

Lending a Helping Hand

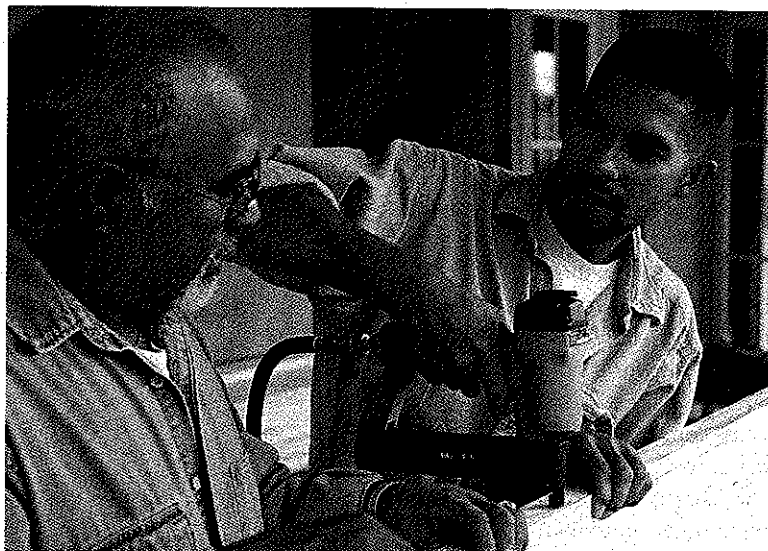
For over 50 years, AARP volunteers have invested their time and expertise to help individuals and communities across America.

Volunteerism in a corporation can take many forms. One organization may give employees time off to serve; another will back their volunteer efforts with financial support. Each of the organizations profiled here is working with the Entertainment Industry Foundation's I Participate initiative. Each has evolved its own approach, yet all have the same objective: to share their resources and the time and talent of their employees for the good of the larger community.

In the case of the AARP, service is at the very core of the association. "It's in our DNA," says Thomas Nelson, COO of the advocacy organization. He's not exaggerating. He cites AARP founder Ethel Percy Andrus, a retired California school principal, who saw the potential of a volunteer force more than 50 years ago and said, "Volunteers are an army of useful citizens."

With nearly 40 million members, including nine million who are either volunteers, activists or donors, much of the Washington, D.C.-based organization's clout has been built on its ability to use the energy and expertise of its members. AARP volunteers advocate on behalf of the needs of the 50+ population, and they also invest their time in causes that are important to them.

For 35 years, AARP and the AARP Foundation have offered a free tax-counseling program to people who can't do their own taxes or afford to pay a professional. Last year, more than 34,000 AARP Foundation volunteers helped nearly 2.6 million people file their taxes. One focus was helping those who qualified get the earned-income tax credit. According to Nelson, that effort put an estimated \$200 million into the pockets of U.S. taxpayers.



AARP's volunteer network, Create The Good (CreateTheGood.org), features online tool kits that help people serve with an emphasis on ease, whether they have five minutes, five hours or five days. The site has searchable, local volunteer opportunities, as well as do-it-yourself tools to help people start their own projects. The tools arm volunteers with easy-to-use instructions on how to help people save energy, stay healthy, prepare for emergencies and more.

This coincides with an AARP project with the Florida governor's office to organize neighborhood efforts for the storm season. In the past, the tool kits have been written by AARP staff, says Nelson, but the organization is revamping its website this month and will eventually allow individuals to submit ideas for new do-it-yourself kits. AARP's involvement with the Entertainment Industry Foundation (EIF) and I Participate is a natural extension of its outreach efforts.

SHARING FAMILY VALUES: A FATHER AND HIS SON LEND THEIR SKILLS TO HELP A TOWN REBUILD AFTER SEVERE WEATHER DAMAGE.

"Our collaboration with EIF allows Create The Good to reach potential volunteers—those who aren't yet engaged or who are looking for new and different opportunities—and hook them up with ways to serve that work for them," says Nelson.

AARP's volunteer efforts are aimed not just at its membership. There is also a vigorous level of internal activity among staff members. This year on Sept. 11, many AARP employees, chapters and members will devote the entire day to numerous volunteer projects.

In addition, says Nelson, AARP employees receive time throughout the year to participate in volunteer projects of their own. Volunteering can keep the doctor away, says Nelson. "Service at any age contributes to a sense of well-being." •

