

# Day of Caring: A community effort

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PORTSMOUTH -- Nearly 1,000 people from 35 companies in the Seacoast ditched their blackberries and suits and traded them in for a shovel and blue jeans on Wednesday, as part of the United Way's 18th Annual Day of Caring.

The workers were distributed among 50 community-based nonprofits in the region, carrying out 120 different projects, from cleaning and landscaping to bringing elderly people to see butterflies. The Day of Caring is a community-wide day of hands-on volunteering in which the United Way connects volunteers from local businesses and community groups with local organizations to work on various one-time projects that would not otherwise be completed.



Tim Horan of Liberty Mutual works with others to demolish an old shed and clean up debris on a trail behind Chase

More than 360 of volunteers came from one of the region's largest employers, Liberty Mutual, which had employees at 45 projects throughout the region. Approximately 25 employees went to the Chase Home for Children, which has served as a refuge for children in distress in the greater Portsmouth area for 132 years.

"They really encourage us to get out and do this and give back to community. It's a great for me because I live in Portsmouth and I get to give back to my community," said Sally Fletcher, a business analyst at Liberty Mutual. "Usually we'd be sitting at our desk in our cubicles at a computer and we love being outdoors ... so this is great."

Business analysts teamed with workers at the home, as well as the children living there, to spruce up the entryway to the school, perform landscaping and clear debris off the walking trail behind the home. Home Director Katy McDermott said the trail is a key part of the programming at the home, but it has been cluttered since the ice storm last December. The dedication of the volunteers to get the work done was overwhelming, she said.

"If we had to bring a landscaping company with 25 workers in, this would be thousands of dollars. There's no way we could do that," said McDermott. "It never ceases to amaze me the generosity of the people in the greater Portsmouth community. They are constantly reaching out to us. We don't go after them; they come to us. It's just amazing."

Lee resident Jason Shattuck, also a business analyst at Liberty Mutual, said the Day of Caring is a great way for the employees to work outside of the office and meet other people in the company they would not normally see on a day to day basis. In addition, the day often becomes a gift that keep on giving, he said.

"We've found that sometimes after these events, it leads people to volunteer in their own time and they come back to these places," said Shattuck. "So it works out really well for everybody."

Bottomline Technologies sent 34 volunteers to spruce up the Seacoast Family YMCA in Portsmouth; 33 volunteers from Lonza Biologics worked on various projects at the Rochester School Department, Dover Children's Home, Learning Skills Academy in Rye, the NHSPCA in Stratham, and the Community Child Center of Portsmouth; 28 volunteers from Public Service of New Hampshire worked on projects at the Farmington Child Care Center, the Rollinsford Public Library and **The Housing Partnership in Portsmouth**; and 28 volunteers from Newmarket International will be taking elders to see

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the Butterfly Garden at York Wild Kingdom Animal Adventure, as well as cleaning and landscaping at the Dover Children's Home, the Farmington Child Care Center and the Urban Forestry Center in Portsmouth.



Nick Pereira of Liberty Mutual paints the fence at the John Paul Jones House in Portsmouth as others split the garden and prepare for the upcoming plant sale to raise money for the historic home as part of the United Way's Day of Caring Wednesday, Sept. 9, 2009.

Volunteers have become increasingly important as human service organizations try to save money under rising costs of operating and a growing community need, according to Robin Albert, director of the volunteer action center at United Way of the Greater Seacoast.

"What's special about Day of Caring is the size and scope of the volunteer effort," said Albert. "Today, 1,000 people (brought) their energy and commitment to the community-based organizations and programs of our region, providing a clear signal, especially in these challenging economic times, that we are all part of one community focused on advancing the common good."