

e-zine of YMCA Alumni

PERSPECTIVE

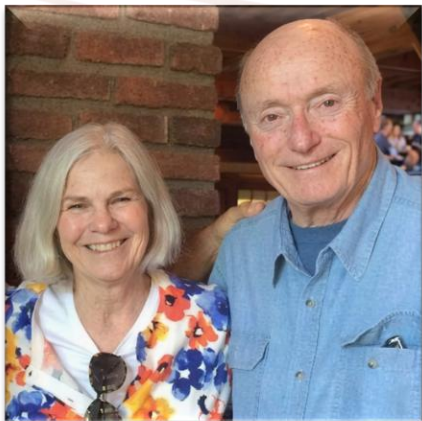
Service... So Many Ways * August 2026



Editors' Note:

Craig Altschul and Peggi Simmons

Who says we can't go home again?



Perspective was re-invented last year as a modern e-zine designed to serve a new audience of YMCA Alumni. This issue marks the end of the first year of quarterly publication.

We've learned a few things: we are now assured that many of you want to continue writing and honing your skills. We believe the revival is appreciated, as evidenced by the many kind notes we receive after each issue is published and by the "open rate" for each issue.

We know the dual-publishing format (e-zine and PDF) makes it easy to use, particularly now that you are getting used to page flipping via clicking and enlarging the text as needed. We also understand many of you are printing the PDF for later reading.

The main reasons your Board approved the plan to revive *Perspective* in a YMCA Alumni environment were to provide interesting, useful content in a "new look" as a benefit for members during their retirement years, and to provide opportunities for our members to write articles of interest for their current colleagues.

The result has spurred a careful review of the criteria for YMCA Alumni members to potentially be nominated and perhaps selected for the prestigious *F. William Stahl Award*. That honor, created a half century ago and bestowed by the Association of YMCA Professionals (AYP) for many years, became the YMCA Alumni's to award following the wind down of that organization.

The Board's decision was to change the criteria so, going forward, all writings submitted for the award must have been created while a YMCA Alumni member, not during one's active professional YMCA career. That opens the nominating opportunity for those who write articles for *Perspective*, books, and other outlets while they are our fellow members. It seems fitting that the award criteria were carefully reviewed and revised this year, as Bill Stahl becomes a historical inductee into the YMCA Hall of Fame.

We sincerely hope and believe *Perspective* will flourish each year, with an ever-wider range of members contributing articles on a wide variety of themes.

CRAIG ALTSCHUL, editor, and **PEGGI SIMMONS**, managing editor, have owned and operated Craig Altschul + Associates (ca+a) for 53 years. Their first client in 1974 was the Association of Professional Directors (APD). Their first assignment from Executive Director Bob Goff was to create a new magazine/journal. Thus, *Perspective* was born. Craig, Peggi, and colleague Steve Kendall combined to publish the magazine for 36 years. ca+a currently directs and produces communications programs for YMCA Alumni.

PRE-SPECTIVE:

Why Volunteering Is Good for Older Adults

Research shows that volunteering not only makes older people feel younger but also slows the aging process, leading to better mental and physical health. Consider this a “pre-spective” of many of the thoughts represented in the articles that follow in this issue of Perspective, themed “Service... so many ways.” (This article is shared and excerpted via a United Way news blog.)

With a traditional 9-to-5 job, your main goal might be to pay the bills. With volunteering, however, it's about devoting hours to organizations you believe in.

A recent study published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* says that “having a purpose provides an intrinsic motivation to adopt healthy behaviors as we age, which will help us to achieve positive health outcomes.”

Volunteering is valuable for older individuals who are susceptible to the effects of loneliness, which Vivek Murthy, then-U.S. Surgeon General, deemed an epidemic in 2023.

Some of the biggest perks of donating your time are that you remain in control of your schedule. If you have a part-time or full-time job but don't want to miss your pickleball or swimming sessions, you can adapt volunteering to fit your regular routine.

While volunteering can't stop the aging process, the phenomenon of feeling younger from doing good deeds is real. Research in *Social Science & Medicine* in 2025 suggested that even a moderate amount of volunteer work may be enough to slow the aging process at the biological level, allowing for more years of a healthier, more active lifestyle.

Regular volunteering can add routine to your day, and that means better sleep. Maintaining consistent wake and sleep times can help you get better rest, according to *Northwest Medicine*.



One of the best things about volunteering is that there are so many available opportunities; you don't have to settle. There's no one way to volunteer. You can pick the ways that work best for you. While not as social as other opportunities, virtual volunteering is a good option for individuals with limited mobility or those unable to travel.

Giving back knows no bounds. Meeting people outside your regular social circle helps break down silos that can limit views. It helps people find common ground and bridge gaps between groups.

Cover Story

How A Bold National Service Project Reignited Our Purpose

Cindy Koenig-Daggs

“...an opportunity to live out the values that shaped our careers and our lives.”



The YMCA Alumni National Service Project was created in response to the National YMCA Alumni's Long-Range Plan under then-President Dale Packer's leadership, to fulfill the “Serve” component of “Connect, Travel and Serve.”

This volunteer project has done more than build physical structures and support communities in need – it has sparked a renewed sense of purpose, connection, and pride across our membership. What began as a bold idea to unite members around meaningful service has grown into one of the most energizing forces in our organization's recent history. Its impact on our members is unmistakable.

