



Geared Up for a Great Time!

Seniors in Service volunteers deserve the Royal Treatment, and that's exactly what they received at our Annual Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon in December.

At Seniors in Service, this is the best day of the year! Volunteers of all different ages, talents, and cultures come together to celebrate the thing they have in common, a heart for serving others!

We welcomed over 400 new and first-year volunteers and honored over 70 volunteers who have been serving for over a decade, some for over two decades. There were smiles, raffle prizes, good food, awards, and dancing!

City of Tampa Mayor Jane Castor shared a video message with our volunteers and summed up their value in Tampa Bay with these words, "Each one of you has touched individual lives and made them better. Together you are transforming entire communities. Thank you for volunteering today to create a better tomorrow."

Congratulations 2022 Heroes of Service

These individuals were recognized for their servant leadership within their program, going above and beyond to help their community and their fellow volunteers.

- Foster Grandparents Hillsborough - **Euthar Brown**
- Foster Grandparents Pinellas - **Rebecca Bray**
- Health Buddies - **Sana Lulu**
- Operation: Veteran Connect - **Neonkita Frazier**
- Resource Advocates - **Sharon Render-Johnson**
- RSVP Hillsborough - **Jim Mecsko**
- RSVP Pasco - **Vance Sheer**
- RSVP Pinellas - **Helen O. Hall**
- Readers in Motion - **Debra Epps**
- Senior Companions - **Crista Garrido**



The Annual Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon is the BEST DAY of the year! We take time to celebrate our successes and spend time with friends.



Fifteen lucky volunteers won raffle prizes thanks to the generosity of our community partners, and we honored all of our dedicated volunteers, including those who have served more than a decade.



We welcomed AmeriCorps Seniors Portfolio Manager Lani Richardson to help show appreciation for the hundreds of AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers serving throughout Tampa Bay.

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CEO Corner

As the Senior Volunteer People, and thanks to our recent co-generational work, we are helping folks from all walks of life find purpose. What better way to start the new year than by helping isolated seniors, struggling students, disheartened Veterans, and hungry families? By volunteering, you aren't just solving community challenges, you are building the social connections vital for human survival.

In fact, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy called loneliness a public health epidemic. Did you know that there are more adults in the United States struggling with loneliness than have diabetes? Dr. Murthy reminds us that loneliness impacts not only mental health but physical health as well, and can even increase chronic illnesses. He found that the mortality impact of loneliness is greater than that of smoking 15 cigarettes a day, obesity, and substance abuse disorders.

How do we tackle the loneliness monster? Volunteering. Service to others is one of the most powerful ways to combat isolation. Volunteers develop camaraderie among their fellow volunteers as they work side by side to solve community challenges. Programs like TelePals, Health Buddies, and Senior Companions help volunteers fight back against loneliness in their own life while providing friendship to an isolated senior.

We've also been making new strides to combat loneliness and build connections. Our Kindred Spirits club in Sun City Center brings together widowed women who are dedicated to friendship, laughter, and compassion for one another. These amazing women meet for monthly outings and in the new year were handed a Social Happenings calendar and a yellow ribbon to wear. This helps them find each other at events, sparks conversation with others, and helps them never feel alone. Their smiling faces below speak for themselves.

-Robin Ingles, CEO

The Mabel & Ellsworth Simmons
CHARITABLE FOUNDATION, INC.

The Mabel & Ellsworth Simmons Charitable Foundation provided a \$10,000 grant to provide social connection and support for seniors through TelePals, Senior Companions, Health Buddies, and our New South Shore Community Clubs.



Ambassador for Volunteering



Five years ago, Vance Sheer was diagnosed with stomach cancer. A great surgeon was able to save his life, and he remains cancer free. This type of surgery doesn't come without complications. Vance understands from experience how health-related setbacks can lead to feelings of isolation. That's why Vance is a fierce ambassador for volunteering. Volunteering helped keep him active and involved in the community instead of letting his health lead to isolation.

For the past 3 years, Vance has been an active leader amongst our volunteers. He is reliable, hardworking and goes the extra mile to support the mission of recruiting and engaging volunteers 55 and better. Vance's experience in sales, management, and education made him a perfect candidate to become an inaugural Seniors in Service Ambassador. He uses his energy, enthusiasm, trademark smile, and humor to entice and endear prospective volunteers.

