

2010 Honorees and special awards

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County outdoes itself: Fort Collins, Colo.

Talk about a Rocky Mountain high. The 10th annual Make A Difference Day in Larimer County, Colo., actually was Make A Difference Week, with 4,450 people aiding 75 organizations and about 40,000 residents. "It was our biggest ever," says Jami McMannes, volunteer center specialist for the United Way of Larimer County.

Volunteers of all ages completed 150 projects countywide. Good deeds included raking leaves for the elderly, harvesting crops for the hungry, and clearing graffiti, trash and weeds. And at the Animal House shelter, 12 Vaught Frye Ripley Design employees reconditioned the grounds around the dog kennels.

McMannes says she believes the iffy economy drove the record-breaking turnout: "A lot of people can't give money right now, but they can see that their time helps."

\$10,000 Make A Difference Day Award from Newman's Own goes to United Way of Larimer County, Fort Collins, Colo.

Teen fishes to fight hunger: Boca Raton, Fla.

Before joining an after-school program at the Florence Fuller Child Development Center, Danny Tijerina, 10, had never heard of a fish warden. Now he wants to be one.

Danny's aspirations were sparked in a fishing class taught by volunteer Lucas Metropulos, 17. The Boca Raton teen started the course to teach needy kids the skills to feed themselves and their families. He also covers sea life and conservation. "I want them to understand the ocean's resources and how they need to be protected," he says.

For Make A Difference Day, Lucas raised money to take his 20 students fishing on the Atlantic - a first for many. They were naturals, catching kingfish, red grouper and triggerfish.

"Lucas is great. He teaches others, and he has taught me," Danny says.

\$10,000 Make A Difference Day Award from Newman's Own goes to Florence Fuller Child Development Center and Boca Helping Hands, Boca Raton, Fla.

Good deed nourishes souls: Commack, N.Y.

Olga El Sehamy first learned about Make A Difference Day in the Sept. 13, 2009, issue of USA WEEKEND, which featured a call to action from our nation's mayors. "It was like a kick in the pants," she says.

Wanting to help the homeless, El Sehamy decided to cook hot meals for those living near Union Square in New York City, asking husband Mostafa and 19-year-old son Alex to pitch in.

On Oct. 23, 2009, Mostafa and Olga stayed up late making 50 chicken dinners. The next day, in the pouring rain, they loaded up the food and drove to the city to meet Alex and four friends from NYU to give it all to those in need. Olga described the day as "soul-satisfying" because, 22 years ago, she was assaulted by a vagrant: "Once I handed out the food and people were saying 'thank you,' I felt really proud of just not being afraid."

\$10,000 Make A Difference Day Award from Newman's Own goes to Victims Information Bureau of Suffolk, Holbrook, N.Y., and Road Recovery Foundation, New York, N.Y.

Drive yields a mountain of food: Frankfort, Ky.

The food pantry is not just full, it's overflowing. Despite all odds.

In February and March, Kentucky's Franklin County Emergency Food Pantry usually struggles to make ends meet. "Once the holidays pass and winter comes on, demand picks up as giving falls off," president Tom Utterback says.

But this past winter, the pantry didn't have to suffer through a seasonal drought. A Make A Difference Day drive organized by the state helped stockpile 20,000 extra pounds of food for that organization.

Kentucky has arranged an annual food collection since 2001. Although state unemployment rates had hit a 26-year high of 10.5%, the drive tallied a whopping 123 tons of food -- a 74% increase over 2008's Make a Difference Day drive. Organizer Eileen Cackowski says the massive outpouring reflects the humanity of the Bluegrass State. "I see it in Kentucky all the time," she says.

\$10,000 Make A Difference Day Award from Newman's Own goes to the Kentucky Commission on Community Volunteerism and Service.

Needy homeowners get help: Nationwide

Anna Trisvane, 79, of Providence, spent 40 years fostering nearly 40 children, giving them food, clothing and the rarest commodity -- love. But it took a toll, and she was left with little time or cash for home repairs. On Make A Difference Day, Rebuilding Together Providence stepped in to paint, clean and replace faulty wiring in Trisvane's home.

Rebuilding Together, a national non-profit that helps low-income homeowners, joined forces with Lowe's to rejuvenate 35 homes across the country on Oct. 24. Lowe's contributed \$350,000 in grants and donated supplies and manpower; Rebuilding Together offered its vast community resources, including skilled volunteers.

