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Volunteer efforts recognized at United Way event

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Local residents with a giving spirit were honored for their efforts to benefit others, at an event last week in Henry County.

The **United** Way of Henry County held its eighth annual Volunteer Recognition ceremony Thursday, at the Merle Manders Conference Center in Stockbridge. Thirty-four volunteers from organizations including Connecting Henry, Meals on Wheels and A Friend's House, received accolades from more than 300 people in attendance for the dedication program.

Connecting Henry Executive Director Denese Rodgers was one of the ceremony's award presenters, and said the annual ceremony marks her favorite day of the year. Volunteers, she said, "work the magic in Henry County."

"It is amazing to see their faces as they come to receive a simple award for the ... invaluable efforts they've made in our community," Rodgers said.

The executive director cited national statistics indicating that 44 percent of Americans are engaged in volunteer efforts.

"That represents some 83.9 million adults, ... and a value of \$239 billion," she said. "We've got the best of those [volunteers] in Henry County."

One of those volunteers, 23-year-old Allison Felker, was commended for her work with Noah's Ark Children's Care Home and Animal Rehabilitation Center in Locust Grove. Felker, whose duties at the shelter include feeding the animals and doing other odd jobs on the facility's farm, said although she works for free, she gets "paid in other ways."

"It just makes me feel good about myself, and it makes me feel like I'm doing what I was made to do," she said.

Henry Medical Center was one of the main sponsors of last week's ceremony. The hospital's chief executive officer, Charles Scott, said

he has been "incredibly impressed" with the volunteer spirit in the county since moving to Georgia last year.

"Right here in this room, we see the best in our community - people who are donating their time, their energy and their efforts selflessly to improve the [area]," he said. "That gives me a wonderful feeling."

Locust Grove Mayor Lorene Lindsey received recognition for her efforts with the Meals on Wheels program. Lindsey, who also works with other volunteer organizations in Henry, said her desire to give back to her community goes back to a time when she was unable to do so.

"I worked for 36 years, and so many times, I was asked to do things, and I said 'I'd love to, but I work,'" she explained. "When I retired 28 years ago, I swore that I'd never say 'no' to a worthy cause, unless it was utterly impossible. I'm thankful to say that I've been able to participate in [volunteer efforts] in the county."

United Way Office Manager Rita Hand was one of the ceremony's coordinators, and said the volunteer spirit in Henry covers the "whole spectrum."

"Every year, we have volunteers from all levels, from board [member] to dishwasher - people who answer the phones, people who organize and create non-profits," she said. "We don't value the board member more than the dishwasher. Everybody's equal, and we couldn't afford to do it without them."

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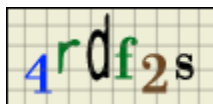
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