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Volunteer Awards, Washington D.C., 4/11/89

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(Smith/Martin)  
April 5, 1989  
Draft Three  
AWARD

PRESIDENTIAL REMARKS: VOLUNTEER AWARDS  
WASHINGTON, D.C.  
TUESDAY, APRIL 11, 1989

Honored guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Good afternoon, and let me welcome you to the White House.  
And let me also add that I have a confession to make.

You know, it's been said -- now, this will shock you --that  
sometimes I have a hard time being understood. But I'll admit,  
it's true. And all I can say is that I'm in some extinguished  
company.

After all, it was Yogi Berra who, when asked, "Are you a  
fatalist?" replied, "No, I never collected postage stamps." And  
Danny Ozark, baseball's master of the malaprop, once observed of  
his ballplayers, "Contrary to popular belief, I've always had a  
wonderful repertoire with them."

See what I mean? Even silver-tongued orators often have  
their meaning blurred.

Well, today, let no one blur our message. Let it ring loud  
and clear. America is great because America is good. And

America gets her greatest deeds from the basic decency of you, the American people.

We see that decency everywhere -- in a child-care center, at the Rotary or Little League, in a synagogue or church. It means lending a hand, tending a wound, and helping the less fortunate.

This is Volunteer Week, a time to celebrate those qualities. And it is my honor today to present the 1989 President's Volunteer Action Awards. These awards were first presented in 1982. And, since then, 148 Americans have been recognized and honored.

I have said that any definition of a successful life must include serving others. Today's award recipients embody that definition. They know that life -- real life -- is not a ledger board.

Eleven years ago, Rose Tichy began tutoring adults through a church-sponsored literacy program in Middleburg Heights, Ohio. She loved her work, but there weren't enough adult-level books to fit her students' needs. So Rose got out her pen, and enriched the printed page. Since 1978, she's written 32 books, and edited the more than 100 books developed by her writers group.

Down in Huntsville, Alabama, Chessie Harris once took several abandoned children into her two-bedroom home. But when

the Welfare Department demanded a boarding license, the Harrises built a house on land purchased with money from the sale of a family farm. Since 1958, that site has been a home for more than 800 children -- or about 10 for each of Chessie's 82 years [PAUSE] . . . 800 children? [PAUSE] . . . sounds like a typical weekend with my grandkids in Kennebunkport.

Today, Allison Stieglitz is 15 years old. But she was only 12 when she asked her parents to use the money they had planned to spend on her Bar Mitzvah to provide Thanksgiving baskets for needy families. That first year, she gave out 15 baskets; in 1988, she donated 75. And in Miami, Allison has begun a Sunday breakfast and bag lunch program in two local temples.

Rose Tichey, Chessie Harris, and Allison Stieglitz, and this year's other 15 President's Awards winners, were chosen from nearly 2,000 nominations. They -- you -- know that prosperity without purpose means nothing. Instead, you revere what matters: the simple, the basic, things like decency, goodness, self-discipline, compassion.

As President, I want to assist those things -- for they form the heart of volunteerism, and of these President's Awards. That is why we have opened the Office of National Service, which is leading this Administration's community and national service programs.

This Office will help you help others. It will alert the public to community service. And challenge individuals, schools, and corporations to expand existing programs. And it will promote community-based efforts to combat social problems which fray the American fabric.

Toward that end, I am announcing today my intent to unveil by May 15 the Points of Light Foundation, which I will chair, ~~and which will help business spur volunteerism.~~ And also by that date, I will send legislation to the Congress proposing our Administration's Y-E-S or YES Program -- Youth Entering Service. Here, Americans <sup>youth</sup> ~~of junior- and senior-high-school age~~ can give of, not to, themselves. By saying "Yes" to America, they can define a successful life.

Of course, that's what you've already done. For you know that volunteerism never asks, "What can I do for myself?" It asks, "What can I do by myself?" Yes, volunteerism views government as an instrument of healing. But it also says that we have surpassed -- far surpassed -- the limits of what government alone can do.

Consider that today, government spends \$ \_\_ billion each year on human resources. But did you know that Americans contribute \_\_ volunteer hours annually? At \$7 an hour, that's \$ \_\_ each year in community service -- or more than \_\_ per cent of what the government spends.

