You wouldn’t think that someone wearing a blinking Christmas tree hat on her head would be an example of community giving in action. But that was exactly the case as Nancy Streeter Howes stood before the assembled Advancement department on December 4, using her wry good humor conducting their annual holiday auction to help benefit local charities. This year they were able to raise nearly $1700. In advance of the auction, the department voted that, this year, they would support the Sidney Smith Toy Fund, a local charity that distributes toys to needy children. Says Vice President for Advancement, Trish Jackson of the event, “Now in its second year, we in Advancement and the Alumnae Association are proud of our charity auction success. We were pleased to triple our total donation to the Sidney Smith Toy Fund from last year, and look forward to supporting either the same or other local charities in the years ahead. We also find the event a great opportunity for us to have fun, to pick up a few holiday gifts for others, and to contribute to good causes that help those in need within our own community.”
In years past, some of the volunteer activities which Smith employees have chosen for their Day of Service include a group project to join Habitat for Humanity in constructing a home for a low-income family, serving food to homeless citizens, cleaning local homeless facilities and delivering meals to people unable to leave their homes. Below are some personal ways in which Smith staff volunteer in their community.

Lou Bouley – Neilson Library

“As a member of the League of Women Voters for over 25 years, I’ve been on several study groups on topics as varied as county government, tax classification and health care. I have learned a great deal about politics, at the national, state and local level. I’ve served on the board of directors in various roles over the years. I enjoyed being part of the annual book sale, our only fund raiser. If anyone is interested in talking to me about the League, my extension is 2924. F.Y.I. Men have been members since 1974.”

Tobias Davis – School for Social Work

“I am a member of the Board of Directors of the Pioneer Arts Center of Easthampton (PACE). As a playwright, theater enthusiast, and amateur ballroom dancer, I was delighted to discover this gem of a community theater in downtown Easthampton. As a Board Member, I help shape the organization’s future and ensure its financial stability. I am most excited to spearhead a New Play Reading series featuring local writers. It is important to me that there be an open and welcoming space for community members to participate in all aspects of the theatrical process.”

Sandra Doucett – Advancement

“I am currently serving as a Board Member of the United Way of Hampshire County and as Chair of its Community Investment Committee. In that capacity, I am helping to lead the organization through a period of critical transition as we seek to build better partnerships with, and provide enhanced resources to, human services agencies from across the region. In my own life, I have experienced how quickly one’s circumstances can change and, at times, how much you need to rely on the support of your community. My work for the United Way, both as a board member and as a member of the Smith College United Way Steering Committee, helps me to feel that I am doing at least a small part to impact a wide range of services throughout Hampshire County.”

Sara E. Fisher – Controller’s Office

“For the past nine years, I have volunteered for the Girl Scouts of Western Mass. I spent several years as a troop leader at the Junior level (4th – 6th grade). For the past four years, I have been volunteering as a Brownie Scout leader (1st – 3rd grades). My troop meets at the Campus School on Thursdays after school (2:45 p.m.). I do not use Smith volunteer time for this. Instead, I have an arrangement in my department to work longer on some days so that I may leave early for Scouts. I love being a scout leader. The girls are so enthusiastic and open to learning and trying new things!”

Louise Krieger – Museum of Art

“I began working with Valley Light Opera (VLO) just after I graduated college in 1984, partially because I wanted to get back on stage and partially because I wanted to be part of a community that had more diversity in terms of gender and age. VLO is a phenomenal group that has grown both in the community and in my own life over the last 22 years. Every fall since 1975, VLO has performed light opera, primarily by Gilbert & Sullivan, and consumes the free time of some 150+ volunteers annually. Although the applause is great, what keeps me going back year after year are the bonds I’ve formed with people, and more recently, the opportunity to help train and engender the love of musical theatre in younger performers. As is often the case with volunteering, we work hard, but we always seem to get far more out of our participation!”
Marsha Leavitt – Advancement

“I volunteer with the Northampton Survival Center by helping them with their database and technology needs. Recently, I totally revamped the database that tracks their solicitations, donations, and thank you letters. It is quite satisfying to be able to use my skills to help. Most non-profits don't have the money to purchase current hardware and software even though it would help make their jobs much easier. I have used my Smith day for the last two or three years. I also donate a basket that I have made to their annual auction.”

Merrilyn Lewis – Advancement

“There are several volunteer roles that I enjoy which seem to overlap. I am a trained community mediator, a member of the Community Crisis Response Team (emotional support for traumatic incidents within a community, school, group, business, etc), and a member of a Restorative Probation board. At first glance these might not appear to share much in common, but they all play a role in creative, supportive, non-judgmental efforts in helping our community to move forward peacefully from conflict. Selfishly, I take tremendous satisfaction in volunteering, and since I am unable to do much about world peace, if I can make a difference in my own community, I find it gratifying.”

