

# FOCUS

ON CARLSBAD

A COMMUNITY MAGAZINE

FALL 2012



# LOVING life as a VOLUNTEER

An Olympian of the Heart | Man's Best Friend | The Business of Volunteerism & More

# VOLUNTEERING: ENJOY LIFE!

by John Safin

## PICK ANY MONDAY.

Wake up, go to work, have dinner, watch television, go to bed, and start over again - wash, rinse, repeat. Yes, a routine can be good (brushing your teeth after a meal) or bad (brushing your teeth during the meal). Tired of a bland routine? Need new skills to get a promotion or find a better job? Want to meet new people? Want to become extraordinary? A "yes" answer could be a sign you're ready to enter a subculture of Carlsbad. A place where you, and those like you, are important and the things you do matter to others. A society filled with movers, shakers, doers, and makers. This is the world of Carlsbad's volunteers.

The average person is familiar with a charity's public image. From all the high school booster clubs to national charities, each one relies on many volunteers--a side the public doesn't see. "Most people see the mission side of the nonprofit. There is a business side," said Kirstin Carlson, executive director of *United Way of Carlsbad & South Eddy County* (575-887-3504), which focuses on improving lives and strengthening communities. "Our volunteers make a difference to our operations. Last year we had to decide whether to remodel our existing office or move. Several board members with construction knowledge stepped up and offered their advice. It's the diversity of our volunteers that makes us successful. We need people to work in the office, coordinate the marketing efforts, and help with various campaigns and new projects."

One new endeavor for Carlsbad United Way is an education impact initiative. "We want to make sure children of all

grade levels, no matter their economic status, have access to a tutor. Our goal is to recruit one hundred adults to be tutors and mentors for children of all grade levels. That's one hundred people volunteering their time and talents to help our children. How wonderful would that be?"

Children are the prime focus of several nonprofit groups. All children need an opportunity to discover themselves and explore their options. Some need a hand because their parent or parents work long hours while others come from an unusual environment. Unfortunately, there are children who have been neglected or abused and are placed in foster care.

"Our volunteers are compassionate about children's issues since they are the voice for children," said executive director Libby Johnston, *Eddy County Court Appointed Special Advocates*. "Because the children are in the custody of the State, there are legal considerations and CASA represents the best interests of children." CASA started thirty-three years ago by a judge who didn't have enough information to make a decision and came up with the idea of citizen volunteers to speak on behalf of the children in abuse and neglect cases.

In addition to caring about children, CASA volunteers are unique as they are sworn officers of the Fifth Judicial Court. "We conduct an extensive background check, including police and F.B.I. records; require written references, plus an interview. Once passed, there is training to teach the history of abuse and neglect laws, roles and



**Photo:** CASA Volunteer, LaVern Shan being sworn in as a court appointed special advocate for the children of Eddy County.

responsibilities of a volunteer, diversity, research techniques, understanding family dynamics, communicating with children, and other skills needed." CASA operates best when there's one advocate for every foster child and, like most nonprofit groups, needs more volunteers.

While CASA volunteers have a special passion for helping children, *Carlsbad Transitional Housing and Homeless Shelter* ([www.eddycountycasa.com](http://www.eddycountycasa.com)) is looking for volunteers with passion and some elbow grease. "Houses require upkeep and our clients need mentors," said board member Reverend Anita Krueger. "We have three houses that require routine maintenance, yard work, and cleaning. We are always looking for volunteers with a construction or handyman background. A lot of work is done by board members, but with three houses we can certainly use more help." A place to live also comes with the opportunity to learn life skills necessary for residents to get back on their feet.

"Clients agree to a covenant, a one-

year binding agreement, for living in our homes. Their covenant includes achieving personal goals they will need after the year—better parenting, earning a GED, or whatever they need to learn. They buy their own food, clothing, and pay rent. The rent starts low and gradually increases. By the end of the year, the client will be prepared for self-sustained living.”

The homeless shelter, the other half of the operation, is still in the planning stage. “We have been searching for a suitable building, but haven’t found one yet. Ideally, one would be donated,” said Reverend Anita. “This will be more than what most people perceive as a typical homeless shelter. We plan to make it available in the event of a catastrophe—if someone’s home is destroyed by fire, for example. Carlsbad Transitional Housing and Homeless Shelter is here to benefit the entire community.”

While volunteers make a direct impact on the success of a nonprofit, they also have an influence on the way our community grows, helps to attract new business, and strengthens our existing economic base. “Volunteers made it possible for us to showcase the Carlsbad community as a big player in the nuclear industry,” said marketing director Jeff Campbell, *Carlsbad Department of Development*. “Earlier this year, the CDOD hosted the National Nuclear Fuel Cycle Summit. Approximately 300 nuclear experts, scientists, educators, politicians, and interested people came to Carlsbad for this three-day summit.

