



The Spirit of Volunteerism



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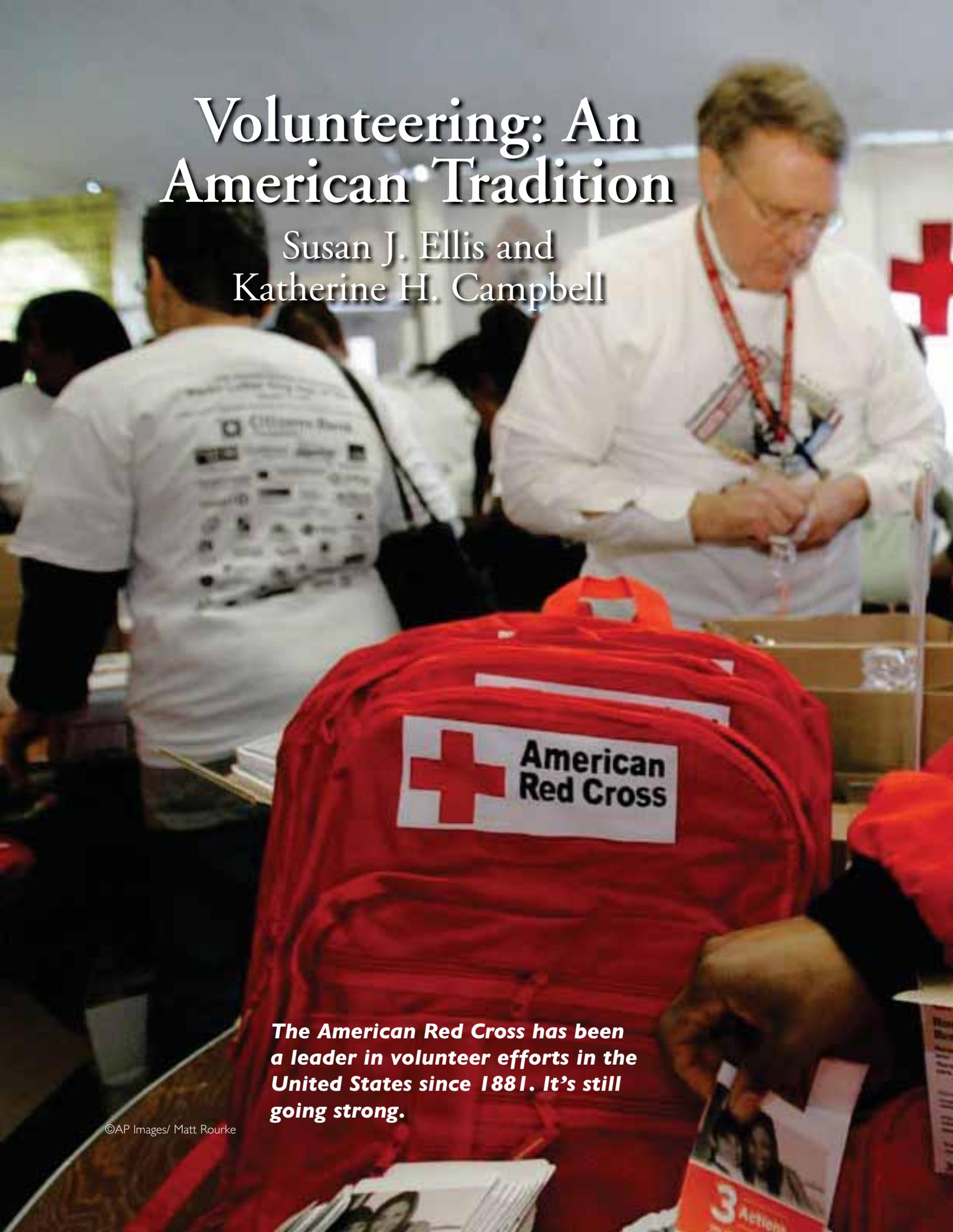
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Volunteering: An American Tradition

Susan J. Ellis and
Katherine H. Campbell



The American Red Cross has been a leader in volunteer efforts in the United States since 1881. It's still going strong.



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Volunteering provides joy for those who give as well as for those who receive assistance.

“I have seen Americans making great and sincere sacrifices for the key common good and a hundred times I have noticed that, when needs be, they almost always gave each other faithful support.”

