



The value of volunteering

As I speak to NALC members across the country about MDA, the recurring theme that comes through loud and clear is the tremendous satisfaction they gain by volunteering to help others. From the NALC Food Drive to political activism to MDA events, letter carriers are a giving group of people. The ways we give back to our communities are varied and many, and I am only scratching the surface here of possible activities.

Each of us gains personally by reaching out to others. Many of you have described the feeling of connectedness and meaning you receive by seeing the impact of your efforts in the lives of those you help. In my own experience, seeing a family when they are given food that they needed badly is reward enough. Getting individuals elected who are sympathetic to the needs of working people is beneficial to the long-term strength of our families and ensures an open mind by our elected officials to our problems. MDA volunteers gain an insight to those who are stricken with neuromuscular diseases and how their lives are changed forever. It is at these moments that we understand what it means to be human beings.

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As the summer ends, many of our members have experienced the joy of attending camps for those afflicted with neuromuscular diseases. Across the country, in over 90 camps, children and teenagers have had the opportunity to attend week-long sessions geared for those who are physically handicapped. At those camps, MDA has designated certain days as “Sponsor Days” so we can meet and greet the families who so courageously fight the battles day by day to care for their loved ones. Meeting these folks gives names and faces to our fund-raising efforts.

What do the kids do at camp? The MDA counselors and staff structure activities that are appropriate for each child’s limitations. Recreation can include fishing, swimming, horseback riding, boating, field hockey and baseball. Less physically demanding activities include arts and crafts, nature studies, talent shows, cookouts and entertainment.

All the counselors are volunteers and receive an orientation and training that includes wheelchair techniques, lifting and transfers, personal hygiene and emergency procedures. The primary responsibility of each counselor is to provide physical and psychological support to their camper, helping them to enjoy the experience. Medical staff are available throughout the week to meet any health-care needs that may arise.

We have letter carriers who take their annual leave each year to attend these camps as counselors. Many more make sure they come to Sponsor Days. I have attended and found that speaking with the children, volunteers and staff give a real dose of reality. If you ever want to know why we get involved, start making your plans for next year. Call your local MDA coordinator and find out when the dates are for next year’s camp and set aside some time to reach out to these kids. It will make your day and give you a whole new perspective. *(See page 62 for photos from one Sponsor Day.)*

I hope you had a chance to catch this year’s MDA Telethon. If you did, you saw the letter carriers from the branches that won each category representing you. My congratulations

to all who participated, and now is the right time for your branch to begin planning for next year. My experience is that the most successful branches are those that plan ahead and prepare for fund-raisers. There is no reason that your branch can’t do more for these kids. All it takes is vi-

sion and the will to make it happen.

I can announce that our MDA forum is now up and running. If you are an MDA coordinator and want to be involved sharing your ideas, you should have already received an invitation to join us. Many have already done so and the ideas are good ones. If not, and you are a branch MDA coordinator, please contact me at williamsj@nalc.org for information about how to join. The real competition is not for the awards but to increase our total giving toward a cure.

Finally, a couple of corrections. First, I apologize for leaving out Huntsville, Alabama on our MDA Honor Roll. Branch 462 raised \$4,000 in 2006. Well done! Also, New City, New York Branch 5229 placed first among branches with fewer than 50 members by raising \$10,370, and they will help represent the NALC at the Jerry Lewis Labor Day Telethon in Las Vegas. Congratulations! ☒