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Serving your community

BY CLAUDE ARON

"We must not, in trying to think about how we can make a big difference, ignore the small daily differences we can make which, over time, add up to big differences that we often cannot foresee." – Marian Wright Edelman

My wife Arlene and I were fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to retire a little over five years ago—back when the economy wasn't looking quite as dismal as it is today. Our dreams of retirement consisted primarily of leaving the daily grind of the work world behind us and of having the time and freedom to do the things we enjoyed most, but that we never seemed to have enough time for. We also talked about looking for opportunities to volunteer our time for worthy causes—though that really was a vague and abstract notion at the time.

After having lived in big, bustling cities our entire lives, we also wanted to find a place to live that was more calm and peaceful. We had spent time in southern Oregon previously and found that it had a lot of what we were looking for: natural beauty, good weather, culture (music, art, theater, etc.), and a reasonable cost of living. We were ecstatic to find a beautiful home in the Applegate Valley and many wonderful people who became fast friends. We've come to feel a sense of connectedness to our neighbors, to the land and a real sense of community that we had never experienced as strongly as city-dwellers. This led us to the idea that we wanted to do something to contribute to the well-being and improvement of our community.

One of the first things we became involved in was working with local groups who provide food, clothing and school supplies to needy families and individuals. Initially, we helped to package and deliver meals to families during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. It felt good to be able to brighten the holidays for those who otherwise would have little cause to celebrate.

In addition to helping established organizations with their efforts, Arlene also took it upon herself to initiate her own efforts in the Applegate and for the last few years has collected generous donations of money, which she has used to buy school supplies for students with financial hardships and donations of warm clothing to help folks get through the cold winters.

These types of efforts often gain a lot of visibility and focus around the fall and winter seasons, and especially around the holidays when people tend to be more thoughtful and generous, but certainly there are people in need year-round. To help fill such an ongoing need, Arlene now delivers meals to seniors one morning a week as part of the Food for Friends program in Jacksonville, and both of us spend one afternoon a week helping out at the Applegate Food Pantry, a local food bank that has been operated by our friends Matt and Donna Epstein for many years. It provides food for families that are experiencing hard times and struggling to make ends meet. As you might expect, the numbers of people in need have grown as the economy has faltered and it has been gratifying to be able to help provide a source of emergency food to those hungry families.

But, as the old saying goes, "man does not live by bread alone," so we also have tried to find other ways to contribute to the vitality of this community. Both of us have participated in the SMART reading program at the Ruch school, I have been volunteering with the program committee of the Friends of the Ruch Library to organize monthly programs at the library, and Arlene has just recently begun volunteering at the Ruch

library itself. It's our feeling that a well-informed and culturally diverse community is a more vital community and we hope that our participation in these activities does a little bit to promote that. And, as a side benefit of our participation, we've also met many wonderful and interesting people we might not have crossed paths with otherwise.

Now, my purpose in relating our activities isn't to toot our own horns and convince you that we're great humanitarians, but rather to share our positive experiences and perhaps get you thinking about what kinds of activities you might want to get involved in yourself. We can attest to the fact that not only is it good for your community, but it also makes you feel good about yourself, provides a way to widen your social network, and, according to a report from a government agency (the Office of Policy and Research Development), can even have positive health benefits. Their study, entitled *The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research*, concludes with:

"This report summarizes the impressive findings from a number of studies that have explored the relationship between volunteering and health. While these studies may differ in terms of their specific findings, they consistently demonstrate that there is a significant relationship between volunteering and good health; when individuals volunteer, they not only help their community but also experience better health in later years, whether in terms of greater longevity, higher functional ability, or lower rates of depression."

Now, if you're working full-time and you're raising a family, you're probably saying to yourself about now that "Sure, these folks can find the time to volunteer because they're retired, but I just don't have the time." That's a valid point, and the last thing I'd want to do is lay a guilt trip on anyone. If you volunteer out of guilt, you probably won't find it a fulfilling experience. But consider that you can volunteer for as little or as much time as you choose. Can you spare a couple of hours a month? Or maybe just get your feet wet in this volunteering thing by helping out during the holiday season once and seeing how it works out?

Another idea for people with limited time that Arlene has been trying to promote lately is the idea of volunteer job sharing. Do you have a friend who would be willing to share the load with you? For example, if there's a volunteering opportunity that requires a once-a-week commitment of two hours, two people can alternate weeks, transforming it into a biweekly commitment. It doesn't even have to be an equal split—maybe one person can do it only one week a month and the other person can do it the rest of the month. I'm sure any organization looking for volunteers would be happy to accommodate any arrangement you come up with as long as you're sincere and serious about your commitment.

So, have I convinced you that volunteering to help out in your community is something worth trying? If so, go out, find a need and fill it. Not sure where to start? The Medford *Mail Tribune* website has a long list of volunteer opportunities at:

<http://www.mailtribune.com/apps/pbcs.dll?article?AID=/99999999/COMM20/70411001>

Or contact your local school, library, museum, hospital, police department, fire department, senior home, food bank or animal shelter and just ask them what you can do to help them out—you'll be glad you did!

Claude Aron • 541-846-0380

The Third Conference on Klamath-Siskiyou Ecology

The Deer Creek Center for Field Research and Education, the Siskiyou Field Institute and Southern Oregon University are pleased to announce the Third Conference on Klamath-Siskiyou Ecology: "Sustaining Biodiversity in a Changing Environment" May 28-30 in Selma, Oregon. This conference will bring together scientists, resource managers and engaged citizens to discuss the scope and consequences of environmental change in the ecologically diverse Klamath-Siskiyou bioregion. The conference will include a broad spectrum of topics including, (1) forest ecology and management, (2) watersheds, rivers, and fish, (3) wildlife ecology, (4) endemic and sensitive species, (5) forest pathogens and invasive species, and (6) hidden diversity ("the small things that run the world").

"One of our main goals is to advance knowledge

about environmental change," says Andrew Englehorn, Conference Coordinator. "The Siskiyou have long been known among ecologists as one of the most biologically diverse places in North America. The research presented at this event will bring science to the public, providing a forum to discuss the impacts of a changing environment in this bioregion."

Dr. Susan Harrison, Department of Environmental Science and Policy, University of California, Davis will deliver the keynote address entitled "Revisiting Robert Whittaker: Botanical Responses to Climate Change in the Klamath-Siskiyou."

For further information, please contact Andrew Englehorn at the Siskiyou Field Institute (andrew@thesfi.org; 541-597-8530) or visit us on the website at www.thesfi.org for updates and registration information.