

Volunteerism boosts community

National Volunteer Month opens door to opportunities

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There are few activities more gratifying and rewarding in life than volunteering.

And April, being National Volunteer Month, is a good place to start for those who don't already contribute their time.

While most of us know instinctively that volunteering benefits the community, United Way of Larimer County has quantified such efforts. For example, a volunteer hour is now valued at \$19.51, and in April 2008, Larimer County residents contributed more than 76,000 hours. If residents contribute the same amount of hours this April, the value would equal \$1.5 million invested back into the community of Larimer County.

What many don't know is how volunteering assists those who give of their time. For those who are unemployed, volunteering can boost networking opportunities and help individuals sharpen skills or gain new ones, develop leadership talents and open doors to job referrals and recommendations.

Volunteers generally have been found to be healthier, more connected to their communities and self-fulfilled.

National Volunteer Week was created 35 years ago when President Richard M. Nixon signed an executive order. United Way of Larimer County has participated since 2005, and in 2006 extended the recognition to a monthlong series of events. This year, a number of events have been scheduled to introduce opportunities for those who want to give their time. Those opportunities range from one-time events to longer term commitments.

With an uncertain economy, the impact of volunteerism and the need for even more participation is growing. National Volunteer Month is a positive introduction into the connection between healthy, vibrant communities and acts of kindness.