

Charitable groups need a helping hand

Dave Hyzy, a Meals on Wheels volunteer who lives in Tonawanda, urges others to pitch in.

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I first encountered the good works of Meals on Wheels through my grandparents. They were in their late 70s by then, still living in the house where my father was raised. My grandmother was an awesome cook and baker, specializing in all the wonders of Polish cooking. However, by this time in her life, standing for hours to prepare food was too strenuous an activity to perform on a daily basis.

Meals on Wheels provided the answer. Having lunch and dinner for the two of them, delivered to their house, played a significant role in allowing my grandparents to live independently at home for many years.

A full appreciation of the value of Meals on Wheels, and the opportunity to pay back the organization that had contributed so much to my grandparents' quality of life, was on my mind when a friend and co-worker mentioned that he delivered meals one day a week on his lunch hour. I asked if he needed help delivering meals; the following week I became a Meals on Wheels volunteer.

Fifteen years later, I still consider my contribution to be relatively small; I take a portion of my lunch hour, one day a week, and deliver meals to people in need. However, in return I receive the enormous satisfaction that comes from knowing that I have played a part in helping make the world a better place.

While delivering meals throughout the years, I have observed firsthand the level of dedication routinely exhibited on the part of the Meals on Wheels staff and volunteers. These modern-day Good Samaritans provide sustenance to the homebound, the disabled and the elderly on a daily basis. These wonderful people toil anonymously doing good works for their own sake. It is an honor to work with all of them.

As I drive my route on the Lower West Side of Buffalo, I am reminded of the teachings of the "Golden Rule" and how, through fate or chance, I could someday just as easily be on the other end of the equation. That realization humbles me, but also inspires me to increase my level of commitment and encourage others to do the same.

Make no mistake; finding volunteers for Meals on Wheels is as necessary as it is difficult. There are always potential recipients waiting to be added to the roster, delayed by the lack of sufficient volunteers to man the route. Volunteering takes people willing to give up something precious and personal, their time, to help people they don't know and probably never would have met otherwise.

Certainly giving up a part of your lunch hour is a sacrifice. Yet the spirit of volunteerism that inspires it seems like an artifact of a bygone era. The simple act of helping people in need seems to have become an imposition to be avoided, or grudgingly endured. How have we, as a people, become so callous? Would we be willing to leave our own fate in the hands of such an indifferent world?

I am aware that Meals on Wheels isn't the only charitable organization that could use volunteer help, it just happens to be the one that I became involved with. What matters is not which organization you volunteer to help, but that you make the effort to help those in true need.

To quote Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” If you are willing to take that first step, an amazing journey is possible, one that will enrich your life beyond measure.