

Volunteers Make a Difference!

Volunteers have a big impact on the economy. The most recent statistics compiled (for 1998) show an estimated 109.4 million adults volunteered in formal or informal activities, giving about 19.9 billion hours. These hours represent the equivalent of 9.3 million full-time employees. The value of this volunteer time is about \$225.9 billion.

Though statistics are not kept specifically for RVers, from personal observation they are definitely an active part of the volunteer force. RVers volunteer at club activities and at RV parks and campgrounds.

If a fellow RVer needs help or has an emergency, other RVers will be there. While many people have encountered an RV camp-host in a state or national park or forest, this mobile force can and does do much more than camp-host. In fact, volunteer opportunities suited to RVing are limited only by your imagination and your skills!

Volunteering can have a personal payoff. You often get an RV site, saving money not only on the campsite but gas for traveling. As a volunteer, you might have a place to park while being near to family.

Volunteer RVers have successfully parlayed their volunteer experiences into paid positions. Jim worked two seasons at Acadia National Park as a volunteer ranger. He was asked to apply for a ranger position and was hired the following summer.

RVers may get tangible benefits like a site when volunteering, but the biggest payoff is the satisfaction of knowing you are helping others. Here's how a few RVers are giving back to the community.

Local Community Organizations

Tom and Nancy volunteered last summer in Prescott National Forest to be near Nancy's mother while she adjusted to a new living situation in nearby Prescott, Arizona. As camp-hosts, they answered visitor questions, checked permits and walked the trails and loops of the campground to pick up litter. They set their own schedule so had plenty of time to visit regularly with Nancy's mother during the week.

In addition, Tom signed up as an "elder-mentor" with Big Brothers/Big Sisters and worked on a site development committee for the local Natural History Center by conducting research, surveys and whatever needed doing. Remarks Tom, "We've had a very blessed life on the road and feel it is important to share wherever we can. We get to feel good about whatever we do, but the benefits go beyond ourselves. It takes many caring communities to build a world we can all be proud to live in."

Helping the Environment

Debbie and Les have had a number of "outdoor" volunteer experiences. They volunteered for the Virginia State Department of Forestry pine tree nursery. "We missed helping things grow since RVing, and we got to get our hands in dirt and satisfy gardening desires," explains Debbie. At the Disney Wilderness Preserve run by the Nature Conservancy, they helped eradicate exotic plants and restore the original ecosystem.

Another time, Debbie and Les worked on special projects like painting, welding and cleaning for a Virginia State Fish Hatchery. “Working with an agency like the fish hatchery gave us contact with nature.” Their latest volunteer venture was going out on a houseboat, the Trash Tracker, at Lake Powell to pick up litter. This houseboat experience would have cost thousands to replicate, plus they had the satisfaction of helping a very high impact area.

Lighthouses and Litter



Ralph and Mary Lou also spent a week last summer volunteering on the Trash Tracker at Lake Powell. Later in the summer they returned to volunteer at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore.

Stationed on Manitou Island, they gave several tours a day of the historic lighthouse to visitors who had ferried over from the mainland. While on the island

they lived in a historic village home, and stayed in their RV in the park campground on days off.

Ralph and Mary Lou usually pick places to volunteer where they want to spend an extended period of time. If they really enjoy the people they work with and the working environment, they go back again. Explains Ralph, “In these places, we come away with a feeling of having made a solid contribution and a sense that our contribution is indeed appreciated.”

They like staying busy but limit their volunteering so they can still do other things they enjoy. “In short, we retain the best of both worlds and still have the satisfaction of giving something back,” adds Ralph.



Community Safety

Dave and Sandy help the community in a different way. They bring past skills to benefit the RV community. With extensive education and years of experience in law enforcement, they have developed and now teach three courses to RVers: “Personal Safety for Women (and Men), RVers,” “Guns & RVs,” and a pepper spray certification training, “Bear (and other Vermin) Repellent Spray Certification Training.”

Dave has always enjoyed teaching; formally at the annual American Society of Law Enforcement Trainers International Training Seminars, and in local Neighborhood Watch sessions. He explains: “Our teaching is a part of sharing with the RVing community We love what we do, and see it as a way of continuing what very important parts of our lives were dedicated to. It is a form of continuing what our professions were all about, or should be, crime prevention.”