\$10,000 Make A Difference Day Award from Newman's Own goes to Rebuilding Together.

Fraternity pledges to do good: Nationwide

Think fraternity. Think partying? Think again.

Community service means a lot to the members of Delta Sigma Pi collegiate business fraternity, who have made participation in Make A Difference Day a tradition.

"As college students, we know we're lucky," says University of Pittsburgh chapter member Dan Kyung. "We feel like it's our duty to help those who aren't as fortunate."

Across the country, roughly 2,000 members from half the fraternity's 195 chapters leapt to action Oct. 24. They took on more than 100 projects, ranging from helping special-needs children to raising money for the poor.

Delta Sigma Pi began encouraging Make A Difference Day involvement more than a decade ago and lists it as one of the fraternity's top three community service initiatives.

\$10,000 Make A Difference Day Award from Newman's Own goes to Delta Sigma Pi Leadership Foundation, Oxford, Ohio.

A town unites to honor a beloved teacher: Fairfield, Ill.

High school teacher Dana Hungerford felt blessed just to be alive, to have Òa chance from GodÓ to make a difference.

For 30 years, Hungerford shared his positive outlook with others while teaching math at Fairfield Community High School, where he was wildly popular with students and colleagues.

And then, in September 2009, he died of heart failure at 53.

By the time Hungerford's memorial service was held five days later, 32 faculty members and 500 students had plans to honor him for Make A Difference Day. Their idea: Raise money for playground equipment for a city park.

Their Oct. 24 began with a pancake breakfast and ended with a variety show at the school based on Hungerford's favorite show, Saturday Night Live. More than 2,500 people -- half of the town's population -- took part in various activities that raised \$31,050.

Leo French Park now will have new swings, slides and memorial benches. "They couldn't have come up with a better idea for honoring him," says his widow, Kim Hungerford.

\$10,000 Make A Difference Day Award from Newman's Own goes to Fairfield Community High School Foundation.

Probationers learn the joys of giving: Iron Mountain, Mich.

Since 2005, Pattie Belongie has played Santa's helper for Make A Difference Day, sewing doll blankets and collecting toys for underprivileged children. The first year, she did this to fulfill a community service sentence for driving while impaired. Now, she returns each year out of love.

"It's so fulfilling to be a part of this -- to be able to share joy and love with little kids who don't understand why they don't have much," she says.

On Oct. 24, Belongie, along with 19 volunteers and 40 people sentenced to community service, passed out Christmas stockings at four stores, asking shoppers to fill them for needy kids and troops overseas. The group collected enough donations to send 400 stuffed stockings to service

members. On Dec. 5, the volunteers held a Christmas party to distribute the remainder of the goodies to underprivileged children.

Corrections coordinator Denise Formolo created this volunteer program to give probationers a chance to do something creative. She never dreamed they'd return to participate on their own. "It changes their whole attitude when they see what a caring community they live in," she says.

\$10,000 Make A Difference Day Award from Newman's Own goes to UPCAP Services, Escanaba, Mich.

Community gives hope (and flip-flops) to Haiti: Colchester, Conn.

News of the massive earthquake that struck Haiti in January jarred young parishioners at St. Andrew Church in Colchester, many of whom had spent last fall collecting donations on Make A Difference Day to help the impoverished nation. "I can't believe this happened to them," says sixth-grader Elizabeth Kowalsky, 11.

The church has had a long-standing relationship with Haiti: Its high school youth group has an annual "rock-a-thon" to benefit the Haitian Health Foundation, based in nearby Norwich. This year, the middle-schoolers got in on the act. "It felt like the right thing to do," Elizabeth says.

The kids voted to collect shoes and supplies for Haiti. As word of their "Flip-Flops for Education" drive spread, the effort snowballed. St. Mary-St. Joseph School students in Willimantic collected money; soccer teams and local businesses donated supplies; and classes at William J. Johnston Middle School in Colchester set out collection boxes.

By day's end on Oct. 24, the St. Andrew kids had collected 2,000 items -- from flip-flops to school supplies. They also raised \$1,900 to serve educational needs and buy 10 goats, a source of food and income. "This has been a big help," says Jerry Lowney, Haitian Health Foundation founder. "The misery never seems to end for these poorest neighbors."