—Alexis de Tocqueville, 1835

In the United States, just about everyone, at one time or another, has been a volunteer. On any given day, millions of Americans give of their time and talents to benefit their communities through volunteer service. Volunteering is so pervasive in the United States that it can be observed daily in almost every aspect of life.

In a typical year, about one-fifth of the American population, more than 62 million people, serve as volunteers, according to U.S. government statistics. They contribute more than 8 billion hours of services, valued conservatively at \$173 billion.

The roots of U.S. volunteerism are far reaching and deep. Americans have been banding together to help one another since colonial times. The settlers of the new American colonies all had the same priority: survival. Physically, the land was a wilderness, and social organizational structures were lacking. Cooperation frequently meant the difference between life and death.

Neighboring farmers combined efforts to clear land, build houses and barns, and harvest crops. Quilting parties and spinning bees were common occurrences, as were “whangs,” gatherings of women who helped each other with annual housecleaning. Church buildings were built by volunteers, and town records are rife with references to donations of land, materials and money, all given voluntarily so that each community could have its own place of worship. Volunteer efforts by both men and women were called “changing works.”

As the first settlements became small cities, new ways of voluntary action evolved. Early street lighting was a

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Maintaining monuments and parks in the United States could not be done without volunteers. President Lincoln looks a bit spiffier thanks to this volunteer

©AP Images/Richmond Times-Dispatch, Alexa Welch Edlund



"Now, Son, this is how you hit the ball out of the park," says an elderly, retired baseball player to a young, up-and-coming player: Coaching sports attracts many volunteers in the United States.

shared responsibility of homeowners who rotated the hanging of lanterns at their front gates. "Sunday schools" were started so that poor children, working at jobs for six days a week, could be taught to read the Bible on their single day off.

As early as the 1600's, colonists formed citizen fire brigades to combat fires in Boston, Philadelphia and New Amsterdam (later New York), and in 1736 Benjamin Franklin formally organized Philadelphia's volunteer fire company, consisting of "thirty volunteers who equipped themselves with leather buckets and bags and baskets." The concept quickly spread throughout the colonies and persists today, when more than 70 percent of firefighters in the United States are volunteers.

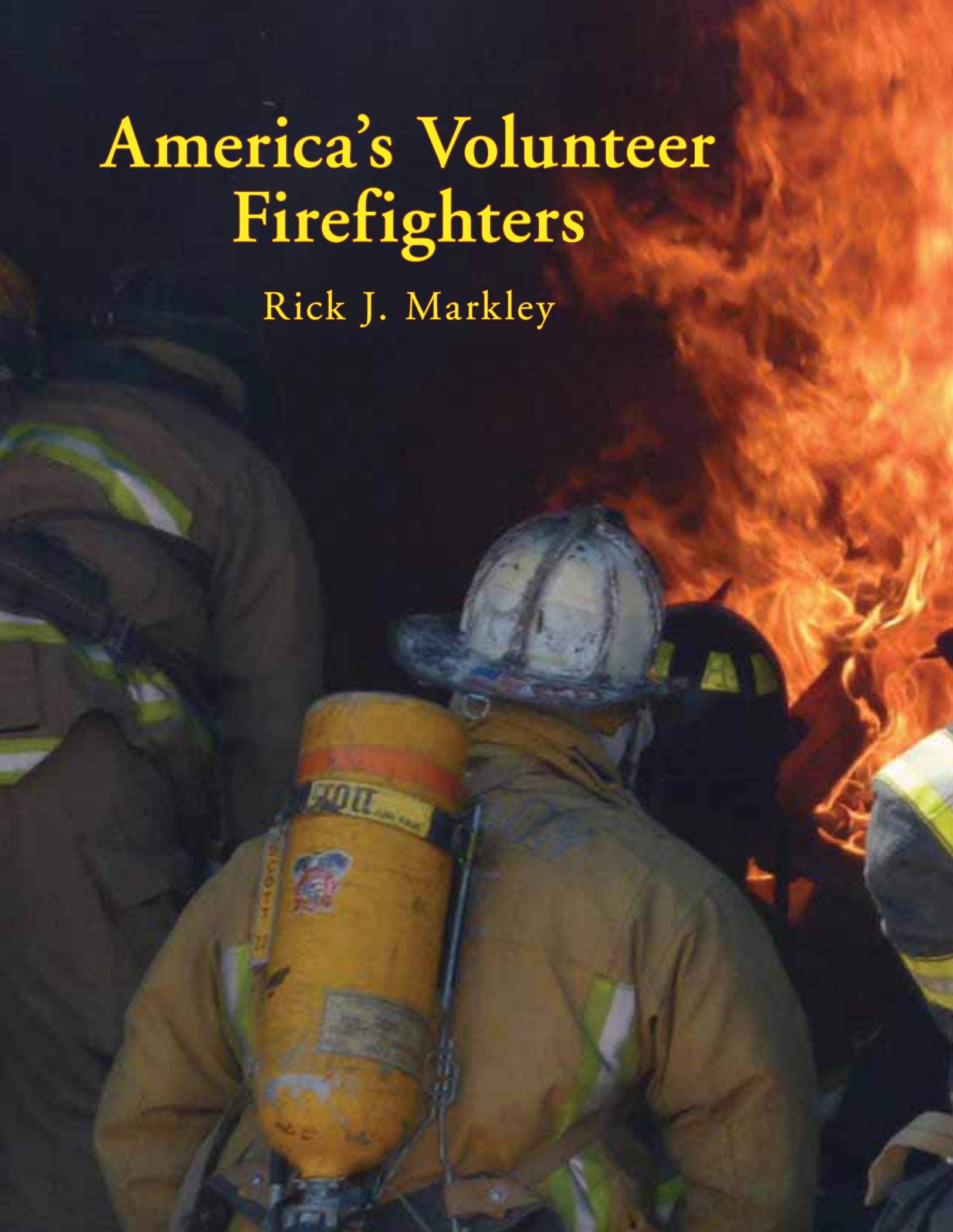
Three and a half centuries later, volunteerism imbues American society. Volunteering, because it is so pervasive, often goes unrecognized. Most Americans probably never contemplate the role of volunteerism in their day-to-day lives and never ask themselves:

- Who donates blood?
- Who runs the parent-teacher organizations in schools?
- Who works to preserve historical landmarks?
- Who passes out political campaign leaflets and registers citizens to vote?
- Who uses ham radios to relay calls for help?
- Who leads 4-H Clubs? Scout troops? Youth sports teams?
- Who blogs, tweets, and uses other forms of social media to advocate for change?

This list only skims the surface, but it illustrates the diversity of volunteer activities in which Americans engage.

America's Volunteer Firefighters

Rick J. Markley



courtesy of Philip Stittleburg



Volunteer firefighters do more than put out fires. They also provide emergency medical treatment, as the La Farge volunteers, above, are doing for a driver who has rolled and crashed his truck.

La Farge, Wisconsin — It’s 2 a.m. and you’re shaken from a deep sleep by a loud tone, then rapid beeping. This is followed by a voice crackling through the radio at the side of your bed saying, “Fire department requested. Fire department requested.” As an unpaid volunteer, you answer the call.

This scene in La Farge, or one very much like it, plays out every night in countless communities across America. That’s because more than 85 percent of fire departments in the United States are staffed either fully or partially by volunteers. These volunteers, nearly 1 million in all, come from all walks of life, sacrifice time with their families and even their sleep to respond to a range of emergencies: rescuing victims trapped in automobiles or buildings, containing hazardous materials and battling fires. These men and women are part of a tradition that pre-dates U.S. independence.

ROOTS OF VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTING

Benjamin Franklin was a noted inventor, writer and diplomat. What’s less well known is that Franklin organized the first volunteer fire brigade 40 years before the 13 American colonies declared their independence and became the United States of America. During a trip to Boston, Franklin noticed how much better prepared the city was for fighting fires than was Philadelphia — the city he called home. When he returned to Philadelphia, Franklin organized the Union Fire Company in 1736. The idea of volunteer fire brigades grew in popularity and similar groups were formed in other American colonies.

The early American volunteer firefighters tended to be financially successful and civic-minded. Their personal prosperity was important because the volunteers had to provide all of their own firefighting equipment.

Much has changed since then. Large U.S. cities, like Boston and Philadelphia, now have departments staffed with full-time career firefighters, but away from the cities, most U.S. suburban and rural communities are still protected by volunteer firefighters.

