

The Oregonian

A handy way to help out

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Web site of the week

With holiday commercialism screaming "Spend!" at every turn, many people seek an antidote in volunteering for a worthwhile cause.

But where do you find volunteer opportunities?

Easy. Just log on to Hands On Greater Portland's Web site (www.handsonportland.org). The 10-year-old organization connects 13,000 volunteers a year with 200 nonprofits, schools and community organizations.

Using the Web site's "Volunteer" button, you can search or browse for projects that match your interests, location and the times and dates you have available to donate.

Between now and the end of the year, for example, more than two dozen projects have issued calls for volunteers. The School & Community Reuse Action Project (SCRAP) needs people to prepare donated arts and crafts supplies for sale at low cost to teachers, artists and families. Portland Books to Prisoners has asked for help in answering requests from prisoners for books and educational materials.

Many organizations ask for a limited commitment -- a morning here, an evening there. For example, L'Arche Nehalem, a faith-based community that operates two homes for developmentally disabled adults, needs volunteers to staff Christmas tree lots in three-hour shifts during the holidays.

Volunteer slots for short-term projects often fill up fast, so get your bid in early.

Other organizations look for volunteers who can donate time regularly to tutor, prepare meals for homeless people, grocery shop for seniors, build houses, answer phones or even act as guides for the current "Star Wars" exhibit at OMSI.

Hands On Greater Portland also creates volunteer teams that tackle larger issues. Past teams have included Focus on Prisons and the SOLV Series on Watershed Health. Future teams will focus on genocide awareness and sustainability.

Two other Web sites to check for volunteer opportunities are VolunteerMatch (www.volunteermatch.org) and Volunteers of America Oregon (www.voaor.org, click on "How to help," then on "Volunteer").

In the 21st century, shall we say, charity begins on your home page.

-- Steve Woodward