

Parading the Spirit of Community Service with Passion and Commitment

By EmRee Moody

"If you're not in the parade, you watch the parade. That's life." -- Mike Ditka

This simple quote is actually a great statement about life. You are either a participant, or you are an observer. You are either doing, or you are watching. You choose to be part of the solution, or you are on the sidelines. Those in the parade are the people doing, participating, and making things happen. During my high school years I have chosen to be a part of the parade. I have chosen to be a doer.

Parades are a much anticipated event for children. The procession of floats, the tossing of candy, the music of bands, and the excitement of fire engines all add to a community celebration. Community Service is something to be celebrated. The spirit of volunteerism is alive in our community, and I have been fortunate enough to be a part of that "service parade." As I have worked as a community volunteer and student leader the past four years, I have learned some key lessons about service. Let me "parade" these lessons before you:

First Lesson

One need not look to far off places to give meaningful service.

Opportunities for service are right here in our community. Each summer I have joined the "Summer of Service" program sponsored by the Washington County Youth Corps. This amazing program provides underprivileged children with reading activities, arts and crafts, and recreational programs. We also assemble supplies for them for the upcoming school year. I have seen first hand the joy these children have experienced because of this volunteer program. It has been a blessing to me to spend many of my summer afternoons serving them.

As Utah's delegate to the National Youth Volunteer Summit in Kansas City, Missouri, I met with youth volunteer delegates from all 50 states. I was struck by how similar the needs were in our communities regardless of location or size. We all expressed concerns about bullying, child neglect, violence, and supporting community improvement projects. We had all assisted in canned food drives and literacy programs. All of these youth delegates were like me-- young people working to make a difference on a local level.

Second Lesson

Service is successful if it touches the life of even one person.

I was fortunate to work with Habitat for Humanity and rebuild a widow's home. Her yard was full of debris and tumble weeds. Her garage was also her horse stables. We worked for two full days-- sun up to sun down. We cleared tumble weeds which filled three trailer loads. We removed broken objects and the trash scattered about her property. We cleaned her horse stalls and corrals from waste and garbage. On her trailer house, we sanded and repainted. In addition, we dug under the trailer and created a new level foundation. Although I had never met this woman before, I was able make a huge impact on her life by showing her that she was cared for.

Third Lesson

If we feel the passion of volunteerism, we should ignite that passion in others.

I am passionate about community service. I decided my junior year to set out to get my student body more involved in community service projects.

First, I spearheaded two projects at my school. The student executive council supported my efforts. One of the projects was writing letters to service men and women. Over 500 letters were collected. The next project was getting students committed to assist with one of Habitat for Humanity's projects. Both were successful! Students felt the satisfaction of working hard in behalf of others.

Next, a new service club was organized at our school. I was a founding member of this club and have served as the club president this past year. The club has grown to over 50 members. This year our club has volunteered at a Big Brother/Big Sister Reading Program, local triathlons, and long distance relay races. In addition we have volunteered at Santa Clara Swiss Days and Ivins City Days. We also did a sock project for the Volunteer Center of Washington County. It has been so rewarding to see this club grow and be so active.

Finally, as student body officer, I helped to raise over \$18,000.00 for families with hardships and medical bills. These fundraisers were so successful because I got other students involved in dunk tanks, "Chuck-the-Change," and "Miracle Minute" fundraisers. It was overwhelming to see the relief these projects brought to a family.

It has been exciting for me to see the joy and passion for service ignited in others. Nothing is so satisfying and fulfilling as giving meaningful service, and it changes the perspective of those serving.

Fourth Lesson

Service not only changes and benefits the community, but it changes the volunteer as well.

As the Senior Judge of the Washington County Youth Court, I have presided over more than a hundred cases. After the youth and their parents speak to the court, a disposition is determined for the youth. I have had to weigh these matters and, with a youth panel, determine the disposition. A mentor is also assigned to the youth, and I have mentored dozens of youth. We provide service opportunities for the youth, and I have worked side by side with them. I have learned that these youth often come from difficult situations. Justice and mercy are both important. Although I have been a judge, I have actually become less judgmental.

Two years ago I was asked to be a counselor for the Special Needs Mutual. This has been an amazing experience working with individuals dealing with mental and physical handicaps. At the beginning of the year we are partnered with a special needs person, and we are their friend. The mutual meets every week to do activities and lessons. I have had two friends-- each unique with their own challenges. I am so grateful that I get to feel the special spirit they possess. Although I am their 'counselor,' I have been the one who is affected most. An accepting and loving characteristic comes to all who work with these individuals.

I have chosen to be a part of this "service parade." I will not be content to stand on the sidelines. I plan to always make community service a part of my life. It doesn't matter if we are the Grand Marshal or assigned to the clean up crew. What matters is just being in the parade. We are in the "parade" when we give service locally. We are in the "parade" when we touch even one life. We can draw others into the "parade" by igniting that passion of service in them, and then we will all be changed for the better together.