COMMUNITY FIREFIGHTING: AN AMERICAN TRADITION

La Farge is a small town in southwest Wisconsin. As fire chief, Philip Stittleburg oversees a crew of 30 volunteer firefighters, who hold full-time jobs as farmers, managers, factory workers and business owners. The volunteer department has one fire station and protects 2,750 residents spread across 135 square miles (350 square kilometers). They respond to about 50 emergencies per year; vehicle collisions and fires make up the bulk of their calls.

Stittleburg said the fire department has the same number of volunteers and responds to about the same number of calls as it did when he joined 38 years ago.



courtesy of Philip Stittleburg

Chief Philip Stittleburg began driving fire trucks when he was in law school in 1972. Lawyering and fire fighting have been his life’s pursuits since then.



courtesy of Philip Stittleburg

La Farge firefighters direct a helicopter to land in a snowy field to transport a highway accident victim to a hospital.

activities like raffles and selling calendars, the La Farge volunteers raise as much as \$10,000 per year — 10 percent of the company’s annual budget — to buy additional fire and rescue equipment.

The federal government also plays a role in helping volunteer fire departments by issuing annual grants. When applying for a federal grant, a department must show that the equipment, such as a fire truck, is needed and also must commit to providing some of the money for the purchase. Stittleburg says he’s used such grants to buy fire trucks for La Farge. But even with the grants, many volunteer fire departments keep their vehicles running a long time.

“When I got here in 1972, we had two trucks: one was a 1957 International that was our first-line engine and the other was a 1939 Dodge,” Stittleburg said. Shortly after he became chief, Stittleburg’s department bought a 1972 fire engine. “Now, my second-line engine is that 1972 International; it’s older now than the 1939

was when I joined.” And that 1939 Dodge? It has been fully restored and is used as a showpiece in parades.

Ben Franklin, volunteer firefighter and diplomat, would be proud. ■

Rick Markley volunteers as the media manager for the International Fire Relief Mission, which provides used fire and emergency services gear and training to developing countries. He is a volunteer firefighter and the former editor of Fire Chief magazine.

Fighting Fires Beyond U.S. Borders



Ron Gruening/IFRM

The International Fire Relief Mission ships donated equipment to fire departments in foreign countries. A plumber in North Branch, Minnesota, donates the warehouse space to store the equipment before it is shipped.



Rick Marley/IFRM

Ron Gruening, left, teaches Honduran firefighters on Roatan Island how to strap on a breathing-air pack so they can enter a burning building.

Americans' volunteerism in fighting fires extends beyond the borders of the United States. Several U.S. nonprofit groups donate equipment and provide training to firefighters in developing countries. One such group is the International Fire Relief Mission (IFRM), whose volunteers often spend their own money to help firefighters overseas.

“When American fire departments buy new equipment, the gear that they replace still has a lot of life in it,” said Ron Gruening, who is IFRM’s president and a volunteer firefighter. “We send it to needy fire departments around the world, where it will keep those firefighters safer

and help them protect their citizens. We also spend time in those countries training their firefighters how to use the equipment and giving them basic firefighting instruction.”

In February 2010, the IFRM team delivered equipment and training to the Honduran island of Roatán. There, IFRM found a young, dedicated group of firefighters using mismatched, badly worn protective clothing. The Roatán firefighters were in for a treat.

“We were fortunate to have come across a protective-clothing distributor who had a supply of never-used gear,” Gruening says. “It was in perfect condition; we had to cut the tags off. It was available because U.S. standards are improved every few years, and this gear did not meet the new standard. The distributor was not allowed to sell it to U.S. fire departments, yet through his donation to IFRM, he was able to protect those Honduran firefighters.”

IFRM focuses on helping fire departments with chronic funding problems. However, after a massive earthquake in Chile destroyed several fire stations in February 2010, the IFRM team sent out an urgent plea for help to U.S. fire departments. They were able to quickly collect, package, and ship gear to help restock Chile’s fire departments. ■

Photo right: Citizens of Yucca Valley, California, express appreciation for their firefighters.

©AP Images/Reed Saxon





Bernard Jones, standing, leads a monthly meeting of the Alexandria, Virginia, Grandfathers and their protégés.

