

Caring culture cultivated

Army of volunteers set for 20th annual event of regional United Way

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More than 2,100 volunteers will spend Wednesday donating their services to more than 200 local projects.

This year is the 20th anniversary of the Laurence E. Richardson Day of Caring, an annual event of the United Way-Thomas Jefferson Area that provides teams of volunteers to help nonprofits in Charlottesville and the counties of Albemarle, Greene, Louisa and Nelson.

"The whole reason this started was to show people how easy it is to volunteer," United Way spokeswoman Kim Connolly said. "For the nonprofits, they get all this work done. It could be as simple as washing windows."

Connolly said finding volunteers for the Day of Caring is never a problem; registration for this year's event is closed.

"The issue is never having enough volunteers. That's easy," she said. "The problem is registering projects. That's the biggest challenge."

Though registration for this year's Day of Caring is officially closed, United Way Volunteer Center Director Jessica Snyder said there will be plenty of opportunities to volunteer throughout the year.

"I would emphasize that if people want to be involved, they don't have to wait until next year," she said. "We have close to 100 volunteer opportunities in Charlottesville at any given time."

For Snyder, who is in her first year at the local United Way, the event



Volunteers from Bristol Myers Squibb, Alltel and the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce paint a map of the United States on the playground of Agnor-Hurt Elementary School during a recent Laurence E. Richardson Day of Caring.

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means more than four months of long days and more than a couple nights and weekends.

"I started in April really actively working on it, where I was doing something every day," she said. "June 1 is when it really starts to get busy. From June 1 until now, it's been all day, every day."

Snyder's duties include accepting applications from organizations that need work done, signing up volunteer teams and running a lottery to decide which volunteer teams get to choose a project first.

Schools and nonprofits had until July 29 to put in project requests. Throughout August, Snyder operates the lottery, which gives teams a random number and assigns them a day to come in and select a project.

Connolly said the projects range from reading to children at elementary schools to stuffing envelopes to walking dogs at the SPCA. Snyder said projects that help people tend to be selected first.

"People like to see the impact of their work directly," she said. "This year the school projects went really quickly."

In its 20 years, the Day of Caring has grown exponentially. According to local United Way Vice President Caroline Emerson, the first event had just a handful of volunteers.

"The first Day of Caring had 50 volunteers, the second had about 200," she said. "It's exploded from there." This year marks Emerson's 18th event.

The event is named for Laurence E. Richardson, who founded the Charlottesville Broadcasting Co. and spent many years volunteering with the United Way. To commemorate his efforts, the event was renamed in his honor shortly before his passing in 1998.

Richardson's son Jim is now on the local United Way Board of Directors, serving as the event's chairman. For the younger Richardson, the event is a way to honor

his dad's memory and continue his legacy.

"He was very involved in the community in a lot of different ways, and I certainly admired that about him," Richardson said of his father. "I was just so moved that they would name the event after him that I was inspired to get involved after that."

Richardson, a public relations representative for Crutchfield, said he participated in his first Day of Caring in 1999, before being invited to sit on the board. Now, he focuses on making sure the event runs smoothly and continues to attract volunteers.

"I visit sites during the Day of Caring to thank the volunteers and make sure everyone is having a good time," he said. "I think the great thing about the Day of Caring is that it exposes so many people to volunteerism. They get a taste of it for one day, and a large number of them come back throughout the year."