



SENIORS in SERVICE

GEARED UP TO SERVE

GEARED UP News

Seniors in Service presents
the News You Need to Know
About Community Service in Tampa Bay



All That Glitters is Ruby Red! A Dazzling Volunteer Celebration!



Imagine being in a room with hundreds of dedicated volunteers who share heartfelt stories, laughter, and a passion for making a difference. It's an inspiring experience! This December, we rolled out the red carpet to honor Seniors in Service volunteers at our annual Volunteer Appreciation Luncheons in Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties. These events are the highlight of our year!

This year's theme, "Our Ruby Celebration," couldn't have been more fitting as we marked our 40th anniversary as an organization. The ruby, a symbol of dedication, passion, devotion, and lasting impact, represents everything our volunteers embody. From helping children learn to supporting veterans, feeding hungry families, and being a light to lonely seniors, our volunteers have touched thousands of lives in our community. This year truly shines as one for the books with a record-breaking 1,921 volunteers serving across Hillsborough, Pinellas, and Pasco Counties! In addition to good food and dancing, we treated the volunteers to heartfelt stories of how their service transforms lives.

Operation: Veteran Connect volunteer Janalee was joined by Bobbie, a Navy veteran who had struggled to get disability benefits for over 23 years. When Bobbie met Janalee, he was nearly homeless, and his health was failing. Now, thanks to Janalee's support, he underwent a lifesaving procedure, found stable housing, returned to school, and is a straight-A student. Janalee shared, "Helping veterans is my way of honoring my father, a Marine veteran. The most rewarding thing is knowing he is looking down on me with pride."



Senior Companion Irma Amador shared how she and her fellow volunteers cleared out their refrigerators and pooled their resources to cook a hot meal and care for their senior neighbors who lost power after the recent hurricanes.



The room erupted in cheers with each statement celebrating volunteers' collective impact on the community..." Classroom Grandparents help 1,591 children learn to read!"... Volunteers dedicated 12,748 hours to feeding hungry families!"... Health Buddies brought moments of joy, support, and connection for 219 isolated seniors!"

CEO Robin Ingles closed the events by reminding us all, "Service to others is the antidote to loneliness, isolation, division, and disconnection. And we need more of it in the world." Check out the CEO Letter on page 2. She's sharing the same message with you.



We're also deeply grateful to the hardworking volunteers from Faith Action Ministry Alliance, the students at Grant Park Christian Academy, Progressive, and the City of St. Petersburg's Sunshine Senior Center for helping make these events unforgettable. Special thanks to the incredible sponsors who made our events possible:



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CEO Corner

As the calendar flips to a new year, we're setting our sights on a great focus: fostering connection, fighting loneliness, and strengthening our community through service. Volunteering is much bigger than just acts of kindness; it's a lifeline to those facing isolation and has the power to bring us closer together in a world that often feels divided.

Service to one another is the antidote to many of society's challenges. We have so much communication now and hardly any connection. This lack of connection impacts everyone, from seniors living alone to individuals overwhelmed by the noise of modern life. But there's a simple answer: service. Every time you volunteer, whether mentoring a child, visiting a senior, supporting a veteran, or feeding hungry families, you are bridging the gap between people and creating real, meaningful relationships.

Each year, the growing crisis of loneliness and social isolation rises; it's the root cause of so many challenges. While there are no easy fixes, we know the path forward lies in showing up. Start by putting your phones down, stop looking at screens, and get out there. Be with people, young or old, even those who might not agree with you. Volunteering is about connection, resilience, and the power of being present for one another.

This year, we have the opportunity to act with intention. Let's invite more people to join our mission of service. Volunteering may not always be easy. It takes effort. But, trust me, living with purpose is so much better than easy.

This is our year of connection, compassion, and community. Join us and bring a friend!

-Robin Ingles, CEO

Generational Differences Make Us Stronger!

