

VOLUNTEERS FROM FIVE-COUNTY REGION

PART OF A COMMUNITY



LAURYN LONGACRE/STAFF PHOTO

From left, Raina Read-Clark and mother Hannah Read assist in the garden at the Public Library for Union County while volunteering during the Susquehanna Valley United Way's Day of Action on Friday.

Nonprofits benefit from United Way Day of Action

**BY LAURYN LONGACRE
AND MACKENZIE WITT**
THE WEEKENDER

More than 260 volunteers from across the five-county region rolled up their sleeves to assist 31 nonprofit organizations Friday during the Susquehanna Valley United Way Day of Action.

"I think having a Day of Action is important because it reminds us that we are all a part of a community," said Danielle Velkoff, senior director of marketing and communications at the Susquehanna Valley United Way.

The United Way enlisted volunteers from businesses from across the region to give their time to nonprofits in need of assistance with a variety of projects. The work was carried out in Union, Northumberland, Snyder, Montour and Columbia counties.



MACKENZIE WITT/STAFF PHOTO

Shamokin Area High School softball players Nina Wilk, left, and Elizabeth Nye hammer an iron post into the ground to hang a sign about the Mrs. Meyers Clean Day grant acquired to fund a community garden on South Franklin Street. The students volunteered to aid the Shamokin Community Garden as part of the United Way Day of Action initiative.

Nonprofits

FROM PAGE A1

In Shamokin, volunteers from UGI Corporation and Shamokin Area High School softball team members aided Shamokin Community Gardens members in putting the finishing touches on the South Franklin Street garden.

The volunteers installed gutters on a tool shed, as well as a rain barrel, framing posts for the lattice fencing, bicycle rims along the perimeter of the pollination garden and a hand-painted welcome sign for the garden.

The garden, located near 244 S. Franklin St., also features 10 community planting beds for flowers or vegetables, a shed for tools and supplies, a seating area, a pollination garden with native plants, and fencing along the edge of the property nearest to the Shamokin Creek.

Once finished, the group spruced up other community gardens on Sunbury Street and Claude Kehler Memorial Park on Arch Street.

“We’re a very small core of older volunteers,” said Jeanie Cowl, vice president of the Shamokin Community Gardens. “We don’t get external help often. Every once in a while out of the blue, we get a donation or gift cards, but this is full force. ... This is fantastic.”

In Lewisburg, Children’s Museum Executive Director Mary Beth Harris said she was thrilled to welcome volunteers to help with sprucing up various areas of the museum, both inside and out.

At the Lewisburg YMCA at the Miller Center, volunteers from McCann School of Business and Technology worked with 10 YMCA staff members to clean the facility.

Greater Susquehanna Valley YMCA CEO Bonnie McDowell said the volunteers inside emptied the storage closet of its vast array of youth sports equipment.

After clearing the space, the volunteers cleaned the area before sorting through the items to discard broken ones. Once finished, volunteers cleaned furniture inside the facility with upholstery cleaner.

“The support is really nice. To know that... the United Way really sees the importance of this and how it is going to help all the nonprofits today, all the agencies are going to get so much support that we need,” McDowell said. “There’s projects that happen today... that just wouldn’t get done without this extra help.”

McDowell noted that the YMCA’s staff is limited, just as it is for most nonprofits. Volunteers help accomplish things that otherwise might never have been done.

Outside, Lewisburg YMCA Associate Executive Director Kyle Snyder and McCann instructor Dawn Raynes washed off 160 outdoor chairs with a pressure washer and picked up litter from the premises.

“It feels great to help the community, especially here,” Raynes said. “The Y is a great resource for the area.”

UGI Community Relations Manager Lori Hoffman, at the Shamokin garden, said it was her first time volunteering for the Susquehanna Valley United Way’s Day of Action. Previously, though, she volunteered through other branches of the United Way in Berks County, Lancaster, the Poconos and the Lehigh Valley.

She said Katie Shiko, an operations manager at UGI, has been awesome in coordinating with the Susquehanna Valley United Way for volunteer opportunities.

“This is a great way to get to know other areas in Pennsylvania and meet other volunteers and employees,” Hoffman said. “I enjoy giving back to the community and making a difference.”

Shamokin Area High

School softball players Nina Wilk and Elizabeth Nye were recruited to aid in the effort to complete the South Franklin Street community garden.

“We heard and knew about it,” Wilk said. “We love helping the community.”

She held iron posts steady as Nye hammered them into the ground, which would be used to hang an informational sign about the source of the garden’s grant funding.

The Shamokin Community Gardens was awarded a \$20,000 Lots of Compassion grant from Mrs. Meyers Clean Day and Kids Gardening and a \$2,000 Joseph Robert Foundation last year, which were used to transform the vacated plot of land into the garden.

With their final tasks completed, the community garden will officially open to the public on May 19.

Back in the Lewisburg area, volunteers from the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit (CSIU) and Bowen Agency Realtors helped to spread mulch outside of the Public Library for Union County.

Don Adams, a volunteer at the library, said having the extra volunteers there to help was wonderful.

“We got a tremendous amount done in a short time,” Adams said. “It’s also an opportunity to share our philosophy of gardening, which is focusing around native (species) and pollinators. It’s just a wonderful group of workers. What they’re doing in a single day would have taken me eight days, easily.”

Volunteers from Evangelical Community Hospital gathered outside the Donald Heiter Community Center (DHCC) to pull weeds, plant seeds, and break down a splintered wooden bench.

“Giving back to the community is really important to us, and when the United Way reached out and had these opportunities for us,

we immediately had volunteers that wanted to help today,” said Angi Lahr, vice president of clinical operations at Evangelical.

Lahr swept dirt from the DHCC porch while fellow volunteers Kate Sheesley, Alicia Brosius, Melissa Lutz, Desiree Powell and Matt Saylor worked on various projects around the building.

DHCC Executive Director Andrea Tufo found the day of community assistance to be “greatly impactful.”

Tufo explained that the DHCC staff consists of only three members, which makes it difficult to commit to side projects such as gardening.

Kids who attend the center have expressed their desire to plant their own vegetables and make salsa in the summer.

“What they’re doing is so important and vital to the kids who come here who want to have pride in what we do,” Tufo said. “We’re just so excited that (the volunteers) are here because they’re making it happen... They’re making one of our kids’ dreams come true.”

Tufo also touched on the sense of community and networking that the Day of Action promotes. She and Velkoff highlighted the saying, “Many hands make for light work.”

Velkoff thanked all volunteers who assisted in the Day of Action “through their generosity.”

Cowl, of the Shamokin Community Gardens, said the group’s next plan of action is to use a \$20,000 grant from the Degenstein

Foundation to progress in refurbishing the Sunbury Street community garden, which is located across the street from Dunkin Donuts. She said they’d like to install a new retaining wall leading up to the second level of the garden and a staircase.

More information can be found on the Shamokin Community Garden’s Facebook page.