

Make '97 a giving year: Help others

BY LISA LUCKOW-HEALY
Special Writer

On Aug. 31, 1995, my life changed forever. It was the night I lost my 18-year-old brother, Mark, to an automobile accident. My family and I were devastated.

Acquaintances passing the funeral home that week told us they thought a celebrity had died because so many people were going in to pay their respects. The funeral itself was reminiscent of a movie scene with the dozens of caring friends and family converging upon the burial site.

Since that horrible night, my family and I have had many long hours to reflect upon our past, present and future.

Losing a loved one has a profound impact on your life. It makes you realize that all the daily activities, rushing to school, planning your life around a client dinner party, worrying about a forthcoming business transaction or holding a grudge mean absolutely nothing without the love and support of family and friends.

As a family, we've repeatedly reminded each other not to dwell on the "should have," would have, could have" phrases, because nothing is going to change the past.

But the memory of Mark that lives on within all his family and friends has been an inspiration to reach out and touch the lives of others in need of help and support—to make a difference in someone else's life by putting that individual first.

With the New Year just begun, ask yourself and your family how you can combine your love and support through volunteer efforts. There are hundreds of volunteer organizations throughout Michigan and the United States that depend on volunteers like you not only during the holidays but the whole year through.

Ways to help

One such organization is Lighthouse of Oakland County, a non-profit that assists low-income individuals with emergencies. Students, families and church organizations are some of the volunteers reaching out to the Lighthouse.

"One local corporation brings their entire staff to Lighthouse at Thanksgiving to help prepare meals for needy families," said Noreen Keating, president, Lighthouse of Oakland County.

"If corporations can do it, more families can, too, by getting involved as part of their child's school community service project. A local man and his child work with the Comerica Bank Trust

office in Birmingham to gather the soft drink can returnables on a monthly basis, turn the cans in for their deposit and submit that money to us to help others."

Sheila Clemons-Steger, manager of development services, Make-A-Wish Foundation of Michigan, said there are numerous ways families can help her organization grant wishes to children with life-threatening illnesses.

"Our new program, called 'Kids for Wish Kids,' is a community service project many schools are tailoring to their needs," she said.

"Basically, students in grades K-12 can participate by working together to raise money to grant a wish for a child in their area. The program teaches students how to focus on individuals other than themselves by demonstrating how they can pool their resources to make a difference in a seriously ill child's life."

"Kids for Wish Kids" is a program that promotes team-building between the students and their families.

"Parents can foster the spirit of giving in their children while encouraging other members of the student body to participate and tackle the awesome responsibility of making another child's wish possible," Clemons-Steger said.

Paint the Town is an organization that selects a community in the city of Detroit and in its surrounding satellite cities to send volunteers to paint homes and perform general repairs. This widespread volunteer effort takes place in mid-August.

"Students in Cub Scouts come out with their parents to lend a hand and receive merit badge credit for their participation," said James Jackson, loan administration, Standard Federal Bank in Troy, a corporate sponsor of Paint the Town.

"The young people who volunteer with their families, many of whom are employees of companies who support the organization, are exposed to community service at an early age."

The Lighthouse of Oakland County, Make-A-Wish Foundation of Michigan and Paint the Town are just a few of the hundreds of local and national organizations looking for volunteers like you to help make 1997 a giving year.

Lighthouse of Oakland County: (810) 335-6752

Make-A-Wish Foundation of Michigan: (800) 622-WISH

Paint the Town Hotline: (810) 827-2398

Lisa Luckow-Healy is a marketing and public relations consultant and the mother of two from West Bloomfield. Her articles frequently appear in Metro Parent magazine and several business trade publications.

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