We must, and can, do even better. For it is the private sector -- and individuals -- which have the responsibility -- and the resources -- to confront issues like hunger, health care, homelessness, and drug abuse. Our challenge is to use those resources to meet our responsibility. For we are a nation, and a family: helping, enriching, and caring for each other.

That great sports executive, Branch Rickey, observed that "Luck is the residue of design." My friends, America's luck is the residue of volunteerism's design. Volunteerism works because it does not view Americans as black and white, laborer and manager, the privileged and the poor. Instead, volunteerism regards Americans as Americans. And it speaks of generosity, involvement, and love of country -- for volunteerism is the highest plane of patriotism.

Volunteerism says that individuals -- like communities -- can join hands, and exchange gifts, for the good of America. One person can tutor an inner-city child; that child can some day become an engineer or artist. And if he's lucky, he will benefit from someone whose life is itself a gift. Like the man I'm honored to honor, now.

Twenty-two years ago, having moved to the East Village in New York to help the urban poor, Father Bruce Ritter opened his door one night to see six children. They were asking for a place

to stay. Well, eventually, Father Ritter founded Covenant House to provide a shelter for abandoned and runaway children. Today, his program involves over 300 volunteers each month. And it offers shelter to more than 25,000 children each year.

Last year, a new award was created to honor the individual or organization whose contribution to volunteerism is greatest among those winning the President's Volunteer Action Awards. And so I'm pleased to announce Father Ritter as the first recipient of an award named for a great President and my good friend: The Ronald Reagan Award for Volunteer Excellence.

Father Ritter, like you, has enriched the American family. And in that spirit, let me close on a personal note . . . about a hero, if you will.

Lou Gehrig was a Hall of Fame first baseman in the 1920s and '30s. He played in 2,130 straight games -- a record which still stands. But more than that, he was a good and decent man about whom a teammate said, "Every day, any day, he just went out and did his job." And when he was stricken, fifty years ago, by a form of paralysis which today bears his name, Lou Gehrig, now dying, told the crowd at Yankee Stadium, "I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth."

This story has become an American parable. But less known is that after he left the Yankees -- for the final two years of his

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life -- Lou Gehrig served his fellow man. Sitting at his desk, weaker by the day, he could barely move his body. But as a parole commissioner for the City of New York, he counseled and inspired kids. They called him the Iron Horse, the Pride of the Yankees. Yes, Lou Gehrig was a hero.

To serve others and to ennoble your community --this, truly, defines a successful life. For success is personal, and it is charitable -- the sum not of our possessions, but of how we treat our neighbors.

My friends, on that score, you've hit a grand-slam home run. Congratulations to each of you, and thank you for coming here. God bless you, and God bless America.

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April 5, 1989  
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WASHINGTON, D.C.  
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This is Volunteer Week, a time to celebrate those qualities. And it is my honor today to present the 1989 President's Volunteer Action Awards. These awards were first presented in 1982. And, since then, 148 Americans have been recognized and honored.

I have said that any definition of a successful life must include serving others. Today's award recipients embody that definition. They know that life -- real life -- is not a ledger board. ~~A successful life says that what we are matters more than~~ what we have.

Eleven years ago, Rose Tichy began tutoring adults through a church-sponsored literacy program in Middleburg Heights, Ohio. She loved her work, but there weren't enough adult-level books to fit her students' needs. So Rose got out her pen, and enriched the printed page. Since 1978, she's written 32 books, and edited the more than 100 books developed by her writers group.

Down in Huntsville, Alabama, Chessie Harris ~~has done more~~<sup>we</sup> ~~rearing than writing.~~ Years ago, she took several abandoned children into her two-bedroom home. But when the Welfare Department demanded a boarding license, the Harrises built a house on land purchased with money from the sale of a family farm. Since 1958, that site has been a home for more than 800 children -- or about 10 for each of Chessie's 82 years [PAUSE] . . . 800 children? [PAUSE] . . . sounds like a typical weekend with my grandkids in Kennebunkport.

Today, Allison Stieglitz is 15 years old. But she was only 12 when she asked her parents to use the money they had planned to spend on her Bar Mitzvah to provide Thanksgiving baskets for needy families. That first year, she gave out 15 baskets; in 1988, she donated 75. And in Miami, Allison has begun a Sunday breakfast and bag lunch program in two local temples.

