

NEWS

Works Sunday Gives Opportunity to Serve

Volunteer event continues to expand, with hundreds helping those less fortunate.

By Mike DiCicco
THE CONNECTION

Two people, one of whom was experiencing chest pains, were sent directly to the hospital from a free health fair at the First Baptist Church in Herndon, said the event's chair, Suzanne Rudiselle, emphasizing the program's importance.

Although it was held on Saturday, the health fair was the largest of 20 volunteer activities that made up this year's Works Sunday, some of which will continue this weekend. What began 14 years ago with three Presbyterian churches has expanded to include hundreds of volunteers from 21 faith communities, including Christians, Jews and Muslims throughout Reston and Herndon.

"It's been very successful. We've gotten a lot of volunteers, more than usual, from the community," said Marilyn Silvey, who organized the event through Reston's United Christian Parish, the church that originated Works Sunday.

ABOUT 80 of those volunteers from nine religious institutions were at the health fair alone, where a wide variety of services were offered, from obesity and diabetes screening to chiropractic care to blood pressure checks. The Lions Club gave vision and hearing screenings.

The Reston Lions Club and the Jeanie Schmidt Free Clinic were the primary cosponsors for the fair, where organizers estimated that close to 400 people came over the course of five hours to get checked out and learn about various health issues.

A nutritionist taught healthy eating habits, the National Institute of Mental Health gave presentations on drugs and alcohol aware-



From left are Michael Moseley, Jim and Anne Ryan, Jacqueline Vasquez, Rae Crabtree, Dave Collyer, Sonja Vaughan, Suzanne Rudiselle and Raul Cruz, all of whom volunteered at Saturday's health fair. Some are members of the Lions Club, while others belong to area churches that support Works Sunday.

ness, an ultraviolet light was used to check for sun-damaged skin, and another such light was used in hand-washing demonstrations. "They put a special ink gel on your hands that only shows up under an ultraviolet light," said Reston Lions Club President Jim Ryan.

Everyone got a card with his or her height, weight, body mass index, blood pressure and sugar levels, which they presented to a volunteer doctor for personalized advice.

"We gave out a lot of important literature, both in English and in Spanish," Rudiselle said. Children got backpacks with educational game books and personal hygiene items.

Many of the people who came to the health fair had lost their health insurance when they were laid off, and some had found new work but had not been on the job long enough to get insurance, Ryan said. He said everyone who attended would be followed up on to make sure they were carrying out the recommendations made for them and had seen a doctor if

they were supposed to. And the Lions Club would be buying glasses for many of them after the Health Department had referred them to an eye clinic, he said.

The next afternoon, at a townhouse on Colts Neck Court, six men from United Christian Parish were working on a job they had started the weekend before and would not finish for another week. The house was one of three Gabriel Homes — residences for the mentally retarded who are able to live on their own — being repaired as part of Works Sunday.

"We try to wait for the second-hottest day of the year," cracked Elliott Wicks as he helped to screw another board into the front deck the men were rebuilding.

"The old deck was kind of a safety hazard," said Bob Pitulej, who was cutting the boards down to size with a circular saw. Earlier, a group of people from St. John Neumann Catholic Church and elsewhere had been working on the backyard, weeding, laying mulch, edging and trimming.

"It's just a good service project,



From left, Elliott Wicks, Lee Schmidt, Bob Mason and Roy Oishi, all of United Christian Parish, rebuild a deck in front of a Gabriel Home on Colts Neck Court in Reston.

helping those who are not as well-off as I am," said Jeff Confer, who was helping Pitulej trim the boards.

At the North Point Giant supermarket, Reston resident Des Horton of St. Thomas à Beckett Catholic Church was handing out lists of items needed for Reston Interfaith's food pantry to the steady stream of customers entering the store.

"It's something to do for the community and just help out, go outside our own little world," Horton said.

The Reston Interfaith food drive expanded this year from three to five supermarkets, with volunteers working two-hour shifts. Silvey said she had been worried that not enough people would volunteer, but the shifts all ended up being filled.

Lauren Wingate had been at the Gabriel House on Colts Neck Court earlier that day, and in the evening, she played with children at the Embury Rucker Shelter.

THE RESTON RESIDENT said she did not belong to any particular church but volunteered to look after children at the center a couple of times a month. When she

learned that someone was needed to entertain children during Works Sunday's games night at the shelter, she signed up. "I just feel like I'm fortunate in life," she said. "And I love kids."

Inside, about 10 residents were playing bingo for Target gift cards and having an ice cream social, accompanied by chips and soda, as games night got underway. Jodi Imel of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Reston was overseeing the evening for the second year running. She said games night at the shelter had run for several years but only recently switched to bingo, as it was more social and gave an opportunity to give out prizes. "They really like to play too, especially when there are gift cards involved," she said.

Jean Banks of United Christian Parish had played the piano that morning for a Works Sunday service at Hunters Woods Fellowship House and was now helping Imel supervise games night.

"This community is really great, you know, in terms of caring," Silvey said. "I think that's the strongest thing about the Reston community is people really do care about their neighbors."

PHOTOS BY MIKE DICICCO/THE CONNECTION