Vance is an engagement and pitch master at Bingo and speaking engagements. He doesn't sit behind a table and wait for folks to approach him. As people walk by you might hear, "Wow, those are nice boots! Where did you get them?" or "Can I tell you an amazing story about how one of our volunteers changed a life?" He's so resourceful in gathering materials for tabling events, an Ambassador training program is even being created so he can help train 100 more like him!

Are you like Vance, and love to share the value of volunteering with others? Contact Chris Noble at cnoble@seniorsinservice.org to learn more about our Seniors in Service Ambassador Program.

Health Buddies Exemplifies Intergenerational Excellence



Health Buddies has been selected as one of eleven Programs of Distinction by Generations United, a powerful network of member organizations, partners, and stakeholders who have been a leader in intergenerational strategies for over 30 years. This distinction recognizes Health Buddies ability to creatively and effectively engage younger and older people in activities that strengthen relationships between the generations.

"We congratulate these programs for earning these distinctions and their dedication to high-quality intergenerational practices," said Donna Butts, Executive Director of Generations United. "Achieving this recognition is a major accomplishment. The Intergenerational Program Certification is the only U.S. 'seal of approval' for intergenerational programs and the application and review process are rigorous."

Health Buddies engages students from the University of South Florida to provide "companionship as medicine" for seniors living with chronic conditions. Through supportive weekly phone calls, college-aged volunteers help aging clients improve their health knowledge, resulting in a decrease in preventable hospital visits. In addition to helping seniors self-manage their health, younger generations benefit from the wisdom and perspectives shared by older adults. Both generations feel valued and benefit from the social connection created through Health Buddies.

To learn more, contact Aria Garling at agarling@seniorsinservice.org or (813) 492-8931.

New Beginnings for the New Year



As Florida geared up for Hurricane Ian back in September, a Veteran at New Beginnings of Tampa, a transitional housing and homeless recovery program, was dealt a very personal crushing blow of his own. He got word that his 36-year-old daughter had suddenly passed, leaving 4 young kids behind. Nothing could have braced him for this sorrowful news and, as others evacuated and prepared their homes for the impending storm, he needed to make preparations to travel to New Hampshire for his daughter's funeral.

Our Operation: Veteran Connect team went to work sourcing funeral appropriate clothing and preparing travel arrangements. After 3 hours of searching, with such short notice and the impending weather, all avenues were exhausted. Thanks to a donation provided by Womenade, a group of generous donors serving those in need, Operation: Veteran Connect was able to provide him with a shirt, tie, pants, belt, shoes, and jacket.

When he walked out of the dressing room he said, "Now I can go bury my princess and look like a man." There was not a dry eye in the men's department.

When this Veteran returned to town 3 weeks after the funeral, he learned his apartment paperwork had not been handled properly during his absence. He had to forfeit his deposit money and return to New Beginnings temporary housing to start the process all over again.

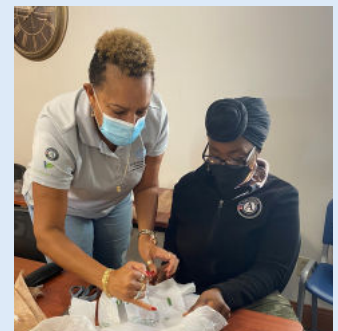
Once a successful entrepreneur, this Veteran is unable to work because of a combat-related injury. He recently received designation as 100% disabled which made him eligible for a house with LGI Homes, a Veteran friendly company constructing quality homes at attainable, affordable prices. In early January, he moved into his new home, and Operation: Veteran Connect members were there to help. They provided furnishing donations to create a home for this new chapter in life. Thanks to Operation: Veteran Connect, New Beginnings, and Womenade, this Veteran was able to overcome his lowest point and carry-on with dignity toward future success.

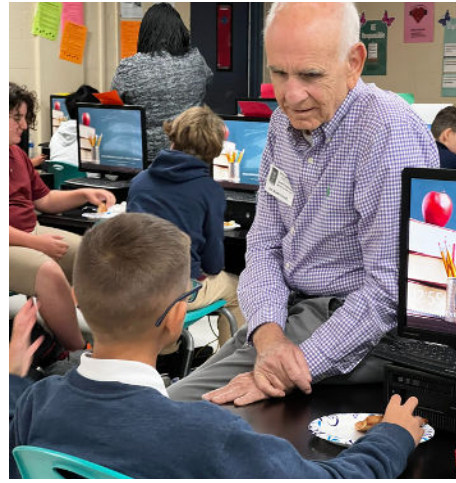
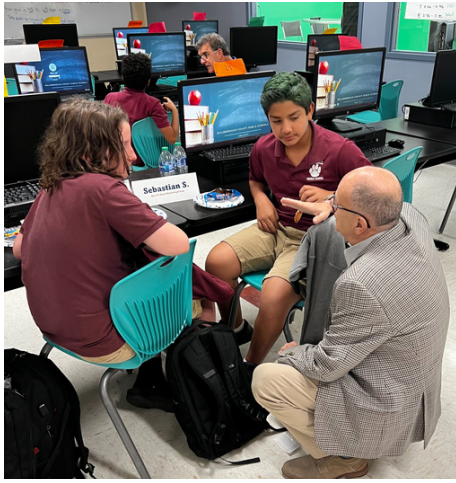
Geared Up for MLK Day of Service