NaVonté rushes into an old townhouse in Alexandria, Virginia. His brother DeShaun hurries in behind him. A few other African-American boys follow. They get hearty welcomes from Bernard Jones and several other African-American men inside. It is the first Saturday of the month, and Jones is hosting a meeting of the Grandfathers Group. Today's topic is career planning.

Sponsored by the Northern Virginia Urban League, the Grandfathers Group aims to promote the development of African-American boys ages 9 to 12 whose fathers are absent from the home. The Urban League, founded in 1910, helps African Americans to secure civil rights and become economically self-reliant.

The boys who join the Grandfathers Group are matched with African-American males, usually age 50 or older, to build one-on-one relationships based on trust. The Grandfathers offer their life experiences, knowledge, instincts and abilities to positively shape the character of African-American boys.

Since the program began in 1998, the Grandfathers have mentored 150 boys in Northern Virginia. Similar programs help boys in other urban areas of the United States. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, only 35 percent of African-American children in the United States live with two parents, compared to 78 percent of white, non-Hispanic children. Federal research shows that

fatherless children are twice as likely to drop out of school and are at a greater risk of getting involved in crime or alcohol abuse than children of two-parent households. The Grandfathers Group aims to help boys who are growing up fatherless to avoid these consequences.

"It's good for African-American boys to meet African-American professionals outside their families and to see that they are responsible adults and good citizens," said Veronica Dean, NaVonté and DeShaun's mother. "My sons have little interaction with adult males, and the ones that they do come into contact with are typically not African American."

Veronica says her sons' perceptions of African-American men are tainted by TV shows in which they are often portrayed as homeless or as people involved with illegal drugs or crime.

The Alexandria, Virginia, couple James and Laverne Chatman created the Grandfathers Group in 1998. James, now deceased, understood the needs of fatherless boys firsthand because of his youth in a fatherless home. But his uncle helped him learn all that a father would have taught: how to fish, how to knot a tie, and how to be a gentleman. James, who was a successful businessman, wanted other fatherless boys to benefit from surrogates.

Tony Martin, 52 years old, has been a mentor for two years in Alexandria. He is matched with Ronald Clark, 12. "He's unique," Tony said. "I have great



**Partners In Health:
Listening Builds a Community**
Lisa Armstrong



©Partners In Health

PIH's American and Haitian volunteers worked side-by-side treating victims of the 2010 earthquake.

Within hours after the January 12, 2010, earthquake in Haiti, people of Partners In Health (PIH) started to arrive in Port au Prince to care for injured people caught in the rubble of collapsed buildings. First, the organization's Haitian doctors and staff arrived from towns around the country, including Cange, where Zanmi Lasante ("Partners In Health" in Haitian Creole) is headquartered.

In the first six months after the earthquake, 733 PIH volunteers from 26 U.S. states and six countries worked in Haiti. They set limbs, delivered babies, and treated tuberculosis, malaria and other illnesses. In tent city hospitals and makeshift clinics, Haitian and American doctors and nurses worked side by side.

PIH has provided health care in Haiti for more than 20 years, primarily in rural parts of the country. Today, the staff also are working in the camps that house more than 1 million displaced Haitians. Under green tents, in the blazing sun, they inoculate, offer prenatal checkups and treat basic ailments. "We were at some point seeing

5,000 to 7,000 people a week, and have seen over 100,000 people at the camps," said PIH's Donna Barry.

"Our goal was not to 'Americanize' our surroundings, but to augment the system in place during the emergency response," says Ed Arndt, a nurse practitioner at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, in a PIH blog post he wrote about his experience. "We were all there to provide direct care and emotional support to our patients."

SOLIDARITY: THE KEY TO SUCCESS

The notion of solidarity sets Partners In Health apart from many other charitable organizations. Their efforts have succeeded because they respect and listen to what the people in the impoverished communities want, rather than telling them what they need.

"One thing that was obvious, even in the 1980s, was that Haiti was a veritable graveyard of development projects, with lots of externally imposed programs," said Dr. Paul Farmer, who co-founded Zanmi Lasante with Haitian

to medical treatment. “We could have given people all the medicine in the world, but if they were going home to a place with no roof or access to water or food, they were going to die,” Dahl said. Today, children vaccinated through PIH efforts 20 years ago are healthy adults. Unlike most of their parents, they have had access to education, adequate diets and medical care.