The project went from a dream to reality from the earliest planning stages, under the leadership of Chair Lou Falk, then National Vice President/East. It involved input from all 17 YMCA Alumni Chapters, whose representatives presented 35 potential projects for review.

A unanimous vote to move forward with the now-named Morning Star Village was approved after considerable evaluation. The project invited members to step forward, and not just as donors who would ultimately raise more than one million dollars.

Plans began developing in 2020, and construction commenced in May 2022. Well over 600 members stepped up in a big way, dedicating significant time, talent, and funds to the project.

That invitation to come to the remote community of Dupree, SD, and get involved in many other ways awakened something powerful. Members who had not been active in years found themselves re-engaging. Longtime volunteers discovered new ways to contribute. Newer members saw a clear pathway into deeper involvement. People from outside YMCA Alumni learned of the project and stepped up to volunteer.

The project became a rallying point – an opportunity to live out the values that shaped our professional careers and our lives.



Cindy keeps Central VP Dave Rogers (left) and Phill Morgan, President (right), working hard on site.

One of the most significant outcomes has been the strengthening of relationships across chapters. Members from different regions, generations, and professional backgrounds have worked side by side, whether on the construction site, in fundraising efforts, or through advocacy and awareness campaigns. These shared experiences have created bonds that feel reminiscent of our days in active YMCA service: the camaraderie, the teamwork, the sense of mission.

We all recognize the extraordinary efforts of the McBurney-Morse Chapter's George Painter, who served as an amazing and talented *"Boots on the Ground"* volunteer General Contractor.

Many members commented that the project made YMCA Alumni feel more unified and vibrant than ever.

The National Service Project has also given members a renewed sense of identity. It reminded us that "alumni" does not mean "former." Our commitment to service did not end when we left our staff roles and those of partners and spouses; it simply evolved.

By contributing to a project with national reach and lasting community impact, members have rediscovered the joy of being part of something bigger than themselves. That feeling has translated into increased participation in chapter events, attendance at national reunions, and a surge of volunteer energy.

Perhaps most importantly, the project has reaffirmed the core truth that brought us all to the YMCA in the first place: when people come together with a shared purpose, they can change lives.

The project has changed the lives of those we serve, but it has also changed us. It has reminded us of our collective strength, our enduring values, and our capacity to make a difference at any stage of life. The Morning Star Village, under the watchful eye of the YMCA of the Seven Council Fires, is now thriving and continues to grow. The small population has already welcomed two new babies.

The final piece of the initial service project is the construction of a "Twig" (small YMCA branch) in the outlying community of LaPlant to be completed by our volunteers by the end of this year.

As we look ahead, the momentum generated by this project offers a powerful foundation for future initiatives. The spirit it has rekindled in service, connection, and community will continue to shape YMCA Alumni for years to come.

***CINDY KOENIG-DAGGS** began her 33-year YMCA career in 1977 at the Fairfield, Ohio YMCA and continued to serve Ys in Middletown, Lebanon, and Cincinnati, OH. Her last assignment was as Executive Director of the East Butler YMCA, a branch of the Great Miami Valley Y. She served on numerous committees, boards, and conference planning groups, directed a program school, and served on the Fairfield Community Foundation Board for 12 years. She currently sits on the YMCA Alumni Chambers Chapter Board and the YMCA Alumni National Board.*

The Gold Standard of Chapter Service: Homebuilding in the Dominican Republic

“The project's amazing impact, going beyond the direct beneficiaries, is felt throughout the Don Gregorio community.” Andres Fortunato, CEO, National YMCA (ACJ) of the Dominican Republic.

Lou Falk: How it All Began.

On the surface, it likely looks like we are building new homes in the Dominican Republic for the benefit of the humble residents of the YMCA International Village in Don Gregorio. This is, of course, true.

However, that was not and is not the reason we took on this project. The year was 2010. Our New England YMCA Alumni Chapter was struggling. Older members were becoming less active, while others were passing away. Leadership positions were difficult to fill. Fewer and fewer members were attending chapter meetings. The chapter needed “a reason for being” to survive.

Membership at that time was composed of many retirees from the Hartford YMCA, which has a long history of partnership with the YMCA (ACJ) of the Dominican Republic. I held the collateral duty as Director of International Programs and served as a District Executive for the Hartford Y. I suggested the Homebuilding Project to invigorate the chapter and volunteered to organize it if the chapter approved.

A year later, we built the first new home for three young girls whose mother had passed away two weeks prior to our arrival, and the project was off and running. Twelve volunteers, all of whom paid their own airfare, hotel, and meal costs, helped build that first home using the \$5,485 raised from our membership for building materials and in-country transportation. The volunteers shared emotional accounts at the chapter's next meeting, and the project was adopted as the chapter's main ongoing service project.



Andres Fortunado (left) CEO of the YMCA of the Dominican Republic and Lou Falk, New England Chapter Project Chair

We have since built new homes for 23 families and involved between 12 and 30 volunteers each year (except during the Covid pandemic, when we hired and paid local labor to do the construction). Chapter members and friends have contributed more than \$225,000 to date to fund the project.

Over the years, we recruited new volunteer builders from Springfield College and YMCA Camp Woodstock, and they have added fresh impetus to keep the project viable. Chapter members have brought their adult children and teenage grandchildren, making it a multi-generational project. Chapter leadership has strived to involve every chapter member in one way or another.

