

# Twin Cities area leads nation's big cities in volunteering

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*Kristen Dammann, a graduate student in nutrition at the University of Minnesota, volunteered at Open Arms in Minneapolis by packaging servings of beer cheese soup. In the foreground, Miles Hang packed cookies. The food is for HIV/AIDS patients.*

**For the third year in a row, Minneapolis-St. Paul is ranked No. 1 in the country for volunteerism among the nation's larger metro areas.**

By CHAO XIONG, Star Tribune

Ten teenagers from a Wayzata church sanded, primed and painted a swing set in the back yard of an affordable townhouse Tuesday afternoon, exemplifying a trend toward increased youth volunteerism, according to a new study.

Although the country's volunteer rate held steady overall from 2007 to 2008, a million more Americans volunteered last year than in 2007. And Twin Cities residents and young people, ages 16 to 24, led the way, according to the study from the federal Corporation for National and Community Service. The researchers found Americans continue to volunteer despite a slumping economy and high foreclosure rate that would usually hurt volunteerism.

"People are giving their time when they can't give their traditional resources" of monetary donations, said Alan Solomont, chairman of the CNCS board.

The study released Tuesday showed that Minneapolis-St. Paul ranked No. 1 among larger metro areas in volunteerism, followed by Portland, Ore., Salt Lake City, Seattle and Kansas City, Mo. Minneapolis-St. Paul has held

that top spot for all three years the study has ranked city volunteerism. The state ranked No. 3 in the country, behind Utah and Nebraska. Alaska was fourth and Iowa fifth.

The study, spanning from September 2007 to September 2008, found volunteerism among 16- to 24-year-olds increased by 5.7 percent in 2008, or about 7.8 million young adults. Solomont attributed that to a growing interest among youth to be part of something bigger than themselves, and service learning in K-12 and college curriculum.

Martha Whiting and Maddie Young, both 16, are among the Plymouth Wayzata Free Church members who volunteer for Aeon, a nonprofit affordable housing developer with 1,700 units in the Twin Cities. The teenagers said they've been volunteering for years, mostly through church or school.

"You feel good about yourself," Whiting said. "You feel like you used your time well instead of just sitting around and watching TV."

Said Young: "People are in more need, and not necessarily just people living on the streets. Kids realize that. We do realize that there's more out there in the world than what we need."

Volunteer officials in Minnesota said the Twin Cities and the state have consistently experienced high volunteer rates because of citizens' sense of civic duty, professional organizations that connect volunteers with opportunities and corporations that encourage and reward volunteerism among employees.

The faltering economy has also helped volunteerism in 2008 by creating a larger population of people who need assistance, and by leaving many unemployed professionals scrambling to keep their skills up-to-date, said local and national officials.

"There are those who are motivated by the fact that there are a lot of people who are hurting because of the economy," said Judie Russell, board member of the Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration, which has 800 members across the state. "They see a greater need."

At Aeon, unemployed or underemployed professionals such as architects and engineers have become more regular volunteers, said Tashia Weisenburger, the volunteer coordinator. As much as they want to help, many are also hoping to keep their skills and work credentials fresh, she said.

The study found that 61.8 million Americans volunteered through an organization in 2008, dedicating more than 8 billion hours of service in 2008 worth about \$162 billion. It also found a 31 percent increase in "self-organized, do-it-yourself" volunteer work, said Dr. Robert Grimm, director of the office of research and policy development for the CNCS. Neighbors helped each other out in an unofficial capacity out of compassion, he said.

Those who work in volunteerism predict that people drawn to help others because of economic forces won't stop volunteering when it recovers.

"Once people learn they have something valuable to offer ... and that they'll get as much as they give, they're likely to continue" volunteering, said Kelly O'Brien, who directs two volunteer programs at Volunteers of America-Minnesota.

The report also found that midsized cities, particularly those in the Midwest, have higher average volunteer rates than large cities, and residents of midsize cities contribute more hours to volunteering. Places of worship also continued to provide large pools of volunteers.

The research is based on annual surveys of about 100,000 people collected by the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics.