

# Golden Isles

THE MAGAZINE FOR BRUNSWICK, ST. SIMONS, JEKYLL & SEA ISLANDS



## Volunteers

Spotlighting people doing good in our community

HOW YOU CAN  
GET INVOLVED

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# HOW TO --- Get Involved!

BY J.M. LACEY

Most of us have observed volunteers in action, such as picking up trash in a park or reading to children at a local library. Giving your time and your energy seems ideal, but can volunteering for a cause be your reality? Should you get involved in helping others?

Volunteering gives us a “better idea of where we’re living and what’s around us,” says Catina Tindall, who sits on the boards of the Brunswick-Golden Isles Chamber of Commerce and United Way of Coastal Georgia and has volunteered with Partners in Education among others. “It’s the best way to find out what’s really going on in your community.”

That sounds great, you think, but how can I contribute to my community and how much time or money do I have to invest?

## Getting Started

Our seasoned volunteers agree that you need to figure out your passion and then do your research. There are plenty of ways to find out about an organization that appeals to you. Check the Web for the national agencies, but even some local agencies have a Web presence. Ask others, says Jeff Bennett, who serves on the Brunswick-Golden Isles Chamber of Commerce, is the current board chair of the Boys and Girls Club of Southeast Georgia, past secretary for United Way of Coastal Georgia, and chaired the FEMA Food and Shelter Allocation Committee. Find out what the agency does, the programs they offer and who else might be involved so there are no personality conflicts, he advises.

“Definitely talk to other volunteers in the organization,” says Felic-

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**Catina Tindall**

*“Sometimes the smallest thing can make the greatest impact.”*



**Jeff Bennett**

*“If you get out and give back to the community, you’re rewarded”*



**Felicity Littles**

*“If you want to see a difference, you have to get involved.”*



**Dana Parker**

*“Find something you’re passionate about and start there.”*

ity Littles, who serves as vice president with the YWCA, and has volunteered with the American Cancer Society and American Heart Association, among others. "Get a feel for everyone in the organization."

Prospective volunteers should think about the things that mean something to them. Find something you like to do. "If you want to see a difference, you have to get involved," she says.

If you still don't know where to start, try checking directly with your local chamber of commerce, school or the United Way. The United Way has a program, "Hands on Coastal Georgia," which places volunteers in various nonprofit organizations.

But you have to put in the effort, much like finding a job. Make the phone calls, send those e-mails and put yourself out there.

## What to Invest

While a financial investment is always welcome, time is just as important. Once you've done your research, asked your questions and know what organization to assist, figure out how much time you can spend volunteering.

"You can't spread yourself too thin," says Dana Parker, president of Christ Church Episcopal Church Women, and a volunteer with many other organizations including the Coastal Symphony of Georgia's fund-raiser, Cabaret, and the American Cancer Society. Especially for those who have other commitments, such as family and full-time employment, it's important to not overextend yourself.

Jeff warns that as a volunteer you can become overwhelmed and burn out at times. "Ask how much time you have to give," he suggests.

There are programs and activities that take up less time during the week or year, depending on your circumstances. For instance, United Way holds its annual "Day of Caring" program during "Hands on Georgia" week for those who can volunteer one day out of the year. You can also become a mentor, serve lunch at Manna House, pick up trash, donate clothes and toys to Amity House, or get involved with a school function.

"Sometimes the smallest thing can make the greatest impact," Catina says.

## Expectations

"You have to volunteer because you want to," says Felicity. "You're going to put in a lot of hours. You're going to get frustrated. If you make a commitment, you have to stand by that commitment."

Don't volunteer for that expected pat on the back, because the volunteers agree that that might not happen.

"Make sure you enjoy it and believe in it or it won't be worth doing," says Catina. "If you don't volunteer with a giving spirit, you won't get anything out of it."

When you're involved in raising money for a nonprofit or other cause, you get emotionally attached, says Dana. But in the end, when you see the numbers and what was accomplished, it's gratifying.

"Find out what's important to you," Dana says. "What you'd like to see change, where you'd like to see improvement. Find something you're passionate about and start there."

The positives of volunteering outweigh the negatives, says Jeff. "We do not live in a perfect world, but if you get out and basically give back to the community, you're rewarded."

Catina agrees. "Volunteering is probably the most perfect form of instant gratification." ©

*J.M. Lacey is a professional freelance writer who writes fiction, non-fiction and poetry. She has worked for both corporate and non-profits and is classically trained in both piano and voice.*

### Melissa is back from Market...



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