Who really benefits from this project? The recipients of the new homes? The New England Chapter, which is now among the largest and most active? Or the many individuals who get a feeling of “doing good” through construction work on the ground, donating, stuffing fundraising envelopes, and more?

I believe the answer is “all of the above.”

***LOU FALK** retired from a 30-year YMCA professional career, serving Ys as Physical Director in Hazelton, PA, Camp Director in York, PA, Associate Executive in Frederick County, MD, and District Executive and Director of International Programs in Hartford CT. Since retiring, he has been New England YMCA Alumni Chapter President and National VP/East. He currently chairs YMCA Alumni's National Service Project.*

Transforming Lives; Building Self-Esteem

Andres Fortunato

The transformation of many broken-down houses made of old wood, rebuilt with cinder blocks, directly impacts beneficiaries' lives, elevating their self-esteem. It is amazing to see how a new home helps change the mindset of people who, before, didn't care much about a dirty environment and the garbage around their living places, and how much their minds change when they zealously keep the area clean.

The YMCA of the Dominican Republic was founded 59 years ago. Since then, our staff and volunteers have been strongly committed to supporting humble communities in the important fields of education, childcare, and youth leadership. This time, a major highlight has been the significant social impact of the New England YMCA Alumni Homebuilding Project, which began 16 years ago.

The project's amazing impact, going beyond the direct beneficiaries, is also felt throughout the Don Gregorio community. It is also increasing the credibility of the YMCA's social mission, as retired people aged 60, 70, and 80 come every year to work hard and with great enthusiasm to help transform the lives of local families.

There is a lot more to do, but with the continued support of the New England Chapter of YMCA Alumni, the mission will continue.

***ANDRES FORTUNATO** has been the National General Secretary of the Dominican Republic YMCA for 30 years. He immigrated to New York City at age 21 with his wife and first child due to political oppression in the DR at the time. He graduated from Pan American School there and worked as a journalist for a Spanish newspaper. He returned home to open a successful graphic arts business. Andres became a member of the YMCA Board while serving as President of the Santo Domingo Rotary Club. He was asked to become the Y's General Secretary and continues to serve in that role today at 80 years old.*

Steve and Mary Beth Clay: The Early Days

I don't know that we were fully aware of what we were signing up for, but Mary Beth immediately raised her hand when Lou Falk asked for volunteers at that chapter meeting, now 16 years ago, but we were committed.

As befit our skill sets, we were assigned jobs that required no knowledge of construction, such as demolition, carrying massive numbers of cement blocks from the side of the road to the building site, distributing water, making lunches, and exterior painting.



Steve and Mary Beth Clay

We had never been to the Dominican Republic and were unaware of the sharp dichotomy between people of affluence and those living in stark poverty. We travelled each day in an air-conditioned van with our entire team of volunteers, picking up cases of water at a plant along the way. When we arrived in Don Gregorio, we were shocked by the poverty and the shacks that served as homes for the residents.

There were 150 people living in a community with a single one-hole outhouse, no bathing facilities, no running water, and no electricity. Once a week, electricity was stolen from a pole on the main road to power the 1950s-era washing machine outside one of the homes in the village.

Our group immediately went to work demolishing the structure, which was clearly on its last legs, pushing over wooden poles and pulling apart corrugated metal pieces that formed the sides of the shack. We then carried tons of cement blocks to the site.

We welcomed the help of many villagers who stepped in, including young children who did their very best. Despite the heat, everyone worked without complaint. We had a toilet at the Y building, and villagers offered mangoes and gratitude. We returned each night to our hotel to shower, eat meals featuring paella, ceviche, and meat kabobs, and to rest.

The construction crew needed to pour the concrete floor one day, so we volunteers were able to take in the sights of Santo Domingo, the Central Y, and a lovely beachside resort. We remember not feeling guilty at all about taking the day off. We knew we had two more days to finish the home, which consisted of rows and rows of cement blocks, open-window areas with plantation shutters, and a door. The blue paint on the exterior certainly brightened up the village.

We hustled to complete the project so that we could “hand over the key” to the family. The new owner’s eyes gleamed as she shared her gratitude, saying that she never thought she would live in such a dream home.

We returned home grateful for the friendships we made and for the opportunity to help in such a heartwarming effort. We returned for two more trips in 2014 and 2016.

So glad Mary Beth raised a hand to volunteer.

***STEVE AND MARY BETH CLAY** both retired in 2007; Steve, after a 37-year YMCA career that concluded at the YMCA of Greater Springfield, and Mary Beth, as a Speech and Language Pathologist in public schools. They then moved to Cape Cod and established a real estate business, which they retired from after 15 years. They are members of the New England YMCA Alumni Chapter.*

Nancy Bonell: I Keep Coming Back



This was my 4th year volunteering with YMCA Alumni and traveling to the Dominican Republic in warm, tropical May. So why do I keep coming back? There are three reasons:

The people in the tiny village of Don Gregorio are so appreciative of the work that we do. They have huge smiles on their faces (especially the children) when they see our vans pull into town. These folks have so very little, yet seem so content with what they do have. There are many families in need of new homes that we can keep going for many years to come.

