

COMMENTARY

## Balch: Make an effort to volunteer

**David Balch, UNITED WAY CAPITAL AREA**



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Recently, the Corporation for National and Community Service released a comprehensive report on volunteerism across the country. There was some great news for Austinites. Our city ranks third in volunteer rate (38 percent) and seventh in volunteer hours (49.2). Not too shabby.

And amid the daily deluge of discouraging news — about the state of our country, the war, the economy, etc. — it's important that we stop, take a deep breath and be thankful that we live in such a caring community.

This report is good news. The even better news is: We can do more. We want to turn the Austin area into a volunteerism hotbed, the envy of the country. (We're Texans, after all, and we like to be No. 1.) I believe that getting engaged — that is, getting "tuned in" to the issues affecting your neighbors and neighborhoods — returns rewards far greater than the initial investment.

I've witnessed firsthand the capacity Central Texans have for compassion and hard work. And I know that volunteerism makes things better, people happier, and communities stronger. Your time, talent, and treasure are the lifeblood of Central Texas. Together, united, we can do more than we could ever accomplish alone.

So get up, get out, get involved:

Call 2-1-1 and say, "I want to become a volunteer." Visit our volunteer center online, at [HandsOnCentralTexas.org](http://HandsOnCentralTexas.org). Find out more about the upcoming "Harwood Summit" for public innovators hosted by St. David's Foundation on Sept. 19 and learn how to create engagement opportunities for your community. Go to a town hall meeting and speak up. Mentor a child. Work at a food pantry. Conduct a giving drive in your workplace. Or simply take one step toward being an engaged citizen.

We can be at the top of that volunteerism list. And we can get there together.

Balch is president and chief operating officer of United Way Capital Area.

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