this city able to overcome this tragedy?" The message on that building answered my question. Thousands of volunteers came from all over the country to help this distraught city recover.

Last year, our country was again struck with disaster when Hurricane Katrina destroyed parts of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. And once again, Americans united and opened their hearts with compassion to aid the victims of this tragedy.

However, why must it take total devastation to solicit aid? Remembering the quote from the building in New York, it is clear that it does not matter how much or how it is done. What is important is the act of volunteering.

As a local spokesperson for Hands On Macon and as an avid volunteer, I am dedicating my year as Miss Macon to increasing youth volunteerism with an emphasis on introducing service at an early age to mold the future volunteers of our communities. My goal is to instill lifetime habits of participation and service in our youth so that volunteerism becomes a way of life.

Learning to appreciate the needs of others by volunteering can be a significant component in the development of our youth. Providing children opportunities to serve will encourage civic responsibility for their community and leadership in solving community needs. Volunteer experiences enhance self-esteem, develop leadership skills, build character and foster a compassionate and giving society.

Young volunteers are more likely to make positive life choices and are less likely to engage in destructive behavior. I encourage parents to involve their children in volunteerism at an early age. If children understand the importance of community service, they will be more likely to be involved as adults. By promoting service as a lifelong commitment for our youth, we will help shape the future of Georgia.

When speaking with children, you might be met with the question, "I am just a kid, what can I do?" Volunteering can involve something as small as collecting canned goods, helping at local libraries, serving at soup kitchens or participating in fund raising campaigns for various health issues. I suggest youth choose an issue they are passionate about and find an organization that is dedicated to that issue.

In volunteerism, you get back whatever you put in. If you know a child who loves to sing, dance or perform, encourage them to use their talents by going to local nursing homes and entertaining the residents. A child

interested in medicine, can offer their help at a local hospital. The avenues to volunteering are immense. Inspire them with success stories.

There are many examples of young people whose seemingly small efforts offered so much help to those who benefited from their service. The important thing to remember is "No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted."

Please make National Volunteer Week not only a time of reflection, but a time of action.

Melissa Rosa is the reigning Miss Macon.

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