



## Volunteering only requires passion, time

By: Christian Moises, News Editor | July 14, 2011 | 0

President Obama issued a declaration in his proclamation for National Volunteer Week in April.

"Generations of selfless individuals from all walks of life have served each other and our nation, each person dedicated to making tomorrow better than today. ... Volunteers are the lifeblood of our schools and shelters, hospitals and hotlines, and faith-based and community groups."

President Nixon created National Volunteer Week in 1974.

I'm not big on Hallmark occasions, so forgive me when I say the nation doesn't need a presidential proclamation to motivate people to donate their free time. One only needs to look back over the past six years to see that volunteers are the lifeblood of our region — on a daily basis.

They come in all different forms, from those who serve lunch at the local homeless shelter to others who work the T-shirt booth at Jazz Fest.

Some are forced to do it, whether through court-mandated sentences or school requirements, but many are called to service, such as the countless church and school groups that helped south Louisiana recover from Hurricane Katrina.

Then there are the volunteers who serve on boards or committees. In the business world, those are the people to whom we are indebted. Banks, chambers of commerce, industry-related groups and foundations. Universities, festivals and nonprofits.

They set policies, procedures and standards. They help improve one entity at a time, which has a ripple effect that reaches the entire region.

Here are just four examples of the impact volunteers have in the New Orleans region.

One group of businessmen and women came together to create the Hornets Business Council to keep the NBA team in the city and create a buzz of support.

Another group helped the city land its 10th Super Bowl, to be played in 2013.

Volunteers also make up an advisory panel for the new University Medical Center, which will create jobs and improve the area's health care.

At WYES, a volunteer board of directors has spent years poring over tax credits and financial documents to build a new technical building for the local PBS affiliate.

Some volunteers do it to give back while others are programmed to go above and beyond. They're known as overachievers.

They each have their own reasons for passing up time on the couch and giving those extra hours of work beyond their paying job, for reasons many people will never know or understand.

There are the ones who volunteer to build their resume or promote themselves in the community, but there are those who remain invisible while performing selfless work.

As much as we try to fight the perception that New Orleans is about who you know, those behind-the-scenes connections get things done.

From time to time, the actions and motivation of volunteers are questioned, and sometimes rightfully so. But whether they're elected or appointed to their position, their job is to act on behalf of the public or an entity and maintain a high level of ethics, responsibility and accountability.

These are the people who keep our region moving forward. They put in 40 hours a week or more for a paycheck and then head off to donate their free time to add a fresh perspective and put their connections to work.

They do it for free and, most of the time, without a pat on the back.

Call it free labor or call it self promotion, but the hundreds, if not thousands, of volunteers who serve on boards throughout the region ultimately do it to give back to the community.

And you don't have to wait until April to become involved. Get out there, find something you believe in and help continue to move the region forward.

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