

Volunteers are recognized on April 20, 2010

Why Be A Volunteer?

--(*Author Unknown*)

It's not for the money;
It's not for the fame;
It's not for any personal gain.
It's just for love of your fellow man,
It's just to give a helping hand;
It's just to give a little of one's self,
That's something you can't buy with wealth;
It's not for a medal worn with pride,
It's for that feeling deep inside;
It's that feeling that you've been a part
Of helping people far and near,
That makes you a volunteer!

“Volunteering is the practice of people working on behalf of others or a particular cause without payment for their time and services. Volunteering is generally considered an altruistic activity, (selfless concern for the welfare of others) intended to promote good or improve human quality of life.” (Wikipedia) Last week, April 19th through 25th, was National Volunteer Week. Volunteers all over the nation were recognized and applauded. These folks are a diverse group and come in all shapes, sizes and races. Some want to help people, others care for animals and others are fighting for a cause. In the United States, there is a volunteer force of over 64 million people. Can you imagine that many people working purely for the benefit of others with no pay?

On April 20th, the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners proclaimed April 19 – 25th National Volunteer Week in Highlands County. They urged fellow citizens to volunteer in their communities, but perhaps more importantly, to recognize those who already serve.

Jimmy Wohl, Supervisor for the Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District (HSWCD) read a proclamation to the Commission and praised the volunteers that attended for all their hard work. Among those recognized were the Earth Team Volunteers, signed up through the Natural Resource Conservation Service, who have stepped forward on many occasions to help with various projects for the HSWCD. Among their many contributions are the design and making of home composter kits for workshops; assistance with instructions and demonstrations at workshops and events; help with 4-H projects and events; creation and design of watershed models used for education; installation of native plants, collection of fishing line for recycling, and participants of the Mobile Irrigation Laboratory for Highlands County. At present, there are 7 active Earth Team Volunteers in Highlands County.

The Master Gardeners were recognized for their value and contribution to Highlands County's citizens. Last year alone, 3,912 hours, which equals approximately \$68,773.00 worth of time or 2 paid full-time employees, was donated to the County. These folks provide an invaluable service to citizens by reaching approximately 43% of homeowners in this county with educational information and materials. Presently there are 62 Master Gardeners in our County.

LAKEWATCH volunteers were praised for the work they do, along with the University of Florida, to provide the County invaluable information and data about our local lakes that would otherwise

cost Highlands County government hundreds of thousands of dollars per year. Highlands County is fortunate to have over 60 volunteers that perform this service in our area.

The Ridge Rangers, associated with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, were also recognized because of their tireless work in protecting the natural environment. They have stepped up and helped out on several occasions when HSWCD needed some extra hands. They assisted with the Air Potato Exchange Day and Day at the Lake. They continue to offer assistance and have been present at every special event the District has held. Ridge Rangers are instrumental in protecting the Lake Wales Ridge that we live on. There are presently about 300 volunteers in the Ridge Ranger force.

There are many more people who have volunteered their time and labor who are not part of an organized group. Each and every one who has selflessly given of themselves deserves our thanks and respect.

Think of the lives that are touched by volunteers. Government itself cannot solve all of our nation's social problems. We rely heavily on those who give up precious time and effort to assist. There are thousands of community service organizations nation wide, many of which are run mainly by volunteers. Remember all of those who stepped forward during 9/11 simply because they wanted to reach out and help others that were hurting.

There are countless opportunities for each person. No matter what talent or strength you may have, someone out there could benefit from it. Think about joining the ranks of the millions of volunteers in our country. Find someone or some cause that inspires you and that you care about and do something positive. It doesn't have to be a full time position, just a few hours a week or month can make a huge difference.

We, at Highlands Soil and Water Conservation want to thank all of the people that have made our lives and jobs so much easier and better. You are to be commended and we appreciate you.