Jinny Mason – Neilson Library

“For nearly 20 years, my husband, myself and my kids all volunteer to cover the 4H Food Booth at the Franklin Country Fair. The five of us spend a happy Saturday morning in September dispensing hot dogs, chili, chocolate shakes and lots and lots of coffee and doughnuts from the 4H building in the Franklin County Fair Grounds. For many years my kids entered their arts, crafts and vegetables in the fair but now it is just a labor of love. It is a great feeling not only to be doing something useful but to be doing it all together. Since all my kids are grown and out of the house, this is one of the few activities we still do together and all enjoy. Besides raising money for 4H, we also meet lots of people we only see once a year. Some are regulars we don’t know outside of the fair and some are friends whose paths we cross less often than we might like. So we have a fun family outing while doing something useful.”

Kathryn Messier – Admission

“For the past two years, the office of admission has used a portion of their all-staff retreat to perform community service. Last year, we volunteered at Northampton High School, processing a mailing, washing windows, and sorting theater costumes and gym locker contents. This summer we volunteered at Look Park, hunting for lost golf balls on the mini-golf course and walking the park, cleaning up trash. Several years ago, the Admission office started collecting money at the holidays to help out Ada moms who found themselves financially challenged during the holidays. In December 2004, we ran an auction. Proceeds, along with donations from people who heard about the auction, were over $1500 and were used to help a lot of Ada moms via gift cards to Stop and Shop, CVS, etc. Other years, we have adopted families through one of the local charities, purchased and wrapped presents and delivered them. All of this has been done anonymously - the joy comes with doing something special for someone else.”

Scott Morin – Controller’s Office

“I volunteer at the Northampton chapter of Dollars for Scholars. This organization was started in the mid 1970’s, and its sole purpose is to raise money to give out as college scholarships to Northampton public school graduates. The 21-member board of trustees is all-volunteer. The only expenses we incur are for administration (postage, printing, etc), so over 90% of all funds raised in this organization are given out as scholarships. We do fundraising activities such as a pancake breakfast, local lore scavenger hunt, "Food for Thought" and annual fund drive. Last year we gave out over $45,000 in scholarships to needy college students, with an average scholarship of $500. I find it very rewarding knowing that I help support students in their decision to attend higher education institutions. I know first-hand how important and difficult the college experience can be. I'm proud to volunteer with an organization committed to providing financial support to needy students.”

Jan Morris – Registrar’s Office

“I volunteered for the Prison Book Project from 2000-2005. We mail donated paperback books to inmates in New England and Texas free of charge, who request them by letter. More recently, I’m in the process of compiling Needs Lists from area non-profits so I can direct people who have stuff to get rid of or who wish to donate. That’s my latest project which is to be named ‘Win-Win Waste’.”
Stories of Giving – continued...

Barbara E. Rejniak – Advancement

“From 1988 to 2002, I volunteered in various roles from fundraising, coordinating an annual fall festival, serving as a helper in school classrooms, scheduling volunteer parent workers in the Little League snack bar, serving on the boards of our local cooperative nursery school and our town's P.T.O., and filling in wherever help was needed in local school events and youth sports leagues. After a four-year break, I am now becoming more involved with my church, Immaculate Conception in Easthampton. I know from experience that having many hands help with any volunteer organization or event makes the process much easier and the organization stronger. A fringe benefit for me has been that I have made many friends I might otherwise not have known and I definitely feel a wonderful community connection. I do not take the Smith Day of Service since most of my activities occur after work hours and on weekends.”

Balbir Singh – Center for Early Childhood Education

“For the holidays I like to cook meals for some elderly people that I know. I feel great being helpful to those who need it. There was a time when they were young and did everything themselves and now they need our help, and it is my duty to do it for them and make their day. I wish I had more time to help others – the satisfaction and pleasure that I get from helping others is unexplainable.”

From the Chair
Making a Difference

I have been thinking a lot lately about Steve Szpila. Sadly, he passed away on November 26 at the age of 53 – after 28 years of service to Smith College. One of the last times I saw him was several weeks ago when he had started back to work after an extensive medical leave. He spoke about how happy he was to finally be back at work. He loved working here and, if you knew Steve, you would know how true that was. I will miss him and his boundless warmth and good humor.

It seems appropriate in this season of giving that this issue of the Staff Council Chronicle focuses on staff members who give one of the most precious gifts, their time. A gift of service to our community or a passionate cause is one that keeps on giving. There is a huge difference in my own attitude when I am doing something because someone is paying me and when I choose to do something because I believe in the work of the organization that I am serving. It’s great when the two are the same. Sometimes, working for Smith achieves both for me, other times I am not so sure.

