

HELPING YOURSELF BY HELPING OTHERS

By Heidi Eakins, volunteer staffing specialist, Overlake Hospital Medical Center

The retirement years are the perfect time to begin an important and rewarding career as a volunteer. It is a time of life when you have the opportunity to reset your priorities from “working to make a living” to “working to make a difference.”

We often ask children, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Now is the time to ask yourself, “What do you want to be when you retire?” Realize that this is an opportunity to explore interests you put aside while focusing on your career. You now have the time to learn new skills and sample new fields without the pressure that comes with a paycheck. Perhaps you made your living as an accountant but always dreamed of being a librarian. You don’t have to seek a position performing the tasks you are accustomed to; instead, volunteer at your local library!

On the other hand, maybe you were very content and successful in your occupation. Volunteering can help with the often difficult transition of leaving the job that you loved by allowing you to use your talents in a new way. Overlake Hospital Medical Center volunteer Charlotte Moore appreciates that she can continue to use the skills she developed during her former career in the retail industry by helping in the hospital’s gift gallery. “Some people think they’re not qualified,” she observes, “but there’s a position for everyone in the volunteer world.” Whether your working years were spent in the business world, the service sector or as a homemaker, your years of experience are indispensable.

Jackie Rawlinson has been volunteering at Overlake for 16 years. After 40 years in the financial industry, she wanted to experience “the pleasure of giving something back.” The truth is, most nonprofit organizations could not survive without the dedicated assistance of talented vol-

HOW TO HELP

Here are a few Eastside organizations in need of volunteers:

Overlake Hospital Medical Center
425-688-5552
heidi.eakins@overlakehospital.org
www.overlakehospital.org

Hopelink
425-869-6066
volunteer@hope-link.org
www.hope-link.org

Elder and Adult Day Services
425-867-1799
volunteer@eadscares.org
www.eadscares.org

Puget Sound Blood Center
800-DONATE-1, ext. 4396
robync@psbc.org
www.psb.org

Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) of King County

This Senior Corps program matches volunteers (age 55+) with local service opportunities.
206-957-4779, ext. 116
kcrsvp@solid-ground.org
www.solid-ground.org

unteers like Jackie. While a few hours may not seem like much to give, a volunteer’s time and skills are a vital resource to the community. To volunteer is to exercise the ability to make a difference in the world. Whether you are giving directions at a hospital information desk or serving cookies to blood donors, these small contributions make a big difference.

Volunteering need not be entirely selfless. After years of working hard, retirement is your time, so why not spend it doing something for you? The benefits one receives from volunteering are abundant. The first and most significant is that doing something for others makes you feel good about yourself. There’s nothing wrong with feeling proud of your

accomplishments, especially when those accomplishments include helping those in need.

In addition to emotional and spiritual yields, volunteers often receive tangible rewards as well. Many organizations show their gratitude by offering volunteers free meals, free parking, discounts on goods or services, gifts or invitations to special events. Check with the organization you wish to volunteer with to find out what incentives they offer.

Entering a new stage of life often brings with it a change in one’s social circle. Volunteering is a wonderful way to make new friends. Many volunteer positions involve interacting with the public. This can be an exciting chance to cross the age barrier and meet people in all stages of life. There is also the opportunity to develop friendships with other volunteer retirees who share a similar desire to serve. Working together for a common purpose is an excellent way to develop lasting relationships. Together with these new friends you can help the community, while also improving personal happiness and well-being.

Volunteering is a healthy habit, and it can keep the mind and body healthy as well. Studies have shown that people who volunteer live longer and have a higher quality of life. According to Dr. John Addison, medical director of Overlake Senior Health Center on Mercer Island, giving back to the community is one of the most important practices for healthy aging. Developing a routine of regular volunteer work can promote physical activity, resulting in increased fitness. The positive rewards of contributing to society can also increase your energy levels. This newfound volunteerism may even have you feeling healthier than you did before retirement. In this case, what’s good for you is good for the community.