What if older and younger generations worked together to solve the problems that no generation can solve alone? We're leaning into generational differences and encouraging collaboration across every age group to tackle today's biggest challenges. Community Engagement Director Chris Noble and Health Buddies Manager Aria Garling are part of the CoGenerate Innovators' Community of Practice, a five-week gathering of creative minds from around the globe passionate about creating opportunities for older and younger people to join forces to solve problems.

Representatives from 167 organizations across 30 states and 8 countries met online to learn from one another. These organizations touch the lives of over 230,000 people.

Aria shared, "Working daily in cogenerational programming, it can sometimes feel like our team is one of the few doing this work. That's why participating in the CoGenerate Innovators' Community Practice gave me a space where our vision felt truly seen and validated, while also allowing us to learn from those who have been doing this work longer and have developed innovative approaches we hadn't considered.

People of all ages want to work across generations to help others and improve the world around them; our job is to facilitate those opportunities. Stay tuned to see how this collaboration experience will enhance Health Buddies and lead to NEW Cogenerational Volunteer Hubs!



COGENERATE

Nat the Elf Delivers Much More Than Holiday Cheer!



Nat the Elf made a special stop at Mendenhall Elementary to deliver Winter Activity Books to help children continue learning at home during the extended school break. Armed with stacks of Winter Activity Books, she brought smiles, excitement, and a little holiday magic to the Kindergarten through 2nd grade classrooms. But her mission wasn't just about spreading cheer, it was about making a lasting impact.

One mom shared how the Winter Activity Book became an unexpected blessing for their child recovering from kidney surgery. **“The activity book kept my son engaged and happy while he was healing. It was such a thoughtful way to keep his mind busy and help him feel like a kid again during a tough time.”**

Readers in Motion is igniting a love for learning in economically disadvantaged children who might not otherwise have access to books at home. By equipping students with educational tools and fostering a culture of learning, we're ensuring that these young minds keep growing beyond the classroom. From one-on-one support provided by our Classroom Grandparents to engaging family reading challenges and hands-on STEM nights, this program is truly a community effort to build brighter futures.

Are you someone with a big heart who wants to see kids succeed? We'd love to have you join our team of Classroom Grandparent volunteers in Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties! Scan the QR code to request more information or email us at FGP@SeniorsInService.org.



Thank you, to community partners who believe in the power of education and invest in intergenerational connection to help children love to learn!



Thank you to SE Grocers, their support ensures that we can continue providing essential resources like books and activity kits to spark joy and learning in young students.



A special shoutout to TECO Energy! Thanks to their contribution to Classroom Grandparents, we can mobilize 3 NEW Classroom Grandparents to help children learn to read.



Florida Philanthropic Network is helping us take math tutoring to a whole new level. Their Excellence in Math Mini Grant will support our Classroom Grandparents who receive top-notch training from Hillsborough County's K-5 Math Specialists, learning tools and techniques to make math click for kids. Plus, they receive Emotional IQ training to help students overcome math anxiety and build confidence. From messaging that shows why math is cool to games, puzzles, and real-life applications, we're equipping our volunteers with fresh, engaging ways to help kids love math.





Unseen Heroes Transforming Lives in Our Community



Health Buddies hit a record number of participants this year! Volunteers used social connection and health tips to improve the wellbeing of 219 adults who were isolated and struggling to manage their chronic conditions.

Russel shared how his Health Buddy Will has been a steadfast source of support on his health journey:

"Will's weekly calls have been incredibly valuable to me. I truly appreciate having someone like him to check in with. I can feel his genuine concern when he regularly checks to make sure I'm taking my medication and asks how I'm feeling. He's giving me resources to improve my diet and help manage my diabetes. My conversations with Will have helped me learn more about my health, which gives me confidence to ask more questions when I visit my doctor. I'm grateful for Will's support and the positive impact he's had on my health journey and all of the new information I've gained through Health Buddies."