The group of Y volunteers, families, and friends is the best. Working together under the warm Caribbean sun, we replace an existing home (made entirely of cardboard and twigs, with a dirt floor) with hurricane-proof cinder-block walls, a poured-cement floor, and a corrugated-metal roof.

The culture, the food (“interesting” at times), and because it’s the Y! Did I say it’s hot? We have to be prepared for warm weather and drink lots of water to stay hydrated! In the middle of the week, while the cement floor cures, we have a day of sightseeing and a chance to swim and lounge on a beautiful Caribbean beach.

“We’ll be back!”

***NANCY BONELL**, a member of the New England Chapter, began her 37-year YMCA career as a camper and then held numerous staff positions at YMCA Camp Nokomis on Lake Winnepesaukee, NH. She worked at four different Y’s in Massachusetts and New Hampshire, concluding her professional career as COO of the YMCA Southcoast in New Bedford, MA. She remains active by skiing, skating, biking, hiking, and golfing.*

A Volunteer Week at Day Camp in Starý Plzenec; King Arthur Was There, Too

Laura Kamperman

“The YMCA Alumni International Service Corps (ISC) offers an opportunity for you to make a difference by experiencing international service, leveraging the skills you honed throughout your career, and to connect, travel, and serve.”



It was 34 years ago when I last enjoyed leading songs, teaching games, making crafts, and hiking with children at day camp. I loved it. So, I enthusiastically applied when the International Service Corps (ISC) of YMCA Alumni offered an opportunity to work as a counselor for a week at a day camp in the Czech Republic.

I was chosen to serve along with Alena Wenker (Weatherford Chapter) and Kim Decker (McBurney-Morse Chapter) as the English-speaking representatives for 50 campers in the small town of Starý Plzenec.

The camp was located on the edge of town, in an open orchard bordered by a deep pine forest of towering trees. The only facilities were a storage building, a rustic play area, and portable bathrooms. We didn't know what it looked like until we arrived.

The three of us began meeting via Zoom before the trip to plan activities for the age groups we had chosen. We also met with the camp staff online and were asked to align our activities with a theme of King Arthur's Court.

Adding the King Arthur theme was fun, but also served as a learning tool, including English immersion. Each morning after group singing, a staff member would read a challenge to the campers. It was framed in the backdrop of “Olde England” and included a message about personal character. The goal at the end of the week was to find the individual pieces that made up an amulet capable of saving the Kingdom.

One day, the task was to go to the woods, find the fair Maiden who would give them a clue when she was untied from a tree. Then they were to capture the wolf to get another clue.

Another day, campers made swords out of three-foot plastic tubes. A Renaissance-style re-enactment troupe came to show campers how to respectfully battle each other and protect the queen.

During all camp activities, campers were encouraged to speak in English. When it was noticed, they were given a gold coin. At the end of the week, their coins could be used to purchase small gifts and snacks at a makeshift store which Alena, Kim, and I staffed.

The day before camp, we assisted the staff in setting up canopies, tables, and chairs for each group. The staff led their camp's traditional songs and all-camp activities, which we joined. We met each day for about two hours with the age group we had chosen to lead activities that would encourage English use.

The favorite activity for my group was reading a recipe for no-bake peanut butter balls and then making enough to “sample” and share with all of the other campers. They were gobbled up in minutes.

One day, all the campers were hiking together to a small lake for swimming. It was amazing to watch the campers of all ages picking and eating fruit along the way. They all knew what was edible and what was not. I was curious why they were throwing berries on the ground and crushing them. Campers told me to try it. It turns out the berries were not edible, but they made a wonderful popping sound when you stepped on them.



The hike was long, so the campers started singing. It turned out I knew the same or a similar song in English. The campers and I loved that connection, so they learned the song in English to sing it to their parents on the last day.

Two of the older boys in my group were Ukrainians living in the Czech Republic with their mothers and sisters, hoping for the day when they would be reunited with their fathers and older brothers who were required to remain in Ukraine to serve in the military. The YMCA provided a place for their families to live, and the camp gave the boys a safe place to “hang out” during the day.

Each of the three of us had a somewhat different experience. Working with the youngest children, Alena taught new English words through music, games, and movement. My group, the oldest, preferred games like solving mysteries or playing charades. Kim’s group of middle elementary campers seemed to enjoy drawing and writing in their journals.

At the end of the camp day, we still had time and enough energy remaining to explore more of the area. We visited another YMCA that was in a family’s home one evening. Their home provided the community with preschool, day camp, and community family events. The next night, we hiked to the top of a hill to visit an ancient castle and have dinner. Another evening, we were given a private tour of an 800-year-old church in town. We joined the campers to sing around the campfire at their overnight to close out the week.

What is wonderful about an ISC experience is that it is more immersive than a typical vacation. We had dinner with the camp director and her family, got to know campers and parents, learned how they filled their days, and walked to camp each day, watching the working community come alive.

One of the key benefits of volunteering for ISC is that transportation is covered by ISC, and the host YMCA provides lodging. The volunteer commitment is generally for one to two weeks, for about 20 hours a week. That provides volunteers with free time to explore the community



or region. Volunteers can also extend their stay, at their own expense, allowing more time to visit the country or other countries.

To get involved with ISC, look for opportunities posted on the YMCA Alumni website or in The Connection newsletter. It is best to complete the interest form now and submit it so the ISC committee knows you are interested when a position becomes available. ISC offers a wide range of opportunities for YMCA Alumni volunteers with diverse skills. There are both administrative consulting projects and programmatic opportunities.

