

## OUR TURN

# Communities that volunteer together thrive together

BY LAURIE BOHM AND JON FINE

For the Kent Reporter

Nonprofit organizations in Kent make our community a better place in countless ways: by feeding hungry families, mentoring children who are struggling in school, protecting our environment and much, much more.

They do their invaluable work on extremely tight budgets, often with small staffs that rely heavily on the day-to-day contributions of volunteers who donate their time and talents to help nonprofits achieve their missions. But volunteers are more than helping hands. They are a powerful force for good – not just for nonprofits and their clients but for each and every one of us.

People want to live and work where neighbors care about each other. Happy, giving communities attract more businesses that strengthen our economy. Companies that encourage their employees to volunteer together build team spirit, morale and job satisfaction.

In a 2010 study titled “Do Good Live Well,” commissioned by United HealthCare and VolunteerMatch.com, eight out of 10 employees said that volunteering with their coworkers strengthened their workplace relationships. And three-quarters said they feel more positively about their company and their jobs.

That’s not the only way that volunteerism is good for business. A 2009 study by Boston College’s Center for Corporate Citizenship found seven out of 10 executives believe that employee volunteerism improves their company’s reputation. That study also found that volunteering enables employees to build important relationships with community stakeholders, improves employees’ skills and supports office team-building.

And finally, businesses that help employees volunteer have a leg up in recruiting Generation Y talent. Nearly two-thirds of 18- to 26-year-olds in a Deloitte & Touche study said they would prefer to work for companies that give them

opportunities to lend their skills to nonprofits.

There’s a growing need for volunteers in Kent and other South King County communities that have been hit hard by years of economic downturn. Many nonprofits in the area have suffered budget cutbacks at the same time that demand has increased for the services they offer.

“We could easily double the size of our volunteer force and still barely scratch the surface of the need out there,” says David De La Fuente, executive director of the Kent branch of Communities in Schools, which pairs tutors with struggling students.

Like many nonprofits, Communities in Schools has a tiny staff and could not survive without the hard work that volunteers do to help the organization meet its mission: to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life.

As the leader of the South King Volunteer Network, United Way

of King County is stepping up efforts to rally more people in Kent and nearby communities to put their passion to good purpose by making it easier for businesses to connect their employees with volunteer opportunities. The new “Volunteer Local” website has a searchable list of hundreds of opportunities. To find out more, visit: [www.uwkc.org/volunteerlocal](http://www.uwkc.org/volunteerlocal).

As Winston Churchill once said, “We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”

There is no better time to give your time and talents than today, and no better place to do so than in our own community. Make a commitment to improve someone else’s life and you will improve your own in the process.

*Laurie Bohm is the South King Council of Human Services Coalition’s board president. Jon Fine is executive director of United Way of King County, which is leading the South King Volunteer Network in partnership with the nonprofit 501 Commons.*

## KENT OPINION

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