

Giving to our community

LEE PROKASKA

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Everyone can be great because anyone can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't even have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve ... You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love...

-- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

As the pre-holiday season binge revs up, let's all take a moment -- and a deep breath -- to remind ourselves of the importance of giving rather than getting. And that the best gifts can't be purchased at the mall.

To some that may sound trite. But without a spirit of giving, a sense of engagement, a belief in the importance of others, a community is a mere shadow of what it might be.

Earlier this week, six of the city's best non-profit organizations were honoured for what they've done in the community and the impact of their work now and in the future. The Immigrant Culture Art Association, the Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys' and Girls' Club, St. Leonard's Society of Hamilton c/o Greenbyte Program, the Hamilton Halton Watershed Stewardship Program, the Church of the Ascension Out of the Cold Program and the Bay Area Restoration Council were picked from a list of organizations that receive funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

It's important to publicly recognize such community work. It's also important to remember that for every organization or person that makes the news, there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of other people in Hamilton who quietly push on day after day and year after year, contributing an enormous chunk of themselves to the fabric of our city.

Many of them work in the non-profit sector often earning well under private sector salaries. They are active members of school councils or home and school associations. They coach kids' sports. They drive cancer patients to treatment. They sit on community boards of directors. They go grocery shopping for shut-in neighbours.

Some are retired, freed from the tyranny of work and able to decide how best to spend their hours. Some are teenagers who got hooked on volunteering because of the mandatory 40 hours of community involvement they need to get a high school diploma. Most are regular folks who work, raise families and enjoy leisure time, but also make a point of regularly doing something -- big or small -- that benefits the community.

They contribute to the fabric of our community in different ways based on their talents and interests. What they share is a level of engagement in the community we would all do well to emulate. It may be easier to be a couch potato, but it's unhealthy both individually and communally.

No community can thrive if its citizens are not engaged. It's about people doing the things that make a community vibrant, that make others want to get involved too. Community involvement improves the quality of life for all Hamiltonians. But you can't buy it at the mall.