

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Volunteers support entire community

The Vernonia Christmas Bazaar, run entirely by volunteers, is a wonderful way to raise money for student needs. But that is just the tip of the area's volunteer iceberg. Volunteers are the muscle, the conscience, the will and, often, the brains behind so many endeavors.

Volunteer firefighters raise money, buy and gift wrap toys, and distribute them to families whose Christmases would, otherwise, be pretty bleak. That project is, of course, in addition to the hours and hours required of them as volunteer firefighters.

The Vernonia Jamboree committee also raises funds that are returned to the community in many ways. Some goes to Toy and Joy, some goes to Vernonia Cares. None of it goes in the pockets of these dedicated volunteers because...they are volunteers!

Vernonia Cares also helps many people, and many of the people who are helped, turn around and volunteer for Vernonia Cares. What could be more fitting?

How anyone living in a small community could be bored is puzzling. Look around and select your own volunteer activity: Senior Citizens Center (and you don't have to be a senior citizen to volunteer your help), volunteer Emergency Medical Technicians (which takes a lot of time, but may lead to a career), youth sports' team coaching, community beautification, and so much more.

There are also people who use their professional expertise to help others: Accountants who take care of others' financial affairs. One man uses the gun products he manufactures to raise money for charity via a New Year's Day Shoot. Another uses his HVAC diagnostic skills as a way to thank veterans and emergency service workers.

Helping takes many forms; most of them require no monetary contribution, but that is helpful, too.

As we get to this time of year, we tend to think more in terms of helping people...and we don't have to go anywhere to find good, well-run charities in our own communities.

If you are unable to volunteer your time and skills, how about writing a check to the charity of your choice. It doesn't have to be large; all charitable ventures need funds, and that's another way to volunteer.



Letters to the Editor

Devaluing education harms future of U.S.

To the Editor:

Instead of this letter, I had for some time been mulling over a piece on why it is that of all animal species, only the human seems incapable of timely weaning its young, pushing them out of the sheltering nest, or otherwise forcing them into the necessary shock of survival as adults. Now, events have pushed more specific concerns into keeping me awake at night.

It has been my privilege, I admit, to have had an extraordinary education, in more than one country and in more than one language. But I descend on both sides from people who valued education "above rubies," and sacrificed a great deal for it. As the South American son of the widow of an American engineer, my Dad had to spend a year in an American high school because his Argentine units wouldn't transfer, and then worked three jobs to pay his way through Stanford. My Great Grandmother was one of the earliest woman university graduates in

this country, but she was no bluestocking. She raised six children in the villages in Natal province in South Africa, and had to let them go, as did my Father's mother and my own, when the time came for them to complete their education in this country.

But I have also taught illiterate Hindu untouchables who so honour any writing, any writing as all, that any scrap of written or printed matter they find they immediately place higher than their own head to dignify it. For these people, these poorest of the poor who Ghandi called "harijans" or God's children, learning to read and write is opening the doors to the world of the highest. As in most religious faiths, the ability to read the sacred writings is an incredible privilege. I have known men so poor that they own nothing but a few loin cloths, a blanket, a bucket for food, a container for water and their holy book. And I have taught prisoners who could not read and write in their own language, but who recognized that learning their ABC's in English would likely help them to change their lives. In most cul-

tures to be a teacher is one of the highest possible callings, and no one is more respected. After all, the words "guru" and "rabbi" (which Jesus was called) mean simply "teacher".

I admit that other than one term in California at the age of nine, I have had no experience of American public education. Although I have defended my American heritage all over the world, I knew that Americans test among the lowest in the world in many subjects, and that teachers here are poorly paid and under-appreciated. I knew that there is a popular de-emphasis on knowledge - to be a nerd is to be uncool - but the reality of the utter abasement of education in this country has astounded me. I have taught college seniors who could barely read and write, and when I had the temerity to ask how they were accepted into a degree completion program, I was urged to pass them without asking too many questions. This sort of policy is nothing to be proud of. And it is doing a terrible disservice to American students and to American culture in general.

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