We hosted a special Volunteer Recognition Event at OrangeTheory Fitness to express our heartfelt appreciation for our dedicated Health Buddies volunteers. The celebration was filled with laughter, camaraderie, and a little bit of sweat. Volunteers enjoyed a hearty dinner, shared stories, and reflected on the joy of giving back. This event was not just a thank you; it was a meaningful celebration of the strong and supportive community we have built together.

A Special Thanks to Orlando Health, their contribution has been instrumental in empowering our Health Buddies program to expand its reach and continue making a difference. Thanks to their support, we've been able to provide training, resources, and outreach that directly improve the lives of participants like Russell. Orlando Health's partnership ensures that our volunteers have the tools they need to make a lasting impact in our community.



The Volunteer Who Became Family



In a heartfelt conversation, Raquel expressed how deeply Delia's weekly visits have impacted her and her mom's lives. Delia has been serving as Christina's Senior Companion for over a year, and they've formed a very special bond.

"Delia isn't just a volunteer," Raquel shared, "She has become an essential part of our family. It's hard to put into words just how much she means to us. Delia's attentive care and ability to notice even the subtlest changes in Cristina's health have been nothing short of a blessing. Delia often spots when something's off with my mom's health before we even realize it. Her presence has saved us from what could have been serious setbacks more than once."

Cristina now calls Delia her "second daughter," a sentiment Raquel wholeheartedly echoes. "She's there for us in every way, offering not just help but emotional support and a listening ear," Raquel said. "We know we can count on her, no matter what. Delia is truly a lifeline."

We're incredibly thankful for volunteers like Delia, who bring our mission of combatting loneliness and fostering meaningful connections to life. And we couldn't do it without the support of the Florida Blue Foundation, whose generous grant fuels efforts like these, ensuring seniors like Cristina find the connection and care they deserve.



Mentoring Magic: From Struggles to Success

When Mr. Plager walked into the room, Giavanni's eyes lit up, and he waved Mr. Plager over to his table. The two have been building a connection by meeting every other week over lunch as part of the Ben Hill Middle School mentoring program. Mr. Plager and Giavanni were joined by two other boys eager to dive into the day's discussion on integrity.

Mr. Plager began by sharing stories from his childhood, moments that shaped his understanding of integrity, both good and bad. The boys listened closely, sharing their own experiences with refreshing honesty, even reflecting on times they hadn't made the best choices. The 45-minute lunch flew by, leaving everyone with lessons to think about.

But the most remarkable part isn't just the conversations, it's the transformation. Since the mentoring program began, teachers have noticed a fundamental shift in the boys' behavior. What started as a group of students with disciplinary issues is now a group of young men making better choices, showing up with improved attitudes, and growing into their potential. For middle school-aged boys, a time of rapid growth and discovery, having a steady, caring mentor can make all the difference.

The program has become so impactful that there's a waiting list of 20 more students hoping to join the current 65 participants. These boys are eager for a chance to connect with mentors who care.

Can you give 45 minutes every two weeks to help shape a young person's future? Become a mentor today and be part of this incredible journey to inspire and uplift the next generation. Contact us at RSVP@SeniorsInService.org.



THE Saunders FOUNDATION Thanks to the generous support of The Saunders Foundation, whose contribution ensures we can continue to expand our mentoring efforts and impact even more students.

Our Pasco County Ambassadors Know How To Party!



Ambassadors are the secret sauce behind helping seniors find the volunteer opportunity of their dreams, and they are equally skilled at helping show these volunteers how much we appreciate their service.

We had an absolute blast seeing all our volunteers' smiling faces at the West Pasco Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast! And the Ambassadors made this event truly shine! From decorating and welcoming guests to serving food with love, their efforts created a warm and inviting atmosphere that reminded us all why volunteering matters so much.

This special event was a heartfelt thank you to the dedicated individuals who give their time and energy to support vulnerable communities throughout Pasco County. Whether it's feeding hungry families, offering companionship to an isolated senior, or lending a hand to nonprofits, their service is bringing help and hope to many.

Thank you to ArchWell Health for sponsoring the delicious breakfast we all enjoyed!

Ready to start your own volunteer journey? Reach out today to get started!