Dozens of people took time out of their lives to help with registration, transport materials, and whatever else was needed for a large, professional conference.”

Unique events are one example of how volunteers help Carlsbad get noticed. Another is the day-to-day activities that make our community attractive to new businesses and industries. “It’s fierce competition between cities to convince an industrial company, restaurant chain, or national retailer to bring their business to Carlsbad. New business means new jobs, and new jobs mean a more economic stability,” said Campbell. “Nonprofit groups provide services that help to make our city more attractive to site selectors. For example, *Keep Carlsbad Beautiful* and the *Carlsbad Community Anti-Drug/Gang Coalition* work together to remove graffiti found all around the city. If it wasn’t for their efforts, the site selectors I bring to Carlsbad would have a different impression of our city.”

According to the latest [VolunteeringInAmerica.gov](http://VolunteeringInAmerica.gov) report, 400,000 New Mexicans gave over two hundred hours of

volunteer time. The same report states the hourly value of volunteering in New Mexico is \$17.44 (the national average is \$21.79). Ask anyone at one of Carlsbad’s 200 nonprofit groups, clubs, and organizations about the value of volunteers and they’ll say, “Priceless.”

So, you might be thinking, “What’s in it for me when I volunteer?” Besides the obvious of helping make your community a better place, there are ways you benefit from volunteering:

**LEARN NEW SKILLS:** Volunteering gives you the chance to get involved with another industry and see what possibilities are available to you. For example, you can learn to cook at *Carlsbad Community Kitchen* (575- 885-4174) or learn about animals at *Noah’s Ark* (575-885-5769).

**IMPROVE EXISTING SKILLS:** You’re at the best in your current position because you have an understanding of the work. In a different environment, you become

**Photo Below:** Participants in the Carlsbad Battered Families Shelter candlelight vigil gathered in the lawn next to First Christian Church.

**Photo Right:** The Carlsbad Battered Families Shelter sponsored a candlelight vigil to honor the victims of abuse.



challenged to think differently. For example, a corporate trainer is very good with teaching business professionals. It takes different techniques to tutor teen parents at the *Carlsbad AWARE Program* (575-887-5112) or adult life skills at *Carlsbad Battered Families Shelter* (575-885-4615).

**BECOME A LEADER:** Almost all nonprofit groups have a board of directors or some executive management team. Your knowledge and experiences can help improve a charity's operations. *CARC, Inc.* (575-887-1570) is looking for caring people to serve on their board of directors.

**MEETING NEW PEOPLE:** Volunteering brings together people who might never meet in their typical day-to-day routine. You could make a new friend or meet your next boss. *Carlsbad Community Concert Association* ([www.carlsbadconcerts.com](http://www.carlsbadconcerts.com)) volunteers include a teacher, dentist, restaurant maître d', video producer, tax expert, and preacher, to name a few.

**IMPROVE YOUR RÉSUMÉ:** College admission boards and many employers

give significant consideration to individuals who volunteer. It shows you're dedicated, helpful, have good time management skills, and work well with teams.

**GET SOME EXERCISE:** Get out of the gym routine and get your body working in other ways. *The Boys & Girls Club of Carlsbad* (575-885-8449) and the *Boys Scouts of America* (256-553-9229) will give you a chance to be active.

**FEEL GOOD:** It's good to be a winner. Winners are proud of what they accomplished. While a trophy is a nice way to be recognized, imagine how good you would feel to see someone smile at you because you taught them to read or showed them how to use a computer. Volunteers at *Carlsbad Adult Literacy Program* (575-885-2752) open new worlds for people through the written word.

Someone famous once said, "We are all sum totals of our experience." When you look back one year or ten years from now, do you think you'll be glad you watched every episode of *America's Got Talent*, or would you rather have your

own unique story to tell? Volunteering will give you experiences for a lifetime.

A list of nonprofit groups, clubs, and organizations is available online at [www.FocusOnCarlsbad.com](http://www.FocusOnCarlsbad.com). Find your passion and make a difference in your life. ■

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** *John Safin has a background in business operations, marketing, event planning, and public relations. Originally from Upstate New York, John moved from Glendale, AZ, to Carlsbad, NM, which he now calls "home."* [www.johnsafin.com](http://www.johnsafin.com)



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*"It's easy to make a buck. It's a lot tougher to make a difference." Tom Brokaw  
Thanks to All Volunteers! There is a Noticeable Impact being made by Leaders  
Like You, and Our Community is Looking Brighter Every Day!*

