

## Volunteering — when you give, you get

I've always believed that volunteering should be an important part of everyone's life.

With more leisure time in our senior years, volunteering is not only an opportunity to do something useful and fulfilling, it is, I think, an obligation we owe to society. But if your volunteer work is going to be truly rewarding, both to you and to others, it must be something you really enjoy doing.

Lisa Sellman, a professional dog trainer and author, has volunteered over time with 16 different organizations and has developed some suggestions on how to choose the right volunteer opportunity.

She feels that many people get roped into volunteering for an organization because their boss is involved with a charity or a family member is working on a community project. That's fine, but only if the project is a match for your personal interests.

The most important aspect to volunteering is to find what you love and direct your energies into a charity or organization that matches those passions. If you are an animal lover, work with a wildlife rescue mission or animal shelter. If you are a nature buff, there are plenty of environmental foundations that can use an extra set of hands.

If sports is your thing, community recreation centers need coaches for needy kids.

Already covered in this



JEAN CHERNI

SENIOR  
MOMENTS

column have been articles about helping others hone their reading skills, recording books for the blind, driving those who no longer can drive themselves and helping to raise funds for a favorite cause or charity.

No matter your interest, you can match it to a cause

that needs help. Sellman also advises that it is important to watch your schedule. While you want your passion to direct your choice of project, you don't want those volunteer projects to rule your schedule.

Make sure you balance your time carefully so the rest of your life and family time doesn't take a critical hit.

Most organizations will take as much time as you offer them, and the most rewarding work usually takes more of a time commitment. But even if you only have an hour or two each week, they can use that, too. It is also important to have fun.

Helping others is its own reward, but it shouldn't feel like a chore. If you're not enjoying your volunteer work, you need to ask yourself why. Is it the tasks you are performing, or the people you are working with, or is it just because the situation is new and unfamiliar? Knowing what is bothering you can help in deciding how to proceed.

Following are some suggestions to help in finding the right volunteer opportunity:

■ Would you like to learn something new or

develop a skill?

■ Would you like to work with others or on your own?

■ Are you better behind the scenes, or do you like a visible role?

■ How much time can you commit?

■ How much responsibility are you ready to take on?

■ What skills can you bring to a volunteer job?

■ What causes are important to you?

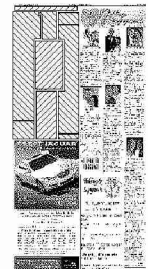
Visit different organizations and get a feel for what they are like. Ask lots of questions. Sometimes you need to try a few before finding the one that really suits you.

Some helpful websites include [www.volunteer-match.org](http://www.volunteer-match.org) (put in your zip code and skills and up comes opportunities in your area), [www.getinvolved.gov/](http://www.getinvolved.gov/) and [www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org).

As we go to press, AARP just announced it is joining forces with Experience Corps, a highly regarded program that engages older adult volunteers to help improve K-3 literacy in underserved schools. Information at [www.aarp.org/experiencecorps](http://www.aarp.org/experiencecorps).

And do write and let me know if you find your perfect "match."

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Contact Jean Cherni, certified senior adviser for Senior Living Solutions and Pearce Plus, a helpful, full-service program for seniors contemplating a move,



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**Lisa Sellman** recommends volunteers  
find an organization that truly matches  
their interests.