If you are interested, complete the interest form found under the “Serve” tab at www.YMCAAlumni.org or contact ISC Chair Tracy Muckey at tracy@muckeys.com or call her at 804-389-8488.

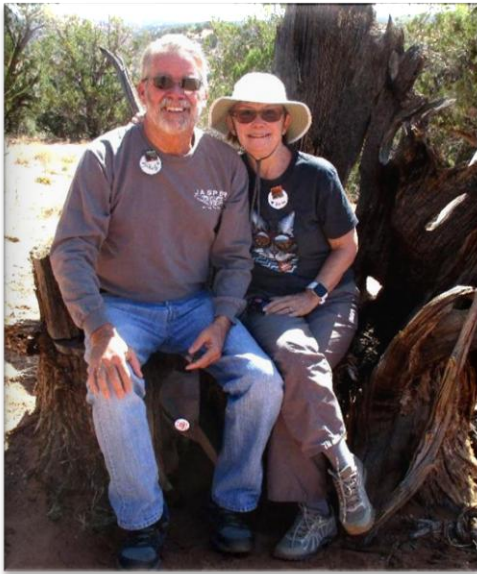
Laura Kamperman, President of the Weatherford Chapter, grew up less than half a mile from George Williams College, but it wasn't until later in life that she would discover her passion for the YMCA when she applied for the day camp director position for a suburban Chicago Park District. After being hired, she learned the camp was a joint project with the YMCA. She would advance to serve as CEO in Paris and Champaign, IL; Executive Director in Lansing, MI, and retire in Somerset, KY. She began camping with her family as an infant and has camped every year since.

Service... So Many Ways

Here's how some YMCA Alumni members serve.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." –Margaret Mead

Making Best Friends in an All-Species Haven Karen Kohl and Steve Mott



We were ready to change following our active careers in public service. Having adopted geriatric cats, abandoned dogs, and even a horse who needed a friend, one could accurately say we have a soft spot for animals.

Wanting to blend travel, volunteering, and helping animals, we chose Best Friends Animal Sanctuary in Kanab, Utah, as the perfect fit. Kanab is known as the gateway to the National Parks, enabling us to volunteer and explore.

Best Friends, nestled in the red rock canyons of Utah, cares for up to 1,600 animals on the 3,700+ acre property. It is the largest no-kill sanctuary in the nation, providing a haven for dogs, cats, pigs, horses, goats, bunnies, birds, and injured wildlife. There is something for everyone: tours, morning and

afternoon volunteer opportunities, and a vegan lunch. Just seeing the view from the cafeteria is worth the trip – truly a spot to reflect and connect.

Over our 15 years of volunteering at the sanctuary, tasks have ranged from socializing animals to helping build new habitats and everything in between. Our experiences and learning curves vary across animal groups. In Piggy Paradise, Steve helped “clicker train” Spencer to walk into a carrier. Why? In case of evacuation. Pigs learn from one another; training one pig makes training the others a lot easier. *(Clicker training is an animal training method that uses a mechanical “click” sound to pinpoint exactly when the animal performs a desired behavior, which is then immediately followed by a reward.)*



Spencer the Pig

In Bunny House, Karen reflected that humans could take a cue from rabbits. They are not only adorable but also very slow and deliberate about selecting their next best friend.

Since Best Friends is a certified wildlife rehabilitation center, Steve helped build a large spiral perch in the aviary as part of the raptors' fitness regimen to help them fly again. They love it.

Because of Best Friends' commitment to each animal, inspirational stories abound. We've personally witnessed a grand-scale transformation through commitment at Horse Haven. The abuse these horses have suffered is gut-wrenching. The wranglers know each horse by name and history, and work with each horse, creating trust where there was trauma. Creating trust is what Best Friends does best -- with the animals they save and the volunteers who want to help save them.

Best Friends says that "volunteers enrich the lives of their animals," but that is a two-way street. Their animals enrich us and bring us pure joy.

Steve Mott and Karen Kohl both had fathers who were YMCA professionals. Steve's Y career began in San Jose, CA, and subsequently served Ys in Minneapolis, MN, Grants Pass, OR, Lafayette, IN, Simi Valley, and Carlsbad, CA. Karen, whose brother Russ was also a Y Director, worked for Mira Costa College for 34 years. They first met at a Y Camp in 1966, went their separate ways, and reunited in 2000. They are members of the Marston YMCA Alumni Chapter,

A Smile On Maryland's 'Volunteer Drive'

Richard Foot



There is a street in my central Maryland community named Volunteer Drive. I smile every time I turn onto it, because it feels less like an address and more like a calling.

After 28 years of YMCA professional service, I have come to understand something simple and enduring: service does not retire.

If anything, it expands.

My YMCA journey instilled in me a worldview rooted in strengthening community, nurturing potential, and serving others -- values that do not end on a final day on the payroll. They deepen. They evolve. They find new expression in new places.

For me, one of those places has long been Rotary International. For more than 45 years, in five clubs across three states, I have found Rotary to be a natural companion to the YMCA, where shared values of service, integrity, and global understanding converge.

I have had the privilege of serving as president of two Rotary clubs, but, more importantly, of living out Rotary's simple yet powerful ideal: "Service Above Self."

