

Give a Day, Get a Disney Day: A Success for Non-Profits

by Jodi Isom, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Now that the Disney "Give a Day, Get a Disney Day" program has officially closed to new volunteers, I wanted to write about the affect it had on one non-profit organization. I work as the Manager of Volunteer Services at Habitat for Humanity of the Greater Fox Cities Area of Wisconsin.

When I first heard about this program, I got very excited because it combined two things I love very much -- Habitat for Humanity/volunteering and Disney! You see I am a Disney fanatic myself -- a DVC owner, a D23 inaugural member, a regular annual passholder and someone who has been to Walt Disney World over 20 times since childhood. So naturally I was thrilled to be able to combine part of my job with my Disney passion.

Here at Habitat for Humanity in Wisconsin, we don't build houses in the winter. It's just too cold! So normally we don't have a lot of volunteer activity happening in January, when this program began. However, the Disney program came during the perfect year for us. We had just bought an older building to house our offices the previous May and since we were very busy building houses that summer and fall, we put off remodeling our office until winter.

We had plenty of volunteer help from our group of regulars for the office remodel project, but I was concerned about how we would feed these volunteers. We have restaurants and local volunteers who typically make lunches for our construction volunteers during our building season, but many of them like to "take the winter off" from this expectation.

Also, I was hoping to find a volunteer opportunity for the Disney program that could involve families with children as young as age 6 (Disney's minimum age for the program). So I decided to see if we could get our volunteers fed through the Disney program. I submitted my volunteer opportunity on the Volunteer Opportunity Portal on the handsonnetwork.org website and it was immediately accepted. I titled it "Habitat meals … ideal for families." That title seemed to catch a lot of people's attention.

The very next day my volunteer opportunity was posted and the flood gates opened! It was a good thing I was not as busy as other times of the year when this program began because I was flooded with emails and

calls from families wanting to sign up. Each week I was receiving approximately 20-30 contacts about this program. It was very popular!

It was fun connecting with new volunteers and getting them plugged in to helping Habitat for Humanity in this way. Basically I asked each family to commit to providing one meal for our office remodel volunteers. They had to work as a family to plan the meal, shop for the items, cook and bake to prepare the meal and then deliver it to our Habitat office and serve it to our construction volunteers. I also offered a few other opportunities for adults, like warehouse work. A co-worker of mine at our Habitat ReStore (a retail store associated with Habitat for Humanity) also joined in on this program and she was able to offer meal needs too as well as many other needs at the store, like cashiers, warehouse work and generally helping to keep the ReStore running.

In addition to numerous families who volunteered with us, I had two sports teams that signed up to help us out. One was a softball team from a local university that spent a day doing a special project at our Habitat ReStore. The other was a volleyball team whose members are going to Disney in June for a competition. They split up their large group and helped do two things for us. They fed a group dinner for a training session we were providing to our newly found Speaker's Bureau volunteers. They also fed and ran the children's area for us with approximately 40 kids in attendance at our annual recognition event for our other volunteers.

We even had a partnership with the cast of "Little House on the Prairie: the Musical" that is currently touring the country and also partnering with Habitat for Humanity affiliates in the cities where their musical is being performed. So one lucky local family who volunteered with us through the Disney program even got to serve breakfast to this cast, including Melissa Gilbert!

One of our new volunteers, Elisa Tremblay, her husband, and three of her five children provided lunch to our Habitat ReStore and found themselves featured in the newspaper! They plan to go to Disney this summer for the Star Wars weekends at Disney's Hollywood Studios. Elisa said, "We thought it'd be a great way to get a ticket to Disney for the day. We have five kids, so any help getting into Disney is wonderful." She went on to say, "The kids have helped with Habitat for Humanity through their school and my husband helped out here before too, so we just thought it'd be a great place to come since we were already familiar with this cause." Louie Thein, a volunteer at the Habitat ReStore the day the Tremblay family donated lunch, said "We deeply appreciate it. It's a nice thing they're doing." Food is always a great way to show appreciation to people, especially volunteers!

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Overall, we were able to utilize the help of 228 volunteers providing meals at our office remodel and another 174 at our Habitat ReStore. So that is over 400 new volunteers who have been exposed to volunteering with Habitat for Humanity just here in our community!

We do have plans to stay connected with these new volunteers. Both Habitat ReStore staff and I have kept track of the Disney volunteers and plan to invite them occasionally to help out with meals or other special events again. In fact, our largest annual fundraiser is just around the corner, a spring walk where we try to raise over \$20,000. I plan to invite the families who volunteered for the Disney "Give a Day, Get a Disney Day" program to walk with us. Again, it's a perfect family volunteer opportunity!

It is our hope at this local non-profit that the result of this wonderful Disney program will be new volunteers who want to stay involved and help us provide home-ownership opportunities for families in need of a simple, decent, affordable home.

I also want to thank everyone who is reading this and volunteers already in their community. It people like you who make your community a better place by giving of your time, talents and treasures!

If you didn't have a chance to volunteer through the Disney program, please consider giving of your time and abilities to help out a local non-profit in need. YOU can make a world of difference!

About The Author: Jodi Isom has served as the Manager of Volunteer Services at Habitat for Humanity, Greater Fox Cities Area (WI) for nine years. She is also an avid Disney fan! She lives in Appleton, WI with her husband David and two daughters, ages 17 & 14. Their next Disney trip is planned for June 2010.

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