

COMPASSION IN 2009

Economic downturn offers opportunities to show how much you care

One of the few positives in an economic recession is the chance it gives us to demonstrate how we care for each other.

One way to show compassion is to give money. You don't have to be rich to be generous. Lee and Betty Jones of Hazel Dell lived modest lives; he worked for the highway department and she was a homemaker. Married 55 years, they never had children. After they died, they left more than \$1 million to Doernbecher Children's Hospital. The gift was announced in October.

Even if money is too tight this year, you can give time. Our community's richness comes not only from monetary wealth, but from its churches, charities and organizations that rely on volunteers to make their programs work. Here are just a few of our favorites:

■ **Habitat for Humanity.** The local group is rather small, with a complicated Web site, and there is a larger program in Portland at www.habitatportlandmetro.org. You can help build houses for deserving people. Can't drive a nail? There are jobs in the office, on committees or in the store.

■ **North County Community Food Bank.** Census figures show that the rural, northern area of Clark County habitually struggles the most with poverty. The Battle Ground food bank, www.nccfoodbank.com, relies on volunteers to receive, sort and stock foods. A recently acquired walk-in refrigerator-freezer means the food bank can do more to help the hungry, but it needs additional help.

■ **YWCA Clark County** relies largely on volunteers to run crucial social programs. One example: Court Appointed Special Advocates — highly trained volunteers who work on behalf of abused, neglected or abandoned children to insure the child's voice is heard in the legal system. The program particularly needs bilingual, bicultural or male volunteers.

■ **Open House Ministries.** This faith-based group helps homeless

families by offering temporary housing and other services. Volunteers help with child care, work in the office and help with fundraising. www.sheltered.org.

■ **Pearson Air Museum.** This small museum at an unusually historic airfield needs a volunteer to read airplane-related stories to toddlers under the wings of the old planes. Visit www.pearsonairmuseum.org/home.html.

■ **Clark College Adult Literacy Program** needs volunteers who can tutor adults for three or four hours per week in Vancouver and Battle Ground. If you read *The Columbian*, you're qualified to help. www.clark.edu/academics/programs/adult_literacy.php.

■ **Fort Vancouver National Historic Site** volunteers help with planning, developing, researching and organizing the historic garden. The garden was a forerunner of agriculture in the Pacific Northwest, and comes alive every year with heirloom vegetables and fruits. www.nps.gov/fova/supportyourpark/volunteer.htm.

■ **Local schools** are great places to volunteer; one probably lies within walking distance of your home. One program in the Vancouver district is Lunch Buddies, matching adult volunteers with elementary pupils. The volunteers come to school once a week and have a 45-minute lunch with their buddies. The kids get a chance to know an adult role model. To volunteer call 360-313-4725 or e-mail Barbara.Nordstrom@vansd.org.

■ **Health care organizations** rely on numerous volunteers. Skilled professionals can donate their time at places such as the Free Clinic of Southwest Washington. But compassion is all that's needed for other jobs, such as assisting at Southwest Washington Medical Center by running errands, helping to staff the gift shop and waiting areas, and guiding visitors.

No matter your financial situation, you can enrich Clark County in 2009 with your deeds. All it takes is availing yourself of the opportunity.