Rose Tichey, Chessie Harris, and Allison Stieglitz, and this year's other 15 President's Awards winners, were chosen from nearly 2,000 nominations. They -- you -- know that prosperity without purpose means nothing. Instead, you revere what matters: the simple, the basic, things like decency, goodness, self-discipline, compassion.

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We must, and can, do even better. For it is the private sector -- and individuals -- which have the responsibility -- and the resources -- to confront issues like hunger, health care, homelessness, and drug abuse. Our challenge is to use those resources to meet our responsibility. For we are a nation, and a family: helping, enriching, and caring for each other.

*My guess is you mean, "responsibility" is a word that is used in a different way than it is used in a different way.*

My friends, volunteerism works -- through 1,000 Points of Light, and through you -- because it does not view Americans as black and white, laborer and manager, the privileged and the poor. Instead, volunteerism regards Americans as Americans. And it speaks of generosity, involvement, and love of country -- for volunteerism is the highest plane of patriotism.

Volunteerism says that individuals -- like communities -- can join hands, and exchange gifts, for the good of America. One person can tutor an inner-city child; that child can some day become an engineer or artist. And if he's lucky, he will benefit from someone whose life is itself a gift. Like the man I'm honored to honor, now.

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Of course, that's what you've already done. For you know that volunteerism never asks, "What can I do for myself?" It asks, "What can I do by myself?" Yes, volunteerism views government as an instrument of healing. But it also says that we have surpassed -- far surpassed -- the limits of what government alone can do.

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I have said that from now on, any definition of a successful life must include serving others. Today's award-recipients embody that definition.

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This Office will encourage partnerships between all levels of government, private enterprise, and voluntary organizations. It will take things that work, and carry them to the Nation. And it will enlist new volunteers in community-based efforts to combat urgent social ills. And toward that end, soon I will announce our Administration's Y-E-S or YES to America Program -- Youth Entering Service. Here, American youth can give of, not to, themselves. By saying "Yes" to America, they can define a successful life.

Of course, that's what you've already done. You know that volunteerism never asks, "What can I do for myself?" It asks, "What can I do myself for others?" Yes, government can and should be a catalyst of caring. Its role is critical. But we have surpassed -- far surpassed -- the limits of what government alone can do.

Volunteerism says that it is the private sector which has the responsibility -- the understanding -- and the resources -- to confront issues like hunger, health care, homelessness, illiteracy, teen pregnancy, and drug abuse. Our challenge is to use that understanding and those resources to meet our responsibility. For we are a nation, and a family: helping,

enriching, and caring for each other. And as a family, we are committed to a nation-wide effort.

Volunteerism says that individuals -- like communities -- can join hands, and exchange talents, for the good of America. One person can tutor an inner-city student; that boy or girl can some day become an engineer or artist. The child-turned-adult will then become a role model to others. ( Which brings me to the man I'm so pleased to honor, now. )

[Twenty-two years ago, having moved to the East Village in New York to help the urban poor, Father Bruce Ritter opened his door one night to see six children. They were asking for a place to stay. Eventually, Father Ritter founded Covenant House to provide a shelter for abandoned and runaway children. Today, his program involves over 300 volunteers each month. And it offers shelter to more than 25,000 children each year.

Because of Covenant House, a child has escaped heroin addiction; another no longer yearns for a decent meal; still another views the world as a warm, not sullen, place. It is an American success story almost without parallel.

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first recipient of an award named for a great President and my good friend: The Ronald Reagan Award for Volunteer Excellence [PAUSE].]

*as role models / real or you*

Fellow volunteers, ~~all~~ of you have enriched the American Spirit. And in that spirit, let me close on a personal note . . . about a hero, if you will.

Lou Gehrig was a Hall of Fame first baseman in the 1920s and '30s. He played in 2,130 straight games -- a record which still stands. But more than that, he was a good and decent man about whom a teammate said, "Every day, any day, he just went out and did his job." Fifty years ago, Lou Gehrig was stricken by a form of paralysis which today bears his name. Even so, he told the crowd at Yankee Stadium, "I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth."

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