The seeds of my passion for international service were planted early, during my time with the Rotary Club of Needham, MA. There, a project to raise funds to ship a fully automated blood centrifuge to the Honduran Red Cross opened my eyes to the profound impact that local initiative can have on global needs. That experience never left me.

Throughout my YMCA career, I supported YMCA World Service, and in Rotary, I found an avenue to continue and expand that global engagement. In retirement, that commitment has only intensified.

As a member of the Rotary Club of Carroll Creek in Frederick, MD, I have had the joy of serving as chair of our “Bikes for the World” Committee.

We have collected, refurbished, and shipped more than 8,000 bicycles to NGO partners in developing regions. Each bicycle is more than metal and rubber—it is mobility, opportunity, and dignity. As we like to say, a bicycle can get a person somewhere... like from poverty to self-sufficiency.



More recently, I have been privileged to serve as project lead on a suite of youth-focused initiatives in South Africa's Northern Cape Province. In partnership with the Rotary Club of The Karoo Region, our club has supported programs addressing gender-based violence, menstrual hygiene management, fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, and literacy.

Service, I have found, is not confined to international efforts. It lives just as vibrantly at home. In retirement, I have co-chaired the Endowment Committee of the YMCA of Frederick County, served on my church's Finance and Stewardship Committees, and held leadership roles in my homeowners' association. Each setting offers a different lens, but the same purpose: to contribute, to strengthen, to serve.

“Serve—So Many Ways” is more than an apt theme for this issue of *Perspective*; it is an invitation. Whether across the street or across the globe, through Rotary and other service clubs, the Y, faith communities, or civic engagement, the opportunities are boundless.

So, if you find yourself wondering what comes next after a career of service, take it from someone who lives on Volunteer Drive: the road continues. It is well worth the journey.

RICHARD “DICK” FOOT, a member of the New England Chapter, served YMCAs in Cambridge, MA; Westport CT, and Y-USA as a Resource Director for New England and the Hudson Valley. He retired in 2010, and is currently living in Frederic, MD.

An Ambassador at the Airport

Peggi Simmons

Volunteering is a decision based on available time (I continued to work) and interest in an organization or cause. My problem? Degree of interest and in what organization?

I first thought of working with shelter dogs, but eventually decided that wasn't a good fit, as I would want to take all the dogs home to where a territorial "only child" greyhound named Taffy already resided. I then turned my search to something more people-oriented, as I have been told many times that I could, and do, "talk to a wall."

Eventually, I became an Ambassador at the Tucson International Airport, having previously road-tested the role for two years at the Albuquerque Sunport in New Mexico. That met my need to interact with animals (canine travelers and bomb-sniffing dogs) and humans, and helped me meet my required step count at least once a week.



I walk through the airport looking for and helping confused travelers and answering questions like: "Where are the bathrooms?" (Where you see the icons for men, women, and families). "How do you find rental cars?" (Take the people mover, through the large glass doors to a separate rental car building). "Where do the Ubers hang out?" (across the walkway). "Do you have pet relief areas?" (Door 17 featuring a fire hydrant). And, "Where will I find my golf clubs?" (oversized - or overgrown-- as I once referenced the baggage area).

I've met all types of people, all ages, all personalities. Most are thankful for my help. Others pass us by with glazed eyes, not realizing (or wanting to acknowledge) why we meet every plane wearing a special uniform with a nametag. We definitely stand out in our blue jackets with "Tucson Warm Welcome Volunteers" embroidered on the back, which closely resembles a Walmart greeter's.

I hope to see you on your travels to the Southwest one day.

Peggi Simmons, a member of the YMCA Alumni Grand Canyon Chapter, is co-founder and co-owner of Craig Altschul and Associates (ca+a) and Managing Editor of Perspective e-zine and The Connection newsletter. Her career included an account executive role at J. Walter Thompson Advertising in New York; Managing Director of the National YMCA Communications Department; Public Relations Director for the YMCA of Greater New York; Facilities Marketing Director at Springfield College, and Sales and Catering Director for the Westin Hotel in Vail, CO, and the historic Equinox Hotel in Manchester, VT.

Serving An Historic Inner-city Church

Len Wilson

Serving YMCA communities during our working lives, while sometimes challenging, gave most of us a significant focus beyond our own needs and wishes. What happens when we leave this work?

The capstone of my more than 40-year career with the YMCA in various capacities was serving as the director general of the Jerusalem International YMCA. While prior experiences involved significant learning and opportunities to positively affect persons within the community, my experience in Jerusalem was life-changing.

There, I witnessed the passion with which individuals embraced the mission of that YMCA: fostering co-existence and mutual respect among the various ethnic and religious groups, despite regional conflict.

Influenced by our experiences, especially those in Jerusalem, Joyce and I moved back to a diverse urban neighborhood in Philadelphia upon retiring.



Len and Joyce Wilson

We were drawn to an historic United Methodist Church in the center of the city because of its significant service to the community and its multi-ethnic congregation. This church is led by a dynamic minister committed to serving the needs of unhoused persons in our city and to other justice ministries. Joyce was part of the initial efforts to expand services and volunteers.

The Center now provides meals, showers, laundry services, a clothing closet, computer access, case management and counseling, periodic legal and medical services, and temporary shelter. The mission, not unlike that of the YMCA, attracts volunteers who often become long-time members.

