

It takes a village



Jim Williams

branch's MDA coordinator, Debby Burbank. I wanted to hear firsthand how they had ramped up their impact on children with these diseases. Since 2006, Branch 82 has

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seen a 600 percent increase in MDA giving. My hope in sharing this is that other branches might gain a vision for the future for MDA.

Debby, who is now retired, served as a steward for more than 10 years and was the full-time vice president of the branch for a year and a half before she retired. She also was a branch trustee during those years as a steward.

After Jim Cook was re-elected as branch president in 2010, he asked Debby to serve as MDA coordinator for the branch, and she gladly agreed. I asked her why she wanted to work with MDA. She had many answers. At the top of the list was her desire to give back to the community.

Her advice to other branch coordinators is to keep events fun, develop a great team, and remember the kids as a rea-

In 1996, then-First Lady Hillary Clinton wrote a book titled *It Takes a Village: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us*. The purpose of the book was to focus on the impact individuals and groups have on a child's well-being, for better or worse.

Recently I've been thinking about how NALC and the branches that participate in fundraising for the Muscular Dystrophy Association contribute to the lives of those who suffer with MD.

To illustrate how we can work together effectively in our branches to help those kids, I recently interviewed Portland, OR Branch 82 President Jim Cook and the

son to be involved. In Branch 82, Debby has people like Sue Canfield and Karon Carlson to work with, alongside many others. By having a team of volunteers, she spreads the responsibility and credit so that she does not burn out in the effort.

Debby says she has been dedicated to MDA since a child on her route was diagnosed with MD. She knows that these kids are just like any other, but are confined to wheelchairs or other devices. The last few years, she and her team have attended MDA summer camps. Seeing where the money she helps raise goes provides a direct connection to her efforts.

Branch 82 has numerous events through the year, including bowlathons, Texas hold-'em tournaments and a Fill the Satchel event in conjunction with Northwest Priority Credit Union. (See the December 2011 *Postal Record* article at nalc.org.) Next year, Branch 82 is holding a Muscle Walk to honor a longtime branch steward and activist. By holding multiple types of events, they keep it fresh for the membership.

But they don't focus only on branch members. One of the biggest changes Debby and her team implemented is to invite friends and family to events. Doing so has increased the universe for contributions.

Debby adds that one of the most important factors in their growth has been the support of branch leadership. President Cook believes that a branch president should never be too busy to help with MDA. Jim doesn't only use his words; he follows up with action. He says that by delegating to Debby, he shows trust in her and allows her to do her job.

Jim has a number of hints for branch leaders. Always put MDA on meeting agendas, don't mingle MDA funds with branch accounts, and budget for seed money for MDA events. The branch has a separate MDA account at the credit union.

President Cook believes that letter carriers are able to do their jobs in large part because our muscles are healthy and strong. The kids we work for need us to carry the weight for them so they have a chance at the future. By no fault of their own, their muscles are weak and failing.

I asked Debby what advice she would give to others. Debby said to pass on that MDA coordinators should always debrief each event so that lessons are learned for the next time. She says to get a team to help and work with your events and your local MDA contact. Lastly, keep the branch and officers involved.

Never forget that we are part of that village that keeps the well-being of children foremost in our hearts and minds. Thanks, Branch 82, and all the locals that work for MDA!