

Illinois Pride

Speak Out!

THE VALUE OF SERVICE CLUBS

By Michael C. Maibach – Peoria Jaycees

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We read and hear about such occurrences every day “Lions Club Builds a Hospital for the Blind.” “Area Student Studies in Germany on a Rotary Scholarship.” “Methodist Church Group Aids Flood Victims.” “Kewanis Forum Hosts Debate on Free Enterprise System.” “College Fraternity Puts On Musical For Senior Citizens.”

For as long as there has been an America, there have been private, local, civic, and religious groups who quietly go about their good work. And when you and I learn of their efforts we naturally applaud them.

Yet it is probably fair to say that we rarely ponder the deeper and more fundamental contribution that such groups of individuals render to our communities, and thus, to the fabric of our nation. Moreover, even the members of such organizations most probably do not conceive the significance that their vital efforts hold. And so it is especially fitting in our Bicentennial year to examine briefly the essence of the gift that the Masons and Eagles, Salvation Armies, Scouts and YMCA’s, Optimists and Altrusians... Leagues of Women Voters and Shriners give each day to the success story that is the American democratic society.

They foster friendship, family unity, and community spirit. Civic and religious groups bring together members and their families for constructive and enjoyable activities: a Farm Bureau corn boil, a League of Women Voters voter registration drive, a Jaycee Junior Olympics. They bring together people who might otherwise spend that time alone in front of a TV- or just alone. And they acknowledge and honor the outstanding achievements of their neighbors: DAR “Good Citizenship” Award, B’nai Brith “Man of the Year,” Jaycee “Outstanding Educator” Award. Such recognition encourages others to achieve and inspires young people who today seem to have a dearth of idols.

They expand people’s horizons and teach tolerance. Benjamin Disraeli said that travel teaches tolerance. Meeting new friends from other walks of life is a form of social travel and suddenly opens people to new ideas and world views. Local Rotary clubs sponsor study and travel abroad for young people from their area who otherwise might never have the opportunity to leave our shores.

They mold civic- minded individuals. Almost all community organizations have high ideals and tangible social goals. Involvement in these goals takes each member’s attention away from his/her

own problems and career and re- focuses that attention on a local problem or issue. When the Lions sell candy for the blind and the local church group collects money and food for an African mission, members learn the precious lessons of empathy and giving. Members also gain a better perspective of their local government bodies and the potential of their community.

They develop character. Whether the group is the Exchange Club, the Scouts, Sertoma, or the area bar association, they adopt programs that require responsible group execution and individual leadership. People learn to work with each other; they learn how to fail as well as to succeed.

They serve the needs of fellow human beings. A tornado hits, the Red Cross and Sheriff's Auxiliary are there. A fire guts a couple's home and a Catholic women's organization begins sewing them new clothes while the 4-H club builds them a new home. A personal tragedy visits a family and fellow group members become that family's "extra" friends if needed.

They allow people to make a difference. As society grows more complex and urban, as our government grows bigger and traditional neighborhoods dissolve, people too often feel powerless to shape their environment. Yet through positive group action, people can, and do make a dent, a difference in a real and seeable way. And that's important, especially in this time of widespread alienation and cynicism.

And they keep our taxes low, our government limited. By doing all the things church and civic groups do, by performing their quiet services so well, they chip away at the growing demands for government services. Parochial schools not only provide a real choice in the education of our children, they also ease the tax burden of homeowners. When the Shrines build a children's hospital, government doesn't have to. And most importantly, the services that these associations of people perform are not given in the form of a welfare check in the mail, nor are they given by a large government bureaucracy. Rather, they are given by people- people serving people, neighbor serving neighbor, family helping family. And not because it is the law. And not because they have to do it. These people give and they serve because they want to do it. And therein lies the beauty and the real worth of those marvelous civic and religious groups which enrich the communities across our land and give deep and lasting strength to the fabric of our democratic experiment. Such groups are the life blood of our American society. They are to be appreciated.

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