Scan the QR code or email us at RSVPPasco@SeniorsInService.org



Game Day: Where Everyone Can Play!

Who doesn't love a good game of Bingo or a round of Monopoly? Board games bring back cherished memories of family gatherings and friendly competition. But imagine losing your ability to join in the fun because of failing eyesight. That's the reality for many older adults with conditions like macular degeneration, glaucoma, and cataracts.

Playing board games can boost endorphins, lower blood pressure, and even help reduce the risk of cognitive decline. However, for seniors with low vision or blindness, traditional games can feel like closed doors. That's why the Low Vision Support Group in Sun City Center created "Game Day," an adaptive gaming event that breaks down barriers and brings isolated seniors back into playtime.

Adaptive game cards come in large print, vibrant color backgrounds for macular degeneration, and even braille. For folks like Yvonne, who hadn't played Monopoly in years, these adaptations are a game-changer. "I miss Monopoly! Our family used to play every Christmas Eve," she shared with a grin. "The size of the property cards is amazing, and they're even in braille!" Other residents were equally thrilled to find beloved games like Scrabble and UNO made accessible. And the best part? Everyone is joining in, not just those with low vision. That's the kind of inclusion we hoped for!

Thanks to the generosity of the Mabel and Ellsworth Simmons Charitable Foundation, we purchased adaptive games that piloted this project. Their support has allowed us to create moments of laughter, connection, and belonging for so many seniors.



You're invited to Dining in the Dark, a dinner and show event, where you can experience firsthand the challenges of living with vision loss while supporting programs like the Low Vision Support Group. Don't miss out, reserve your seat today and come enjoy jokes from Comedy Master Rich PurPura!



Saturday, March 8, 2025
Veterans Theater – Kings Point
(Located in the Main Clubhouse)



1900 Clubhouse Dr., Sun City Center, FL 33573
Dinner is 6:00 pm – 9:00 pm

Tickets can be purchased in the Kings Point Box Office



Scan the QR code to learn more!
Or contact Michelle Mason at
mmason@seniorsinservice.org



We've Got a Seat at the Table for Seniors in St. Pete!

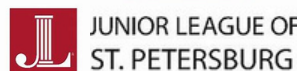
We're thrilled to share our very own Health Buddies Program Manager, Aria has been appointed by the Mayor as a commission member on the St. Petersburg Commission on Aging. Since 1973, this group of dedicated volunteer leaders has been advocating for seniors in St. Petersburg, ensuring they have the services and resources to live safe, independent, and dignified lives.

Aria's new role means she'll be a vital voice, helping identify the needs of seniors and their families, advocating for solutions, and collaborating with local providers to promote positive aging experiences.

This is a big win for Seniors in Service and the seniors we serve! With Aria at the table, our organization has a direct connection to city leadership, making sure the voices of older adults in our community are heard loud and clear.



Thank you to our funders!





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A Day On Not A Day Off

There's nothing quite like rolling up your sleeves with neighbors and friends to honor a great legacy. This past MLK Day of Service, four outstanding AmeriCorps programs joined forces at The Franciscan Center in Tampa to embody Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of unity and service.

With 8 acres of lush grounds in need of care, 35 AmeriCorps members and community volunteers came together for a mission of restoration and renewal. Programs like Operation: Veteran Connect, The City of Tampa Green Team, Metropolitan Ministries Mobile Brigade, and ReDefiners World Languages lent their strength and spirit to clear debris and beautify the grounds. It's more than just sprucing up a space,, it's about transforming it into a sanctuary for healing.

The Franciscan Center is home to Operation: Restore, a free weekend retreat for first responders and veterans grappling with trauma. By working hand-in-hand to restore this vital facility, volunteers ensured that it remains a haven of hope for those who give so much to their communities.

This remarkable day of action was a testament to what we can achieve when we come together with shared purpose. To everyone who showed up, pitched in, and carried forward Dr. King's dream of service and collaboration, thank you for making a difference in such a meaningful way!

