

Volunteers can help others 'breathe easier'

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "To know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived, that is to have succeeded."

April 19-25 is National Volunteer Week 2009 and an opportunity to honor, recognize and celebrate those volunteers who serve throughout the year and help many of us "breathe easier." This has been an annual event across our nation since 1974, when President Richard Nixon signed an executive order, and has been continued by each president since.

As stated on the "Points of Light" Web site: "National Volunteer Week 2009 Celebrating People in Action presents an opportunity for individuals, families, nonprofit organizations and government entities alike to celebrate the ordinary people who accomplish extraordinary things through service without the expectation of recognition."

Sheridan County volunteers are those extraordinary individuals who do accomplish extraordinary things.

Songwriter Tracy Chapman wrote, "I've seen and met angels wearing the disguise of ordinary people living ordinary lives." I have personally met many of those angels.

Tuesday, I attended the Fifth Annual

"Jefferson Awards for Public Service" in Casper with five Senior Center volunteers who were recognized for their volunteer service throughout Sheridan County. It was an exciting event shared with Gov. Freudenthal and Sen. Enzi.

One of the resounding themes of each speaker was that one person can make a difference. Sen. Enzi stated, "Life isn't about who you know, but who you've been able to help ... not talking about what needs to be done but getting on the end of the shovel and doing it ... turning perspiration into inspiration."

From the bio's read of the 40 nominated volunteers throughout the state, Wyoming volunteers are those type of "git 'er done people," and we are all the better for it.

As other nonprofits throughout our country, the Senior Center is stronger and more equipped to meet the ever-increasing needs of our community not as an isolated entity, but working togeth-



**Center
Stage**

Nancy
McKenzie



er with our wonderful resource of volunteers.

According to the Web site volunteeringinamerica.gov: "On average, Wyoming's 142,000 volunteers dedicated 17 million hours of service per year (between 2005 and 2007).

The estimated economic contribution of the volunteer hours served is \$332 million annually." Wow!

You have, more than likely, heard the following story by Loren Eiseley but possibly have not thought of it in the context of volunteerism.

Many starfish washed up on shore. A young boy started picking them up and throwing them back into the ocean. Someone saw what he was doing and told him that it was pointless, that there were too many to save, that it wouldn't make a difference. Throwing another starfish into the sea, the little boy responded, "It makes a difference to this one."

It sums up for me what volunteers are to each life they touch, each smile they give, each helping hand they lend.

As Leo Buscaglia wrote, "Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around."

One volunteer stated it's giving the "gift of hope."

Thank you, volunteers, for recognizing that each or your volunteer efforts make a difference to the recipient of your act of kindness, make a difference in the lives of those served.

Betty Reese writes, "And please remember, if you think you are too small to be effective, you have never been in bed with a mosquito."

Nancy McKenzie is director of volunteer services at the Sheridan Senior Center, a commissioner with ServeWyoming, and a member of the local volunteer group ServeSheridan.

Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.