Martin Luther King, Jr., Day of Service (MLK Day) is the only federal holiday that is also designated by Congress as a national day of service – a "day on, not a day off."

Seniors in Service partnered with Mercy Mats and Metropolitan Ministries to bring together volunteers of all ages on this day of service. They recycled plastic bags by crocheting them into sleeping mats for individuals who are homeless.

We also partnered with OneBlood to host blood drives in Pinellas, Pasco, and Hillsborough County. Every 2 seconds someone in the United States needs blood. Blood only has a shelf life of 42 days so it's critical for people to donate often.





Mentoring Students to Reach New Heights

AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP volunteer group, better known as the "JCC Mentors," ended their first-semester mentoring students by leaving a huge impact on their community. This all-male identifying group of volunteers has been mentoring 7th-grade boys at Ben Hill Middle School in Tampa twice a month for an hour. Each time they meet with the same group of boys as they eat pizza, talk about life, and share insightful advice about the future.

The JCC Mentors have become fully invested in not only their mentee's academic success but their personal success as well. By sharing their unique life experiences, they have inspired the Ben Hill boys to reach higher heights. Dr. Alicia Ponds, a teacher at Ben Hill, expressed how the volunteers have "brought a tremendous increase in confidence, camaraderie, goal setting, and friendship amongst the boys." The students have learned from their mentors that to flourish in life, you should always try your best, never give up on your dreams, and be a leader!

When asked, "What do you want to do after high school?" nearly all the Ben Hill boys mentioned aspirations of college or a career. A school advocate shared that after three months of mentoring, many of the boys had improved test scores! The mentees enjoy spreading their wise knowledge to eager students who appreciate learning how to be a good and kind person, and live life to the fullest. The boys described their mentors as superheroes like Batman, Ironman, and Superman because of their intelligence and willingness to help others. The JCC Mentors continue to show up for their mentees and make a difference sparking joy in the lives of 7th-grade boys at Ben Hill Middle School.

Committed to Help Children Succeed

Recent test results from the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress, recognized as the nation's report card, indicates that children have considerable learning loss due to disrupted education during COVID-19. Now more than ever children need extra support in the classroom to develop their literacy skills. Thanks to these donors, children in Pinellas and Hillsborough County will have the one-on-one tutoring they need to succeed.



TD Bank Charitable Foundation granted Readers in Motion \$5,000 to provide tutoring in the classroom and provide incentives to encourage more reading at home and parent involvement.



Winn-Dixie provided a \$10,000 Romay Davis Grant to provide tutors and mentors in the classroom. This grant is named after a 102-year-old Winn-Dixie associate who continues to inspire with her unwavering dedication and strong work ethic.



The Saunders Foundation provided a \$10,000 grant to engage even more Foster Grandparent volunteers in the classroom.

Exciting News & Knowledge for the New Year!



Operation: Veteran Connect Members and community volunteers made sure that food and furniture donations were distributed to those in need at Madison Highlands Senior Apartments.



The Hispanic Honor Society at Plant High School in Hillsborough County gifted us a huge stack of uplifting cards to distribute to all of our Spanish-speaking clients and volunteers! A HUGE thanks for helping us pass out Cards That Care!



Readers in Motion volunteers brainstormed and created vision board during their in-service trainings. They are excited to have clear goals to put into action as they focus on this new year of purposeful service.



The Seniors in Service team learned new skills for leading with cultural competence, building networks, developing strong teams, and acting with intention at the Nonprofit Leadership Center's Leadership Conference: Call to Action.

Thank you Nonprofit Leadership Center for organizing an inspiring event to develop and help Tampa Bay's nonprofit leaders grow!

Thank you to our funders!





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**1306 W Sligh Ave
Tampa, FL 33604
(813) 932-5228**

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