\$10,000 Make A Difference Day Award from Newman's Own goes to the Haitian Health Foundation, Norwich, Conn.

Caregivers receive a special thank you: Fountain Inn, S.C.

Small gestures mean a lot -- more than we may realize.

Months after Charlene Reeder of Laurens, S.C., received a gift bag to lift her spirits while caring for her ill husband, she still appreciates it. "The bag just made me feel happy, and now it still helps," she says, referring to one particular item, a book on grief that has been useful since her husband died of leukemia.

Reeder was one of 50 caregivers to receive goodies from Georgia Fowler of Fountain Inn, S.C., and her extended family on Make A Difference Day. Fowler's 50th birthday inspired her action: "I didn't want to have a selfish birthday."

With the help of brothers, sisters, children and grandchildren, she collected items to include in the bags. Then, on Oct. 24, the group assembled the bags and gave them to caregivers in three counties.

Fowler chose caregivers because her mother, who suffers from Alzheimer's, cared for others before she fell ill. "She was a caregiver before the word was invented," Fowler says.

\$10,000 Make A Difference Day Award from Newman's Own goes to South Carolina's Alzheimer's Association.

2010 Encore Award: 3,164 feet get happy in Las Vegas

Busloads of youngsters enjoyed an unforgettable day on Oct. 24, 2009, traveling to the Lied Memorial Boys & Girls Clubhouse to hang out with friends, eat lunch with local celebrities, get new backpacks and school supplies and, best of all, pick out a brand-new pair of shoes.

The giveaway was the seventh for Las Vegas-based Goodie Two Shoes Foundation, which launched in 2003 as a Make A Difference Day push to give footwear to 225 needy kids. Organizers Nikki and Tony Berti -- a full-time mom and an NFL player turned Las Vegas realtor, respectively -- were honored in 2005 as National Make A Difference Day Award recipients. Five years and 12,000 pairs of shoes later, they're still going strong: In six hours on Make A Difference Day 2009, 300 volunteers helped 1,582 youngsters select from among the nearly 9,000 pairs donated by Zappos. The effort earned the Bertis a 2010 Make A Difference

Day Encore Award.

When the Bertis started the program, Nikki says she envisioned helping children in Las Vegas, then expanding. Today, Goodie Two Shoes Foundation supplies shoes to kids in Clark County and nearby Pahrump, Nev. "Las Vegas has one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, and the school district has 5,800 registered homeless children," she says. "That's why we're still here."

\$10,000 Make A Difference Day Award from the Gannett Foundation and USA WEEKEND goes to Goodie Two Shoes Foundation, Las Vegas.

USA WEEKEND proudly announces these special awards.

AARP Create the Good Awards: Helping older Americans

New this year, AARP's Create the Good Awards recognized two projects that helped older people stay in their homes. "Service is incredibly important -- it strengthens the very fiber of our communities," says AARP chief operating officer Tom Nelson.

In North Wilkesboro, N.C., 400 volunteers from the Wilkes County Volunteer Coalition built wheelchair ramps, constructed stairs, replaced roofs and winterized homes for 54 area seniors.

In Fairfield, Calif., local union and city volunteers installed outdoor lighting and railings and made other safety-related fixes at 13 seniors' homes. For their efforts, each receives a \$5,000 donation for charity from AARP.

Disney FamilyFun Award: A family gives back

Disney FamilyFun magazine joins USA WEEKEND in honoring volunteers by recognizing an outstanding family project. The winner: Nancy Jayne and 6-year-old grandson Caleb of New York's Oneida County.

For Make A Difference Day, Jayne and Caleb launched a shoe drive to help inhabitants of the

Amazon, where entire villages of Brazil's indigenous people go barefoot and, therefore, are left vulnerable to disease.

The duo set out collection boxes at stores, offices and their church, and they distributed fliers asking for donations from community members, including Caleb's classmates. Their drive netted 6,000 pairs of shoes, three times what they expected to collect.

For their effort in working together as a family to change the lives of others, Jayne and Caleb receive a \$2,500 donation for the charity of their choice from *Disney FamilyFun*.



Every year, thousands in Colorado's Larimer County help their fellow man -- and man's best friend.
(John Johnston for USA WEEKEND)