I became a trustee, providing time and support to the facilities and finances that make many of these services possible. I credit my YMCA career with the experiences that have helped me become an effective contributor to the important services our church continues to offer.

Purposeful living in retirement is indeed a blessing. Many of us enjoy bucket-list checkoffs, hobbies, travel, and extended family time. However, without meaningful engagement in regular service activities, can purposeful living be found in retirement?

LEN WILSON retired from the Navy as a CMDR USNR, has a master's degree in Community Development, and spent more than 40 years serving in a variety of YMCA positions. He retired from the YMCA in 2006 as the Director General of the Jerusalem International YMCA. He is a past president of the YMCA Alumni National Board and the Central Atlantic Chapter, and he and Joyce recently retired as editors of *Bridges*, the newsletter of the World Fellowship of YMCA Retirees (WFYR).

Serving the Community, One Bowl at a Time

Martha Machnik



Retirement has given me new opportunities to give back, and one of the most meaningful roles has been helping co-found Empty Bowls Attleboro with friends. As a Y retiree, I have always believed that strong communities are built when neighbors support one another. Founded in 2019, Empty Bowls Attleboro helps local programs serving individuals and families facing food insecurity in the Attleboro, Massachusetts area.

The idea for a local Empty Bowls project came from clay artists Sally Cobb and Sarah Mott, who shared their vision with our small group. We helped build support, organize the effort, and connect with local partners.

Each September, Empty Bowls Attleboro holds a one-day event at Capron Park in Attleboro. Guests enjoy live music, donated soup, and ice cream, but the true stars are the one-of-a-kind bowls they choose to take home. Those bowls symbolize the many empty bowls in our community and remind us of the neighbors and families facing food insecurity.

Local donors and matching funds help expand our reach and deepen our support. Proceeds support the Attleboro Norton Y Senior Meals Program, Food n' Friends, Hebron Food Pantry, and other community food programs. In 2025 alone, we distributed more than \$180,000, bringing our total to more than \$900,000 over seven years.

One of the most rewarding parts of this journey has been watching Empty Bowls Attleboro grow from a small effort into a dedicated group of 12 volunteer potters and artists who create and glaze more than 1,200 bowls each year.

Personally, this work has helped me discover a creative side of myself, and I now find deep joy in creating and decorating bowls alongside fellow volunteers. We are preparing to move from a 700-square-foot studio to a new 2,300-square-foot space, giving us more room to create, teach, and serve. A training program, supported by a grant from the Attleboro Foundation, is helping new volunteer potters build production skills.



Empty Bowls does more than raise funds. It creates awareness, brings people together, and reminds us that hunger is a local issue that deserves a local response. I am grateful to be part of an effort that reflects the values I carried throughout my Y career: service, inclusion, compassion, and responsibility. With our 2026 event on the horizon, we are hopeful this may become our million-dollar year!

***Martha Machnik**, a member of the New England Chapter, retired from a long career in nonprofit leadership. She is a graduate of Salve Regina University and has held several senior leadership roles with the YMCA, including Chief Operations Officer, Regional Executive Director, and Executive Director. She also served nationally with YMCA of the USA with Activate America and Listen First. Martha lives in Rhode Island with John, her husband of 46 years, and loves to travel and spend time with their three grandchildren.*

Did I Fail at Retirement? Probably Not. Paul Andresen



I thoroughly enjoyed my 40+ year career with the YMCA. It helped that I was a “Y-brat” as my dad had a career with the YMCA as well. Being dragged off to camp every summer and many other Y programs throughout the year didn’t hurt (except for the time I fell off the top bunk at Camp Fox and broke my arm).

Having positive experiences as a kid paved the way to both volunteer and paid jobs at various YMCAs – starting at \$5 a week washing dishes at Camp Fox. Eventually, I attended and graduated from George Williams College in the early 70s. GWC

exposed me to others from around the country (and the world) working towards a career with the YMCA that spanned more than 40 years

Retirement started off normally– some volunteer work (couldn’t say no to Rotary), lots of yard work, more sailing, and naps at 3 p.m. Then came that call from our local YMCA USA Resource Director. What about doing an interim CEO gig in the California Central Valley? “Y not?” – was my response.

So much of the next year was making regular trips to Visalia and working with a great team of staff and volunteers, making a difference in the lives of young people and families at YMCA Camp Sequoia Lake. Another year and another call, this time to serve as the interim CEO for the YMCA in Sacramento. Another good experience, and I’m still trying to figure out how to use all the JetBlue miles I earned flying to and from Sacramento every week for six months.

In between the ‘interim gigs’, there have been normal retirement activities – trips with family and friends to Europe, National Parks, and Hawaii, and sailing to Catalina Island, among others. Most recently, I have accepted another ‘opportunity’ and am currently serving as the interim CEO with the YMCA of the Desert in Palm Desert, CA.

So, one might look at my path and conclude that I have failed at retirement. Not sure I can argue with that – but are you really “failing” when you are doing something you love that makes a difference? I think not.

It also helps that we, through YMCA Alumni, have good opportunities to stay connected. Chapter events, and national YMCA Alumni opportunities to connect, travel, and serve. I have been a proud member of the YMCA Alumni National Service Project Standing Committee and had the privilege of pounding a few nails in Dupree at the Tiny Home buildout.

