

There are many reasons to volunteer. You may have a need to give back and make your community a better place to live. Perhaps you have a commitment to a cause or belief. You may even possess special skills that can be shared. Volunteering offers you the opportunity to meet new people, engage in challenging activities, travel, and have fun. This book offers specific information on how to expand your horizons during your retirement years.

## **Volunteering & Your Retirement Lifestyle**

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# **Volunteering & Your Retirement Lifestyle**

JEFFREY WEBBER

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER 1: YOUR RETIREMENT LIFESTYLE – START WITH A PLAN .....	5
CHAPTER 2: WHY VOLUNTEER DURING RETIREMENT? .....	9
CHAPTER 3: HOW TO VOLUNTEER .....	18
CHAPTER 4: COMMUNITY SERVICE.....	24
CHAPTER 5: YOUR SCHOOLS NEED YOU! .....	34
CHAPTER 6: LITERACY VOLUNTEERING.....	45
CHAPTER 7: HEALTHCARE ASSISTANCE .....	56
CHAPTER 8: GLOBAL OPPORTUNITIES .....	73
CHAPTER 9: VOLUNTEERING AS A FAMILY .....	90
CHAPTER 10: UTILIZING YOUR ARTISTIC TALENT ..	102
CHAPTER 11: WORKING FOR A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN.....	111
CHAPTER 12: VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERISM.....	118
CHAPTER 13: ARCHAEOLOGY FIELDWORK .....	131
CHAPTER 14: USING YOUR RECREATIONAL VEHICLE AS A BASE.....	141
CHAPTER 15: VOLUNTEERING WITH A DISABILITY.	153
CHAPTER 16: YOU AND YOUR PET: PET THERAPY ...	160
CHAPTER 17: ECOLOGY VOLUNTEERING .....	176

*Jeffrey Webber*

CHAPTER 18: VOLUNTOURISM: IMMERSION TRAVEL .....	188
CHAPTER 19: GIVING BACK FOR PERSONAL REASONS .....	213
CHAPTER 20: OTHER UNIQUE SUGGESTIONS .....	219
CHAPTER 21: VOLUNTEER PROFILES.....	226
CHAPTER 22: SPECTACULAR NONPROFITS .....	243
CHAPTER 23: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES .....	259
SUGGESTED READING .....	265
WEBSITE DIRECTORY .....	268

## **CHAPTER 2: WHY VOLUNTEER DURING RETIREMENT?**

It would be quite a challenge to come up with only one salient reason to volunteer. A great many retirees that I've interviewed have indicated a multitude of reasons for doing so. And, as you can imagine, the main thrust is not just personal. Although you may be desirous of personal gains, volunteers genuinely want to help others. As implied by President Obama, it is our duty to give back to our country. However, this idea does not exclude personal motivations.

I like to think of volunteerism as an exchange. These activities can provide a variety of benefits to you and, there is absolutely nothing wrong with that!

Marc Freedman, the chief executive of Civic Ventures, noted that although people do focus very heavily on the idealism of giving back, volunteers that he talked to indicated that there are other immediate aspects that appeal to them. For example, being part of a group with a place to go or a schedule to follow may give them a reason to get out of bed in the morning. "Relationships and a sense of purpose are just as important as some of the more lofty ideals in getting a

*Jeffrey Webber*

satisfying experience.” Many people find that being in a leadership position and being recognized leads to passionate sense of commitment.

Volunteers are also attracted to the work for the learning opportunities provided. The important thought here is for you to carefully consider what you would like to gain from volunteering and which organizations offer you those choices.

There is, however, more to this idea of exchange. You may be the individual with the ability to help others right now since you are retired. But in the future, these actions may be reciprocal. You may require volunteer medical assistance or need help with your residence if a catastrophe occurs.

An AARP state volunteer survey stated that besides giving back, a large percentage of respondents indicated that they have a desire to make their community a better place to live. Another large group indicated that they volunteer because they have a commitment to a cause or a belief. Many were deeply concerned about issues that affect people over the age of 50.

### **Motivation**

When you think about what you get back when you volunteer, the motivating factors become clear. The following are some benefits provided by past volunteers.