Habitat for Humanity



Habitat for Humanity is another volunteer experience that fits with the RV lifestyle. Habitat for Humanity International (HFHI) helps meet the needs of the over 1.5 billion people who lack decent, affordable housing. To date HFHI volunteers have built or renovated over 100,000 houses. HFHI has over 1900 active affiliates in 64 countries, including all 50 states. RVers can volunteer for a local affiliate or participate in a build with RV-Care-A-Vanners. The Habitat for Humanity RV

Care-A-Vanners travel in their own recreational vehicles to Habitat affiliates across the United States and Canada, building new friendships, building awareness of Habitat, and building decent homes in partnership with families in need.

Nan and Steve volunteered at a two-week RV-Care-A-Vanner build in Kellogg, Idaho “The work was very strenuous the first couple of days,” relate Nan and Steve, “but the community took really good care of us.” Townsfolk went out of their way to feed and entertain the builders. Adds Steve, “We were very tired but so glad we did it. We made some wonderful friends and the couple we were building the house for were so appreciative.” They plan to go back to the next build in Kellogg.



Jim and Kendra have participated in several Habitat builds, some with local affiliates and three with RV-Care-A-Vanners. Says Jim, “In addition to the satisfaction of doing good works, we really enjoyed the sense of community that developed at each of the builds.”

Paul and Stephanie recently worked on an affiliate build in Tucson. Explains Stephanie, “Paul and I selected Habitat for Humanity in Tucson because it allowed us to help build for several weeks, which gives more continuity with the project, making it more rewarding for us. We hope to find a few Care-A-Vanner builds along our travels as well, which will give us an opportunity to bond with other full-timers who build for Habitat. Full-timing is a dream come true for us. Now, with Habitat and our full-timing lifestyle, we can help others dreams come true.”

International Projects

If you have a yen for overseas travel, you can volunteer and do just that. Habitat volunteers can travel to other countries, temporarily leaving their recreational vehicle behind.

Mercy Ships voyage to third world countries to provide much needed medical care. Other volunteers help on projects in villages so a medical background isn't necessary. And if traveling that far isn't for you, their headquarters in Garden Valley, Texas can also use volunteer help. Full hook-up RV sites are available.

For volunteer ideas, check out some of the resources below. Whether you want to travel in your RV or overseas, volunteer outdoors or in, there are many organizations seeking your willing hands.

A Few More Ideas

Here are a few more RV volunteer activities:

- Update the slide collection at a state park.
- Repair historic structures.
- Teach “leave no trace” camping to hikers and campers.
- Volunteer projects with the Elks Club.
- On the Red Cross Emergency Response team.
- Construct churches, help out at church camps.

Resources Links to National & International Volunteer Opportunities

- To find a local Habitat for Humanity affiliate, call 800/422-4828, ext. 2551 or 2552. Ext. 2446 will connect you to RV Care-A-Vanners. Also find affiliates and information about international needs at their Web site.
- Search for short and long term volunteer opportunities by zip code at Volunteer Match, a large database with all kinds of opportunities. You can find government volunteer opportunities at the Volunteer.gov Web site.
- If you can't physically participate in some activities, volunteer on-line on your own computer for various organizations at Netaid.org.
- Idealist.org is a database of nonprofits both nationwide and worldwide, including volunteer opportunities. Search for positions that match your interests.
- Find out about Mercy Ships at their Web site or write to PO Box 2020, Garden Valley, TX 75771.

Outdoor volunteer experiences

- Volunteer America has links to many public agencies and volunteer experiences.
- American Hiking Society's Helping Out in the Outdoors has volunteer vacations (at a cost) and also lists trail events and workdays.
- Volunteer in Parks (VIP) program. Contact the park you are interested in or check online.
- See more information on and resources for volunteering in *Support Your RV Lifestyle! An Insider's Guide to Working on the Road, 2nd ed.* See also Jaimie's home-study course on RV volunteering, “*Volunteers Make a Difference.*”