Even after the 2010 earthquake, PIH has worked to provide more than emergency medical care.

“We’ve increased agricultural outputs,” Barry said. “We have a farm near Cange, and they immediately got to work growing corn crops, knowing that food needs would be high, as displaced people had moved out to the Central Plateau.” Working with Zanmi Agrikol (Haitian Creole for “Partners in Agriculture”), PIH ramped up production of Nourimanba, a peanut-based food, to fight malnutrition, and provided farming tools to more than 1,000 families.

Today, PIH staff and volunteers view their work in much the same way that Dahl and Farmer did when they were setting up the first clinic in Cange.

“Going to Haiti is extremely daunting, and it was very daunting back then,” Dahl said. “But the key is to focus on a small area where you can help, rather than saying ‘I am going to combat poverty’ or ‘reforest the whole of Haiti.’ It is about looking at long-term prospects, making partnerships and allegiances, and working together, through thick and thin.” ■

Lisa Armstrong is a freelance writer who reported on the aftermath of the Haitian earthquake for the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting.



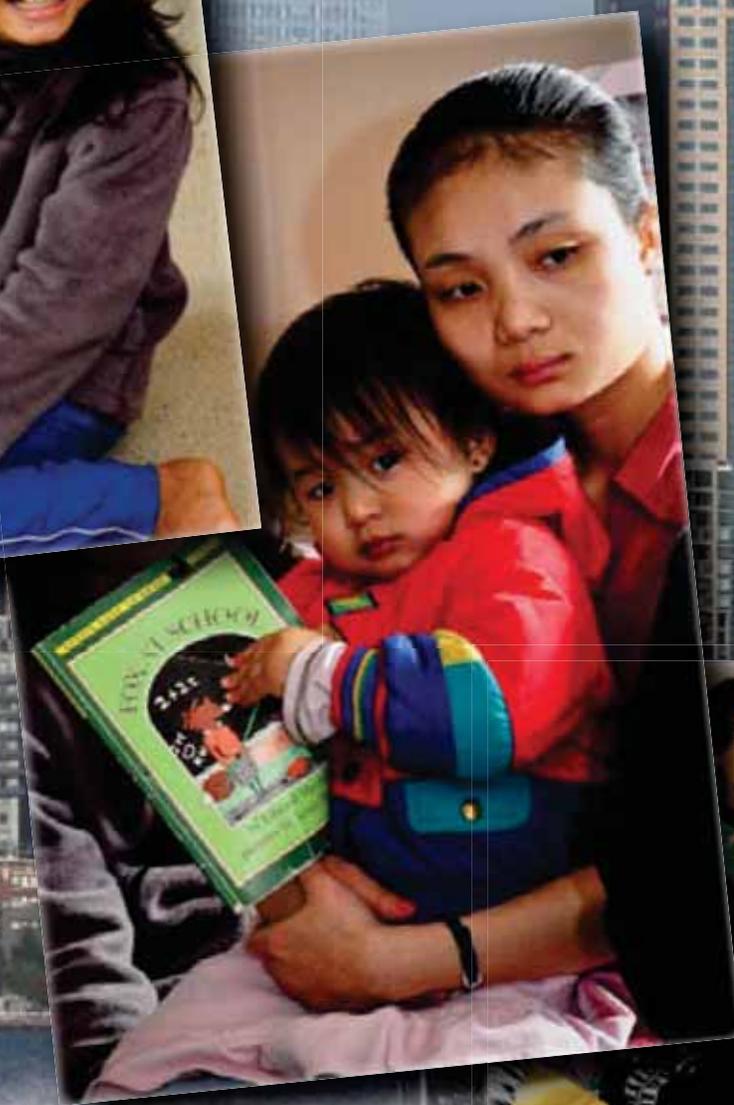
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Ophelia Dahl, co-founder of Partners In Health, listens to a Haitian woman stricken by the 2010 earthquake. Listening to local concerns is the key to the success of Partners In Health.

Photo Right: Haitian women sort peanuts to prepare *nourimanba*, a highly nutritious food. PIH helped Haitian farmers launch peanut cultivation and *nourimanba* production.