- share your special skills
- make a difference
- give back to your community
- be an integral part of your community
- do your civic duty
- have an impact
- demonstrate a commitment to a belief
- be challenged
- feel needed
- help someone
- feel good
- keep busy
- have fun
- meet new people
- be an agent of change
- for religious reasons



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- make new friends
- learn something new
- seek adventure
- assure progress
- stand up and be counted

### **Additional Personal Gains From Volunteering**

In my first book, *The New Professional Person's Retirement Lifestyle*, I discuss the importance of what I refer to as the Five R's. They are:

- 1.reinvention
- 2.rediscovery
- 3.rethinking your life
- 4.redefinition
- 5.revitalization

If you've ever had the desire to come up with the new you during your Third Age, why not do it?

According to TimeBank ([timebank.org.uk](http://timebank.org.uk)), a national charity from the UK, volunteering makes a positive impact on your life. The benefits include:

- building your confidence through facing new challenges

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- introducing you to potential long-term friends
- improving your health from a feeling of well-being
- boosting your career options if you'd like to continue working

**My Personal Experience: Heifer International**

Soon after my wife and I retired in 2001, we began volunteer efforts with Heifer International (*heifer.org*). Heifer is a nonprofit organization whose goals are to end world hunger and poverty and care for the earth. We've been involved in a variety of activities including presenting Read to Feed (*readtofeed.org*) programs at public schools. Heifer's education programs offers teachers the resources to help students to develop a passion for helping others, which in turn inspires them to create a better world.

Additionally, Heifer offers a variety of volunteer opportunities in communities, their domestic learning centers, and their international learning centers. Volunteers can give presentations at workplaces, clubs, congregations, and community centers. Heifer also offers study tours, which can include specialized expeditions to remote villages to examine

*Jeffrey Webber*

unique ecosystems and spectacular geography, while helping people improve their lives and protect the earth.

We've seen proof that our volunteer efforts with Heifer have resulted in a new perspective on behalf of the young people that we work with. The students we work with become informed, enlightened, and inspired to make a difference in our world. In one of the schools we worked with, the students read a large number of books as prescribed in the Read-to-Feed program. In just four weeks they raised a staggering \$20,000 to help buy animals for poor families in an effort to promote a sustainable food source, and, they wanted to do more. For us there can be no better reward than to see young people so invigorated about helping others. Positive energy is created and self-confidence is increased. And, it is contagious. As a veteran retired teacher, I am doing what I love the most—teaching others.

You may discover that your motivations evolve as you work. You may realize new benefits to both yourself and your recipients. In addition to the previous list of reasons, there are many more. Volunteers offer hope to people around the world and a chance to build a stronger community.

**Listen to Bill Clinton!**

When Bill Clinton left the White House, he decided that he wanted to spend the rest of his life giving time, money, and skills to worthwhile endeavors where he could make a difference. He had the desire to solve important problems and give more young people the chance to live their dreams.

He wrote the book, *Giving*, which describes a variety of ways we can change the world. He encourages the reader to give whatever they can, because “everyone can give something.”

Clinton thinks that most of us know how to do something that others cannot do as well and the ability to use and transfer that knowledge can empower others in amazing ways.

He suggests that the reading tutor is the most common volunteer. Thousands of Americans tutor young people with their reading, which is a precursor for success in all other subjects.

In all of my years as a public school teacher, I was very involved with the enhancement of literacy skills. The value of our literacy volunteers, particularly the Foster-Grandparents, was immeasurable.

*Jeffrey Webber*

### **Slow the Signs of Aging**

A recent study by the National Institute on Aging indicates that volunteer work may slow many of the factors and consequences of aging for senior citizens.

Volunteering may actually prevent the onset of frailty in seniors. After three years, participants were found to be less likely to become frail. The study appears in the *Journal of Gerontology*.

Another study conducted by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health demonstrates that volunteering can improve brain functions of older adult volunteers, leading to an improvement in the cognitive abilities of older adults. This can enhance the quality of life, something I am confident we are all interested in.

As life expectancies increase, it becomes important from a public health standpoint to delay the onset of diseases associated with aging.

