

Rep. Markey joins other volunteers in Make A Difference Day projects

BY MARCY MIRANDA • MARCYMIRANDA@COLORADOAN.COM • OCTOBER 25, 2009

Working to improve the community is something U.S. Rep. Betsy Markey has done her whole life, she said.

So taking a day to help out two organizations she's previously been involved with was something Markey was happy to do.

"It's important," she said. "We've got a lot of needs in this community."

The annual Make A Difference Day had thousands of volunteers throughout the community doing everything from helping plan Halloween parties to making fences and raking leaves at more than 110 sites in Larimer County.

At the Matthews House, 726 Mathews St., Markey and her husband were among eight volunteers organizing toiletry and bedding items inside the house or raking leaves outside.

The Matthews House offers support to youths who are transitioning to adulthood and need the help of adults and mentors in their lives, said Jerri Howe, founder and executive director of Matthews House.

Many of the youths at the house have been previously abused, neglected or incarcerated and are referred to the program through the county's social services agencies.

In the morning, Markey went to Grant Family Farms in Wellington. She spent part of the afternoon at the Matthews House, touring the house and learning about the program and also cleaning out plastic crates to make space for soaps, shampoos and other toiletries.

She also visited Estes Park to see firsthand the damage at Park Theatre Mall caused by Monday's fire.

The work done by the thousands of volunteers who devote time to Make A Difference Day is enormous, said Mary Atchison, vice president of community investment with United Way of Larimer County.

"The nonprofits could never afford to do this without the thousands of volunteers," Atchison said.

Although it is called Make a Difference Day, volunteers devote their time throughout the week to the various projects and organizations. For a community the size of Larimer County, the amount of support is tremendous, Atchison said.

"We have such an outpouring of volunteers," she said.

In touring the house, Howe talked about how the Matthews House grew out of a small, committed group of her friends. Since its opening almost four years ago, the Matthews House has grown to 121 volunteers, about 50 who volunteer regularly, and has helped 279 youths, Howe said.



Ronnie Millos, far right, and Steve Redder cut a piece of wood for a compost bin as Jim Kelly works behind them Saturday at the Matthews House in Fort Collins. (Dawn Madura/The Coloradoan)