So, what’s next? Who knows? Perhaps one of those YMCA Alumni Travel Club opportunities. Well, after I retire. Again.

Paul Andresen, a member and past president of the Lyon YMCA Alumni Chapter, had a 40-year YMCA career spanning service at YMCAs in Nazareth, Israel, Chicago, IL, Los Angeles, Orange County, Bakersfield, Long Beach, Pomona, and retiring as the CEO of the Anaheim, CA Family YMCA in 2015. He is a member of the YMCA Alumni National Service Project Standing Committee.

My Perspective:

1.9 Million Volunteer Opportunities

Linda Dean

“Volunteers don’t get paid because they’re worthless, but because they’re priceless.” --Sherry Anderson, author

Here’s everything you want to know about nonprofit organizations in the United States. We’ll deal with “what’s missing” a bit later on.



There are approximately 1.9 million registered nonprofit organizations in the United States, including over 1.5 million 501(c)(3) public charities and private foundations. These organizations represent about 10 percent of private-sector employment, with roughly 12.8 million employees. That’s according to Candid, a nonprofit firm that provides data and insights about the social sector.

Annual donations to U.S. nonprofits exceed \$550 billion, with roughly 65–67 percent coming from individual donors.

The sector employs 12.8 million people (2022 data) and contributes \$1.4 trillion to the national economy.

The majority of nonprofits are small and locally focused, with 62 percent headquartered in suburban and rural areas. The number of nonprofits may actually be closer to 2.5 million if unregistered, small grassroots, and religious congregations that are not required to file with the IRS are included.

So, what’s missing?

- The number of volunteers engaged with these organizations.
- The tremendous impact of the contributions volunteers make to achieve missions and goals.

More than 75.7 million people in the U.S. formally volunteered through a wide range of nonprofit organizations between Sept.2022 and September .2023, according to the latest Census Bureau and AmeriCorps data. That’s 28.3 percent of the U.S. population aged 16 and older.

People are eager to connect and give back. At the same time, 54.2 percent of Americans reported assisting neighbors with informal tasks like running errands, lending tools, or providing caregiving. Even when people are not registered with an organization, they still dedicate their time to assisting others in meaningful ways.

Today’s volunteers aren’t necessarily looking for long-term loyalty. They want to use their time and skills to make an impact on their own terms. So, what’s driving people to lend a hand?

- *A desire to connect with their community*
- *Flexible opportunities that can fit into busy schedules*
- *A chance to make a tangible difference on issues they care about*

Perhaps you are thinking back on where you have volunteered, your motivation for getting involved, and the impact you feel you have had.

My first volunteer role, besides caring for my younger brothers and sister when my parents were out doing their volunteer work, was as a piano accompanist for the Oswego Presbyterian Church Sunday grade school classes. I was in junior high, and I wasn't a particularly good pianist, but that didn't seem to matter. Mrs. Wooley, Grade School Superintendent, told me I was doing just fine.

Fast-forward: I was named Volunteer Engagement Director for the final 15 years of my YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago career. I loved working with individuals seeking volunteer opportunities with the Y, as well as with corporate and other non-profit organizations, Key Clubs, Rotaract groups, and college groups. My role was to match them with episodic service projects at Ys across the Chicagoland area.

As a YMCA Alumni member, I've been involved with the National Service Project on the Standing Committee, as Volunteer Engagement Chair, and as an on-site construction volunteer.

I imagine many, if not all of you reading this, have very similar stories to mine. I think we're all aware of the tremendous impact we can make as volunteers in our communities, and of the proven benefits of volunteering for our health and well-being, our connection to others, and our sense of accomplishment.

***LINDA DEAN**, a member of the Messer-Brandenburg Chapter, served YMCAs in Pennsylvania and Illinois, with the last 15 years of her professional career as Volunteer Engagement Director of the Metropolitan Chicago YMCA. She is a key member of the National Service Project Standing Committee, serving as Volunteer Engagement Chair since the project's inception.*

PERSPECTIVE AUGUST 2026

"EVERYBODY CAN BE GREAT...BECAUSE ANYBODY CAN SERVE. YOU DON'T HAVE TO HAVE A COLLEGE DEGREE TO SERVE. YOU DON'T HAVE TO MAKE YOUR SUBJECT AND VERB AGREE TO SERVE. YOU ONLY NEED A HEART FULL OF GRACE. A SOUL GENERATED BY LOVE."

- DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.



COMING UP IN PERSPECTIVE!

FALL: November 2026: Hobbies for Fun and Profit

WINTER: February 2027: Y Retirees Across The Globe: Their Stories

SPRING: May 2027: Upsize, Downsize, Where Do We Live?

SUMMER: JULY 2027: When We Were Kids

Would you like to write for *Perspective* on any of these subjects? Please send a query note to Managing Editor Peggi Simmons (peggisimmons@icloud.com) summarizing your story concept. She will acknowledge your query. Please don't write it until your story idea is accepted.

YMCA Alumni President: Phill Morgan

Production: craig altschul + associates (ca+a)

Editor: Craig Altschul (caltschul@icloud.com)

Managing Editor: Peggi Simmons (peggisimmons@icloud.com)

Graphic Design: Khayyam Akhtar

Editorial Advisor: Phil Wortman

YMCA Alumni, P.O. Box 133, Bowling Green, OH 43402