This same study suggests that new kinds of roles for older adults in our aging society can be seen as a win-win situation both for those volunteers and children they may mentor in a school setting. The children receive the obvious benefits in areas such as reading and other academic areas. These results

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come from an examination of the effect of Experience Corps, a national volunteer program that trains senior to work in urban public schools. I will present more details on this organization in a later chapter.

## **CHAPTER 4: COMMUNITY SERVICE**

The most accurate definition of community service is the performance of an action that benefits his or her community. In the true sense, it is an altruistic service. When you think about it, you are performing a positive action that revitalizes the people around you. Additionally, you are making the community healthier and livelier with all of that energy.

When you volunteer for community service, you really do connect with the people you help. You are afforded the opportunity to learn more about the place that they live and get a true sense of identity. And, you are making the world around you a more pleasant place.

The intangible benefits from doing community service create strong personal feelings. They include pride, satisfaction, and accomplishment.

So, lets talk about the town of Fountain Hills, Arizona. The town cannot say enough about the team of volunteers and all of the work that they do for the community. The economy is tight, but the town is able to keep providing various services thanks to the more than 500 volunteers.

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According to Katie Decker, town community affairs and media and media relation administrator, volunteers of all ages contributed 10,985 hours from January through June of 2009. These volunteers added to the quality of life Fountain Hills residents enjoy. As well, they exemplified a defining characteristic of the American people in their commitment to serve.

In the community of Fountain Hills, volunteers deliver meals to homebound residents, participate in environmental education and recycling efforts, assist with Park and Recreation events, serve as hosts at the Community Center and Town Hall, and serve as coaches for Parks and Recreation programs. They also instruct at the Senior Activity Center, provide trail maintenance, and utilize their professional skills.

#### **Organizations**

HEIFER INTERNATIONAL (*heifer.org*)—Heifer has helped more than four million impoverished families worldwide become more self-reliant through sustainable techniques. Community workers can work in their own communities, as my wife and I have done. We have staffed display booths and engaged in a variety of school presentations based on their



*Jeffrey Webber*

Read-to-Feed (*readtofeed.org*) program. You can obtain more information about Heifer in the chapter in this book on spectacular nonprofits.

AMERICORPS (*americorps.org*)—AmeriCorps offers you an opportunity to apply your skills and ideals towards helping others in the community.

Each year offers an average of 75,000 opportunities for adults to serve through a network of partnerships with local and national nonprofit groups. Those opportunities include giving a child a second chance, environmental protection, and making communities safer. You can also:

- fight illiteracy
- help build affordable housing
- teach computer skills
- help communities deal with disasters
- improve health services
- tutor and mentor disadvantaged youth

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AmeriCorps programs:

- AmeriCorps State and National supports a broad range of local service programs that engage thousands of Americans in intensive service to meet critical community needs.
- AmeriCorps Vista provides full-time members to help bring low-income individuals and communities out of poverty.
- AmeriCorps NCC is a full-time residential program for men and women, ages 18 to 24, which develops community leaders through service venues.

EXPERIENCE CORPS (*experiencecorps.org*)—This award winning organization, utilizes volunteers over the age of 55 in meeting communities' greatest challenges. They have about 2,000 members that tutor and mentor in 22 cities across the country. Volunteers provide literacy coaching, help with homework, and provide role modeling in schools and youth service organizations. At the same time, an additional benefit is the enhancement of the well being of older adults in terms of improved physical, mental, and social states.

*Jeffrey Webber*

Independent evaluations have indicated that Experience Corps has boosted student academic performance even in terms of raising test scores. Schools have also found that there has been a reduction in suspension rates and referrals.

The website contains written testimonials by volunteers specifically indicating the successes they have had. You will also find links to regional offices around the country.

ALL FOR GOOD (*allforgood.org*)—This organization makes it easy for volunteers to share activities with friends and family. The main focus is on improving the quality of life in our communities. The impetus for the creation of All For Good was in response to the call from President Obama to serve.

The search mechanism is easy to use and is similar to other websites in that you browse activities and events based on your location or interests. You can even register with your primary social networking site to connect with your friends.

The core team members of All For Good consist of volunteer enthusiasts from Google, Craigslist, YouTube, and even UCLA.

