

volunteering

Neighbors helping neighbors

Several places in the community will be spruced up and receive repairs during Volunteer for a Better Sandy Springs Day in April. The annual event is one of numerous opportunities to give back on the Northside.

STORY BY KERI JANTON | PHOTOS BY JASON GETZ



Left, Bob and Sandy Rose volunteer regularly in the food pantry at the Community Assistance Center in Sandy Springs. April 25 marks the 13th annual Volunteer for a Better Sandy Springs Day.



Volunteer opportunities are available daily. Those looking to volunteer can find non-profit organizations on the Greater North Fulton Chamber of Commerce website, cm.gnfcc.com

2015 Volunteer for a Better Sandy Springs project sites



Volunteers worked on the grounds of the Dorothy Benson Multipurpose Complex during Volunteer for a Better Sandy Springs Day last year. Photo courtesy of Volunteer for a Better Sandy Springs

Island Ford Park, Ridgeview Middle School, Sandy Springs Library, Dorothy Benson Multipurpose Complex, Spalding Elementary School, Lost Corners Park, Big Trees Forest Preserve, Keep Sandy Springs Beautiful Recycling Center, Mary Hall Freedom House, and Sandy Springs Tennis Center.

The Northside group creates volunteer opportunities.

“We work on projects that serve a variety of Alpharetta’s nonprofits, including Senior Services, Foster Care Support, The Drake House and Homestretch,” says Jason Binder, a member of the organizing committee. “We want to establish a relationship between a volunteer and a nonprofit they’ll be passionate about so that they’ll volunteer year round.”

North Fulton Serves volunteers will meet for a Day of Service in Alpharetta, Johns Creek and Milton on May 9.

In the fall, simultaneous Day of Service events will be held in Sandy Springs, Roswell, Milton, Alpharetta and Johns Creek (nfserves.org)

Katherine Watson listened in the background as ideas bubbled up during a 2002 brainstorming session for her leadership group’s community service project. Fellow participants in the Leadership Sandy Springs class were coming up

with ways to volunteer around town. “They were all great ideas — cleanup a playground, paint fences for a church — but nothing longstanding,” recalls Watson, a public relations specialist at Northside Hospital. “It was something that was done in a day. We wanted to do something that would live on past our class.”

Then Watson thought of Hands on Atlanta’s many avenues of outreach and realized the leadership group could do something similar. With the help of additional volunteers, group members could paint, rake leaves, erect walls and do whatever was needed at a variety of sites around town. They would do it on a designated day called Volunteer for a Better Sandy Springs Day.

To get started, they challenged each other to go to their respective businesses and organizations to find out what the leadership group could do for them. “One person worked for a local senior center that had volunteer needs, another worked at Sandy Springs Library, and they needed volunteers,” Watson says. “A church needed help with painting.”

Carolyn Axt, executive director of Leadership Sandy Springs, explains: “The thought was to recruit individuals from civic groups, businesses, churches — anywhere, really — and get them hooked on volunteering. Luckily, that’s exactly what’s happened.”

April 25 marks the 13th annual Volunteer for a Better Sandy Springs Day. In the past 13 years, the community-wide event has led to \$475,000 worth of improvements to about 25 sites, including nonprofits, parks and schools. The number of volunteers has grown every year, totaling nearly 600 individuals in 2014.

“We are hoping we’ll hit the half million mark in improvements this year and, hopefully, see even more volunteers,” says Jan Paul, Leadership Sandy Springs director of development and community events.

Leadership Sandy Springs is a program aimed to help people get to know the inner workings of the community; develop their leadership potential; and bring individuals, businesses and organizations together to address community needs.

Axt says the goal is to equip and inspire people to be involved in shaping a thriving Sandy Springs.

The program is composed of active alumni and gains nearly 35 new class members annually. Applications are accepted beginning in February each year; the class is selected by April for a September term, and concludes the following May. Class members participate in a series of program days, activities, evening discussion sessions and a community connections project, such as Volunteer for a Better Sandy Springs.

“We’ve had corporate groups come out and do a project for a nonprofit, then stay attached to that service after volunteer day,” Axt says.

About 30 employees and family members from Choate Construction Co., a commercial contracting business based in Sandy Springs, participated in the event last year. The company anticipates plenty of repeat volunteers in April.



Volunteers Jane Symon and Sally Williams recently priced and tagged donated clothing in the thrift boutique at the Community Assistance Center. Photo by Kristen Ristino

Choate’s 2014 project was to clean up the nature trails in Island Ford Park at the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area. “It was a beautiful Saturday spent outdoors with family and friends, all of us focused on doing something good for our community,” says Steve Soteres, Choate’s vice president of interior construction and Leadership Sandy Springs board member.

“Some people were introduced to Island Ford Park for the very first time,” he says. “That day they discovered a beautiful wildlife preserve with hiking trails along the river and a lodge that offers all kinds of classes and events.” >

insider TIP » Volunteers can help spruce up Brook Run Park on “Clean, Shine, Fix-up Dunwoody Day” in November. dunwoodyga.gov. The Community Assistance Center, which serves families in need in Dunwoody and Sand Springs, can use volunteers year round for the food pantry, thrift boutique, client interviews, donation sorting and much more. www.ourcac.org