Resettling in Seattle

Charlotte West



People who fled conflict in their homelands find new lives in Seattle with the help of volunteers from the International Refugee Committee.



photograph by Jonathan Dodds

Jared Meyers, second from left, and Reyna Swift, right, visit with the Liana family to help the new arrivals from Burma adjust to life in Seattle.

Six women sit around a table littered with sticky notes and pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that fit together into a map of the United States. Jennica Prescott, a volunteer with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), walks around the room asking if they can find Washington state on the map. They laugh as one of them tries to put Utah on the East Coast.

The IRC has been helping these women and their families from Bhutan to resettle in the Pacific Northwest. “It’s amazing to hear the paths of how they got here. The goal of the organization is to help refugees become self-sufficient,” Prescott says.

Founded in 1933, the IRC today works in 22 American cities, resettling refugees, and in more than 40 countries, places like Sudan, Ethiopia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Burma, providing emergency assistance, education and health services. In 2010, the organization helped resettle 9,600 refugees in the U.S. and provided services to 24,500 refugees, asylum seekers and victims of human trafficking abroad.

The IRC office in Seattle has helped more than 18,000 refugees from more than 30 countries to resettle in the Puget Sound area since 1976. The majority of their clients come from Bhutan and Burma, with smaller groups from Somalia, Eritrea and Iraq.

Most of the IRC’s work in Seattle is carried out by about 200 volunteers who work on the administrative side as well as directly with refugees.

Volunteers become refugee mentors through the Friend of the Family program. Volunteers are paired with

families and meet with them weekly to help them adjust. They teach the families to use public transportation and help them practice English. Others teach classes on how to get a job or help young people deal with school.

The IRC volunteers span the age spectrum from college students and recent graduates to mid-career professionals and retirees. All are motivated by a desire to give back to society.

“I had been looking for ways to be involved in the community since I moved to Seattle. I really wanted to work with minority communities, especially those that were new to the U.S. because I missed having the cultural exchange that I had during the Peace Corps and other travels abroad,” says Tilden Keller, a former Peace Corps volunteer in Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Keller mentors two families, one from Burma and the other from Eritrea. The Meh family of seven, part of the Karenni tribe of Burma, came to Seattle about a year and a half ago. They were farmers in their homeland before spending 10 years in a refugee camp in Thailand.

Keller says her relationship with the Mehs has evolved since she began working with them. In the beginning, she helped them with practical matters like hooking up the electricity for their apartment and setting up a bank account. Now she spends a lot of time just “hanging out” with them. On one particular visit she sits in their living room playing a game that resembles jacks.

Keller has a vivid memory of going to the local zoo, Woodland Park, with the Mehs. “When we got to the ‘Thai village,’ their eyes all lit up. The kids ran around

Beyond Profit: IBM's Volunteers

By Kathryn McConnell

IBM's corporate volunteers are introducing new technologies that will shape Indonesia's future.

courtesy of Janice Fratamico, IBM Corporate Service Corps



courtesy of Mathian Osicki & Lisa Lanspery, IBM Corporate Communications

Computer technology skills taught by IBM volunteers have boosted the effectiveness of health education in Nigeria. Here, a health educator conducts a workshop in Nigeria's Cross River State for a class of attentive students, except for the little one on the back row.

Work in the private sector means more than helping a company turn a profit. It means contributing to communities.

That's why in 2008 computer giant International Business Machines Corp. (IBM) started its Corporate Service Corps linking its employees to governments and nonprofit organizations in developing countries. It is part of a new era of international volunteerism.

Based in Armonk, New York, IBM spends \$60 million a year on the corps. "It's at the intersection of technology, economic development and job creation," said Stanley Litow, IBM's vice president of corporate citizenship. Since the program began, IBM has sent some 1,400 of its employees to work on projects in about 50 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Litow said that's more than any other company doing pro bono work in the developing world.

The Corporate Service Corps enables IBM to identify and train its next generation of skilled leaders while helping developing nations solve pressing problems, Litow said. "This is a model that increasingly other companies will be emulating."

The program offers a triple benefit, Litow said: technical assistance for the communities it serves, a chance for employees to hone their leadership and technical skills, and inroads for new markets.

Teams consisting of six to 12 employees with skills in technology, science, marketing, finance or business development immerse themselves in places like Cross River State, Nigeria; Chiang Mai, Thailand; and Johannesburg for up to one month while developing solutions to local challenges. "They are providing those skills to make a real difference," Litow said.