At the time of this writing, a variety of new search categories were added including poverty, animals, nature and

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senior. A cursory examination of volunteer openings in the seniors category reveals openings such as a volunteer bill payers. Senior advocate facilitators, neighborly assistance for disabled adults, and consumer fraud advocates.

AARP (*aarp.org*)—The most pronounced goal of AARP is to help people over the age of 50 improve the quality of their lives through positive social change. As the current membership hovers around the 40 million mark, many people certainly must find that to be a meaningful goal.

Needless to say, AARP maintains a commitment to volunteer service inspiring volunteers to put their time, skills, and experience to good use. The organization works closely with community partners in effort to ensure that AARP programs are available in their communities.

So, here some examples of their hands on community programs:

- AARP Tax-Aide – This is the nation’s largest free, volunteer run tax assistance and preparation service available to low-income with special attention to those over the age of 60.

*Jeffrey Webber*

- Driver Safety—A great way to give back to your community is to volunteer with the driver safety program. The goal here is to improve and maintain the driving skills of the participants.

- Money Management Program—Volunteers offer services to assist low-income older or disabled people who have difficulty budgeting, paying bills, and keeping track of financial matters.

- Benefits Quicklink—This program assists Americans over the age of 50 connect with public and private benefits that they are eligible for. These benefits help them to stay healthy, cover basic expenses, and assist older relatives.

Recently, AARP has begun Create the Good ([createthegood.org](http://createthegood.org)). It is a way for “good people to get connected to opportunities to create good in whatever way works for them.” The website offers an easy to use mechanism to locate volunteer needs in your area. Create the Good seeks time commitments of five minutes, five hours, five days, or any amount of time you have available. Additionally, they

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encourage the development of new ideas with a series of how-to-videos.

A link on the website takes you to How to Create the Good. Here, you'll find example of projects that work. Accompanying these projects are Do-it-Yourself Toolkits. These kits describe in detail ways to implement the suggested projects. Some of the suggested projects include:

- Rx Snapshot—This suggests ways to help older people manage their medications.
- Organize a River Camp—Ideas are presented that offer suggestions to cleanup a local river or stream.
- Operation Emergency Prepare—Checklists are presented in preparation for a natural disaster.
- Women's Giving Circle—How to begin a charitable giving circle.
- Help a Family in Need—Help to end hunger in the United States one family at a time.

HANDS ON NETWORK ([handsonnetwork.org](http://handsonnetwork.org))—This organization maintains more than 250 Action Centers across the country and eleven international locations. They offer more than 30,000 projects a month. They truly feel that there is something

*Jeffrey Webber*

for everyone who wishes to engage in service. In 2008, volunteers delivered more than 30 million hours of service.

Some of their national programs include Neighboring, which engages families from low-income and underserved neighborhoods as volunteers.

HandsOn Schools transforms schools into community centers where volunteers can come together to address economic issues in their areas. Research indicates that schools with broad-based community involvement provide more dynamic learning experiences, actually resulting in higher student achievement.

Skills-Based Volunteering matches a person's professional skills and experience with a nonprofit in need of help.

The website allows you to search for volunteer opportunities based on your zip code and areas of impact. You can choose from education, arts and culture, children and youth, human services, seniors, animals and environment and much more.

RSVP (*seniorcorps.gov*)—RSVP is a large volunteer network for people age 55 and over. Join RSVP and you join nearly 500,000 volunteers across the country who are tackling

*Volunteering & Your Retirement Lifestyle*

tough issues in their communities. The organization is a program from Senior Corps.

RSVP offers a full range of opportunities with thousands of organizations nationwide. The good thing here is that you can choose how and where you want to serve along with the specific amount of time. And, you can draw on your current skills or learn new ones. Basically, you really are able to locate the opportunity that is right for you.

The organization that you choose to serve with will provide you with necessary training and supplemental insurance while on duty.

At the website you can easily search for RSVP programs from a drop down menu. Even if you play the saxophone, as I do, your talent can be utilized in the public schools. Or, if you are a retired lawyer, your services can be used to provide particular types of counseling.

Further, RSVP organizations are always in need of drivers, particularly in the area of disaster relief.



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