

# United Way faces uncommon problem

**S**haele Wood's got a problem. Yeah, I know, we all have problems. We've got problems with budgets and missing checks and mounting bills and the IRS and the CIA and the FBI and MoveOn.org and the Tea Party. We've got problems with our cars, our kids, our dogs, our cats and our motorcycles. So what makes Ms. Wood's problem so darned different? She has too many volunteers and not enough things for them to do.

## An abundance of help

Ms. Wood is the Primary Force, the juggernaut driving the United Way — Thomas Jefferson Area's annual Laurence E. Richardson Day of Caring coming up on Sept. 22. It's

an all-day event that brings teams of volunteers out of the offices of local businesses and groups and puts them behind rakes, brooms, file cabinets and paintbrushes at local non-profit organizations.

"I think people like to get out and get dirty and maybe get away from the office for a while, so we usually have a large number of volunteers and a need for projects," Ms. Wood said. "This year, we expect more than 2,500 volunteers to go into non-profits and help do whatever is needed. The problem is we always have more volunteers than projects. Not that it's a bad problem to have. It's actually a good problem, but it's still a problem."

Bryan McKenzie



Established in 1992, the Day of Caring promotes "the spirit and value of volunteerism" and increases "the awareness of local human service agencies and schools," United Way officials say. It's also supposed to "demonstrate what people working together for the community's good can accomplish."

Ms. Wood also admitted that the day is a way for nonprofit agencies — always living on shoestring budgets and looking for

free help — can expose their programs and goals to people already predisposed to volunteer.

## Seeking opportunities

Although the United Way has enough volunteers for the day, it needs enough agencies with enough need to give the volunteers something to do.

"We're looking for anything that can be done in a day, either by an individual, several individuals or a team," Ms. Wood said. "We have some people with construction experience, so a little carpentry or light construction is a possible project, but we're not talking about major renovations."

Painting offices is a good project. Cleaning up the grounds is good. So are

organizing files, rearranging furniture and distributing fliers. Washing windows, making coffee — OK, maybe making coffee isn't a "project" per se, but it's always a good thing to volunteer to do — and reading to children are good ideas, as well.

"Anything that can be done in a half-day or a few hours is a good potential project, because we have a lot of volunteers who can only take a half-day off from work," Ms. Wood said.

"Schools, day care agencies or any nonprofit is welcome," she said. "There are a lot of people looking forward to helping out and we want to make sure we have something for everyone to do."

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