

Volunteers Build Community by Mayor Skip Priest

When we think about the qualities that make our community special, we have to recognize the impact of Federal Way's volunteers. Take a look around and you will see the work of volunteers in some of our most important landmarks: St. Francis Hospital, the Aquatic Center, Celebration Park, and the West Hylebos Wetlands. Each of these community landmarks started out as the vision of volunteers. More than buildings and parks, though, volunteers are a vital Third Sector of Federal Way that fills the gaps between business services and government services.

Volunteers change lives for the better. They feed the hungry, mentor at-risk youth, build community gardens, feed and clothe seniors and low-income families, beautify our parks and green spaces, and even round up wayward shopping carts.

Simply put, volunteers (and the nonprofits that support their activities) are vital to our community; especially so, during challenging economic times like these when everyone's dollars are stretched thin. That's why I am encouraging Federal Way residents and business owners to consider ways to volunteer in the community.

On Friday, I'll be emceeding Communities in Schools' annual breakfast fundraiser. This group's incredibly powerful mentoring program brings positive adult role models into schools to work with at-risk youth. Giving just 45 minutes a week to this program can change a young person's life.

Think about that: how often do you get a chance to change a life? Volunteering provides amazing opportunities to help your neighbors and help build a brighter future for the community.

A new city recreation program called The Rhythmic Arts Project provides a great example of the power of volunteers. In September, the Federal Way Community Center began offering this groundbreaking educational program using drumming and percussion to teach and enrich the lives of community members with developmental disabilities. This program is the first of its kind in Washington State.

It wouldn't have happened without a volunteer. Rob Sanders (who is also the Dumas Bay Centre's very talented chef) came up with the inspiration for the program, persuaded the city's Recreation staff and has volunteered time and money to arrange training and to help run the classes.

When we do something selfless for a family member or a friend, it's an act of love. It's how we show that we care, and support our loved one's future.

Volunteering is how we show love for our community. It's an act that recognizes that all of Federal Way shares a common purpose. We're all in this together and we have a common future. Volunteering is how we express our desire to create a better future for our community.

There are many, many volunteer opportunities in Federal Way, from the mentoring and TRAP program, to food and clothing banks, forest restoration, and many, many more. I've only been able to touch on a few here, but there are volunteer opportunities

for every interest and background. In most cases, you don't need a special skill or talent to volunteer. You just need a big heart and the ability to show up.

If you'd like help finding a volunteer organization that's right for you, contact my office at 253-835-2400.