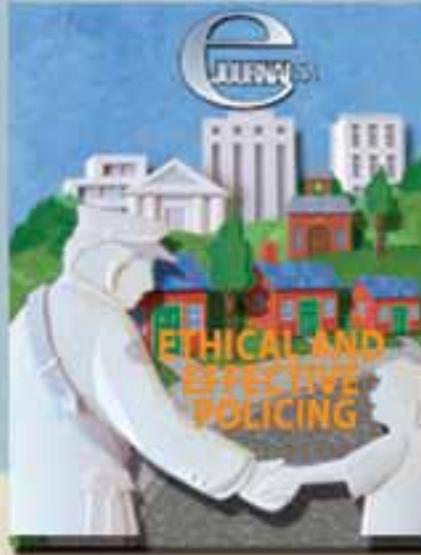
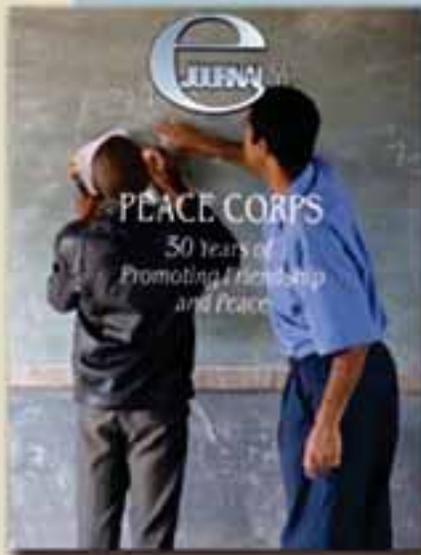
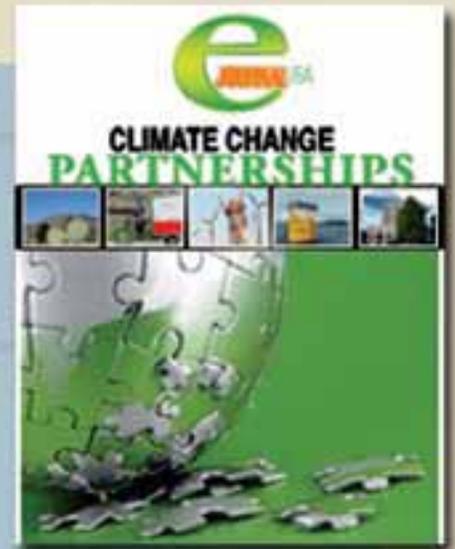
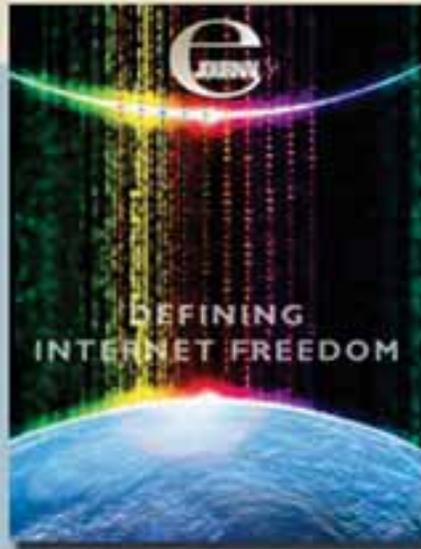
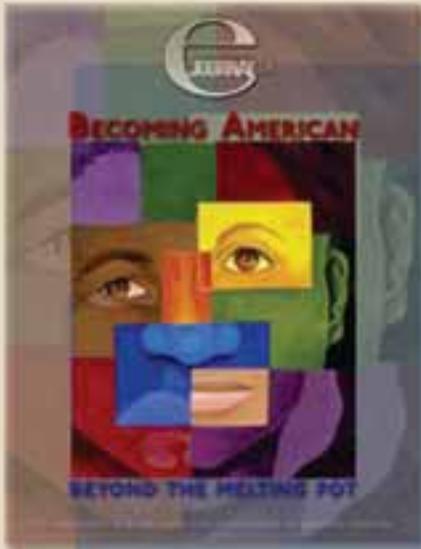
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A desire to share knowledge with strangers from distant lands animates many American volunteers. Many U.S. senior citizens volunteer as tutors and mentors to schoolchildren.



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