

Day of Caring draws about 2,700



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Carrie Wood and Elissa Lauer wash out the dog pools at the Charlottesville-Albemarle Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals as part of the United Way's Day of Caring.

By [BRYAN MCKENZIE](#)

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They came, they saw and then they cleaned, painted, filed, hammered, nailed, designed, dug, raked and hoed.

An estimated 2,700 volunteers, most from company-sponsored teams, descended Wednesday on area nonprofit agencies, charities and public schools to do those things for which regular volunteers and staff can never find the time.

The onslaught of help came from the United Way-Thomas Jefferson Area's 17th Laurence E. Richardson Day of Caring. The event is named in honor of the late Richardson, an avid United Way supporter who was president of the now-defunct Charlottesville Broadcasting Co.

The volunteers took on 250 projects scattered about Charlottesville, Albemarle and outlying counties, officials said.

"It went really smooth," said Shaele Wood, the United Way's volunteer center director. "The teams had it together, they showed up and they really worked. It's amazing how much got done and how smoothly it went."

The day kicked off with sausage biscuits, hot coffee and the State Farm Gospel Group at a pep rally and breakfast in the Albemarle Square shopping center parking lot.

“There’s a lot of support in the business sector and they give their employees half a day off or maybe a full day off to do this. It’s really made the effort a great success,” Wood said.

For Carolyn Barnett and Lorrie Pollard, of State Farm, their day of walking dogs for the Charlottesville-Albemarle Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was worth it.

“I love animals and a chance to spend the day giving them love and attention is great,” Barnett said, sitting on a bench with a butterscotch-colored hound named Moon Queen.

“We were very lucky,” agreed Pollard, giving treats to a shy pooch named Marmite. “There are a lot of people cleaning and painting, and to spend a day this beautiful walking dogs is wonderful.”

Eddie Byers, of the University of Virginia’s College of Arts & Sciences, had no problem with painting.

“This is the fifth area we’ve painted today,” he said, touching up the animal shelter’s foyer wall. “We’re just trying to give back a little to the community.”

Some organizations sent several teams. Some used the event to bring employees closer together. PRA International, a consulting firm, brought employees from as far as North Carolina and Ohio to participate as a team-building exercise.

“Every year we focus on getting to know your colleagues and working together,” said Larry Broach, of PRA International. “It also gets you out of your cube and out into the street to meet people.”

The United Way provides funding for a variety of programs sponsored by local human services agencies. The agency acts as an umbrella funding source, choosing programs based on need. Agencies that receive United Way funding must reapply every year.

The Day of Caring does not raise big bucks, but it does raise awareness, Wood said. Similar events are held by United Way organizations throughout the country, said Kim Connolly, a spokeswoman for the local United Way.

“Ours is a bit of an exception in the number of people who turn out and the number of projects we have,” she said. “It’s a pretty big event for a community our size. It just gets bigger and bigger every year.”