

Acts of kindness create atmospheres of joy

Earlier this month, I had a great time interacting with students, faculty, staff and community leaders during the BIG Event. An initiative of the university's Student Government Association in collaboration with the FHSU Foundation, BIG provides help and services to community members who need them. This successful event is just one of many ways FHSU supports the community – a community that has long been a strong supporter of the University.

I love the fact that April is National Volunteer Month. It encourages us to pay tribute to the many people who make a difference for the university and the community. It also honors our mission “to develop engaged global citizen-leaders.” Our students, faculty, staff, alumni and neighbors are so very giving of their time, heart and home. Our impact on our communities is profound.

The great thing about volunteer service is that the impact is threefold. Research has established that when one person does something kind for another person, and someone else happens to witness that act of kindness, in that one moment three people benefit: the doer, the recipient and the witness. Research also indicates that random acts of kindness improve health and life satisfaction, increase energy and self-worth as well as optimism, and foster a sense of belonging and connection in the world. Amazing!

As I was thinking about how witnessing one simple event can bring happiness and optimism to others, I remembered the absolute joy of being part of the presentation team in October of 2014 when FHSU student Amanda Thompson won the National Disability Institute's “My American Dream” video contest. Amanda suffered a traumatic brain injury (TBI) following a car accident. Not only did she complete college but at the time of the award Amanda was pursuing a master's degree in communication disorders to achieve her dream of becoming a speech pathologist to help other people living with TBIs.

This annual contest encourages people with disabilities to share their dreams – to demonstrate that having a career, succeeding in college and achieving financial independence is an important American dream for everyone. The surprise presentation happened during one of her classes. I will never forget the moment – the pride, the joy, the hopefulness. That day the benefit of kindness was not threefold – but 33-fold!

Just this past week I experienced great joy, and honestly many tears, as I watched Dancing Together for DSNWK in the Beach/Schmidt Performing Arts Center. The event is a collaboration between campus and community partners, Styles Dance Centre, DSWNK, and the FHSU Leadership 310 course. My friends Karen and Jason McCullough told their story of being thrust into the disability community when their daughter Natalie was born with a rare chromosome rearrangement, Trisomy 4p.

Eight-year-old Natalie, on stage, wore a beautiful pink ballerina tutu. Two dancers twirled around her with wonderful grace, lovingly lifted Natalie into the air, and together they danced. Natalie McCullough became a ballerina.

As I reflect with a grateful heart about the many volunteers who make our community a better place, I am pondering how I will participate in Pay It Forward Day on Saturday, April 28. Here are some ideas from my short list:

1. Send a positive text message to five people.
2. Tape an envelope on a vending machine with some money in it and a note “enjoy a drink and snack.”

3. Surprise a neighbor with freshly baked cookies.
4. Donate towels or blankets to an animal shelter.
5. Pick-up litter.
6. Clean windshields of cars in the parking lot.
7. Thank a volunteer fire fighter.
8. Leave positive sticky notes on the mirrors in public bathrooms.
9. Write my husband a list of things I love about him.
10. Tape coins around a playground for kids to find.

Pay It Forward Day is a global initiative that exists to make a difference by creating a huge ripple of kindness felt across the world. I urge you to talk with your family and friends about one small thing you can do to Pay It Forward on Saturday. Let's make Hays America the epicenter of 10 million acts of kindness around the world!