For me, volunteering works best when I do so of my own free will – without coercion, guilt, or quid-pro-quo. Making that gift always gives me energy and makes me feel like I have ability to make a difference in my life. For me, I couldn’t ask for more than that as a reward.

So, to everyone who continues to volunteer despite all the reasons why not, keep up the good work. To those who have it on their to-do list, take the plunge. Carpe Diem. Seize the day.

Happy Holidays.

Sam Rush, Staff Council Chair

Did you know ...

that the Day of Service encourages each of Smith’s 1,200 employees to take one paid day off during the year to devote to service in the community, with an emphasis on volunteering for nonprofit organizations?

The idea of a Day of Service was proposed by Eve Forbes, then associate director of gift planning in advancement, and embraced by President Christ as it improves community relations, supports local organizations, promotes charitable giving and encourages staff to be involved in their communities.
How to Get Involved

The Service Organizations of Smith (S.O.S.) links students, staff and faculty to volunteer opportunities. There are staff-specific openings listed at http://www.smith.edu/sos/employees/employees.htm. The S.O.S. also has a terrific Directory of Projects and Internships at http://www.smith.edu/sos/directory.pdf, which provides general program information and a listing of approved local agencies and their respective contact people. If you’d like a paper copy of the directory, or would like to talk with someone about volunteer opportunities, stop by the S.O.S. offices at the Helen Hills Hills Chapel or call ext. 4595.

Examples of short-term project ideas:

- refurbishing local housing through Habitat for Humanity
- entertaining residents at nursing homes or local hospitals
- working at the Food Bank Farm or other community gardens
- painting a children's therapy room at a local agency
- participating in a community clean-up
- visiting veterans at a local hospital.

Saturday Afternoon at the Movies

Saturday, January 13, 2007, 1 p.m. Staff Council Activities Committee presents Pixar’s Cars in the Stoddard Auditorium. Popcorn available!

Staff Holiday Hoopla!

Thursday December 14, 2006
Noon - 1:30 p.m.
Campus Center - Carroll Room

Featuring:

Cookie Contest with special guest judges and optional Cookie Swap (#1 cookie will be featured in house dining rooms & win a prize!)

Garnish and craft demonstration

FOOD!

Snacks, desserts and beverages for first 200 attendees
Campus Center Cafe will offer staff appreciation lunch special ($1.50 for a slice of pizza and a soda)

Performance by the Campus School Chorus!

Staff Visions Art Exhibition

The Book Arts Gallery in Neilson Library continues to host the 2006 Staff Visions Art Exhibition through December 15, 2006.

Did you know …

that Staff Council meetings are open to all staff? Meetings are held from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month. Join us! If you would like to host a meeting for approx. 25 people, please contact Sam Rush at srush@smith.edu or at ext. 3249.
Because we are now at a point in the strategic planning process where the main elements of a plan have begun to emerge, I will use this occasion to describe how I see them. I was gratified by the large number of faculty and staff who responded to my call for proposals earlier this fall. We received over 125 submissions, rich with good ideas. The proposals have all been posted on the planning website: http://www.smith.edu/planning/proposals/index.php. The campus planning committees have been hard at work reviewing and integrating them, as they develop our strategic plan.

The focus of the plan is student learning, especially the capacity to do original and independent work. As a way of providing such opportunities, it is particularly exciting to explore the set of proposals on the use of centers: one focused on community-based learning and research, one focused on environmental research, and one focused on global citizenship. These proposals (and there are multiple proposals for each center) have a number of things in common: they are cross-disciplinary in nature, and they envision projects that connect academic scholarship with practice, sometimes in team-based projects that take students beyond the Grecourt Gates. Over the next several weeks, we will be developing and integrating these proposals, shaping from them a distinctive set of opportunities for Smith students.

Another powerful idea emerging from the planning process is a more developmental approach to student learning. Smith has had an open curriculum for over thirty-five years—that is, a curriculum without general education or core requirements. Many of us feel that students would benefit from more focus and progression within this curriculum. We are now considering a set of experiences specific to each year in a student's career: first-year seminars for all first-year students; a reflective moment in the sophomore year, in which each student would map what she will do in her remaining time at Smith; junior cross-disciplinary seminars; and a culminating project in the senior year.

In all the initiatives taking shape, we are seeking to connect resources inside and outside the classroom. Staff members will be critical partners in these projects, as we develop a holistic concept of the goals of a Smith education. Students develop essential capacities in their academic courses, as well as in their campus jobs, in their houses, in the many extracurricular programs so ably directed by staff.

The focus of this Staff Council Chronicle is volunteering. In this strategic planning process, we are expanding the opportunities for students to learn from work with the community. Such opportunities, I believe, will make them better citizens of the communities in which they ultimately settle, of the country, and of the world.