

“I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I live.” – George Bernard Shaw

Growing up in a small rural town, I longed for the day when I could leave and experience the culture and excitement of a much larger urban area. I got my wish. But, a funny thing happened along the way to middle age. Much to my amazement, my little hometown became a center of culture and a source for exciting things to do! Unlike me, a couple people that I grew up with stayed and made a difference in the community. One fellow turned his love for bike riding into establishing a bicycle museum and creating the Midwest’s largest annual cycling event that attracts over 5,000 cyclists. Another person reopened the long-shuttered town theater and started offering foreign films. When that started attracting “urbanites” from far away, the demand for more entertainment led to old factory in town being converted into a live theater.

Two people who gave of their time, talent and resources made a huge difference in my hometown. Their efforts continue to improve the quality of life in that community decades after they first started volunteering their services. While these might seem like dramatic examples, the benefits of volunteering are being touted more and more, at home and at work. A report last year from United Health Group, **“Doing Good is Good for You: 2013 Health and Volunteering Study”** (<http://www.unitedhealthgroup.com/Newsroom/Articles/Feed/UnitedHealthGroup/2013/0619HealthVolunteering.aspx>), revealed that volunteering positively impacts a person’s health in a number of ways.. Among the benefits to be realized are:

- Health: volunteers say they feel better – physically, mentally and emotionally
- Stress: volunteering helps people manage and lower their stress levels
- Purpose: volunteers feel a deeper connection to communities and to others
- Engagement: volunteers are more informed health care consumers, and more engaged and involved in managing their health

The study showed that “employers” also benefit when their employees volunteer. Benefits include:

- The health benefits volunteers enjoy also benefit the workplace – employers can expect lower health care costs and higher productivity from employees who volunteer
- Volunteers in the study report lower stress levels; other, established research shows that reducing employee stress contributes to higher productivity and levels of engagement
- Volunteering can develop employees’ work skills, which benefits employer and employee
- Volunteers report that volunteering helps them build teamwork and time-management skills; fosters stronger relationships with colleagues; and supports professional networking
- Volunteer activities lead to stronger positive feelings toward an employer when volunteer programs are supported in the workplace

BE A COMMUNITY BUILDER is a health promotion activity that encourages volunteerism in the local community.

A complete description can be found on the We Choose Health 365 website at:

<http://wechoosehealth365.com/asp/public/Page.aspx?pid=15548>.

Live WELL!

Michael

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