

Food with a Cause: Social Volunteerism for Mitzvah Day 2012

By:

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Nestled in the heart of Midtown, Atlanta, on the outskirts of the Georgia Tech campus lies one of Atlanta's most rewarding hidden treasures. The Atlanta Community Food Bank, founded in 1979, provides a variety of different programs and derives a lot of its help from the kindness of volunteers such as myself. My personal passion for picking this organization in particular to donate my time and money stems from a desire to make food social on all levels. This includes food and hunger education, providing food to those less fortunate and baking and selling food. So, when the opportunity to volunteer with the Food Bank was presented to me as one of the project sites for Mitzvah Day 2012, I jumped at the opportunity.

Mitzvah Day is an annual volunteer day sponsored by Jewish Family & Career Services. Each year, a couple hundred volunteers participate in different projects throughout the day that serve the Atlanta community – a great way to donate time on a weekend when most working professionals have more time to give, meet other people with similar interests, and give back to the community. I was personally pleased to see several of my friends had picked the same awesome organization as myself, whether it was for the same reason or not, and getting to meet some great new people as well.

During our three or so hours at the Food Bank, we packed enough food to feed about 4,500 people. Though most of the time we spent chatting and putting food in boxes to get sent off, we were also doing a great service to the community. The fact that many people, especially children, have very little or no food to eat at home is devastating. At least 22% of children in America live in poverty and do not receive proper nutritional meals, or any food for that matter on a regular basis. About one in six Americans face hunger each year. Chances are someone you know lives below the poverty line and struggles with hunger related issues on a regular basis.

The Food Bank does not just provide food to those in need, it also has several sponsored programs designed to help low-income families and serves close to 30 counties in the metro Atlanta and North Georgia area. These projects include the Atlanta Prosperity Campaign, Atlanta's Table, Community Gardens, Hunger 101, Hunger Walk/Run, Kids in Need and the Product Rescue Center (PRC for short), which was where the Mitzvah Day volunteers spent their time.

Each of these programs is wonderful in their own unique way and also relies on volunteers in order to be successful. Many of my friends and I also participate in the annual Hunger Walk, which is one of the Food Bank's main charity events. I have personally been participating in the walk for the past several years, but may actually run it this year now that I am in running shape again. Hopefully I can be more involved in the planning of the event as well in collaboration with the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta, which one of the organizations that solicits a large number of walkers and runners on an annual basis. Last year, the walk raised over half a million dollars and continues to be more successful each year.

So volunteering at any organization can be fun at the same time. Putting in a few hours when possible or participating in an annual walk with friends, while it might seem like fun, can also help to give back in more ways than one can imagine. It seemed that everyone who volunteered on Mitzvah Day had a great time learning about the organization and helping to provide meals to those less fortunate. Still, the Food Bank would never function without its' dedicated staff of hard-working employees. All the employees that I met and had worked with when previously volunteering at the Food Bank seemed like they genuinely enjoyed working there. I almost envied their job because they get to interact with the people they are helping personally on a daily basis where as I am stuck at a desk and glued to a phone most of the time. In speaking with Christina and Bavone, two of the employees who were around the same age as me, I learned that it is a very rewarding place to work. Christina in particular shared a very moving experience with me in that working in the Kids in Need area, she was able to reconnect, help, and support several of her former teachers from the Atlanta Public School system. These teachers, a lot of the time, cannot afford out of pocket supplies for their classrooms and rely on organizations such as the Food Bank, who receive donations of all kinds, to assist them. Bavone, who is moving over to the transportation department, will be picking up and delivering food packed in the PRC to various agencies and food pantries in the metro Atlanta area. Both have been working at the Food Bank in some capacity for almost three years.

Needless to say, I am very much looking forward to the Hunger Walk/Run, which happens in early March 2013, and next year's Mitzvah Day.

More information about the Atlanta Community Food Bank can be found at www.acfb.org

More information about JF&CS volunteer programs can be found at <https://yourtoolsforliving.org/volunteer>

Registration and information about the Hunger Walk/Run can be found at http://www.acfb.org/projects/hunger_walk/

Hunger information provided by the Feeding America website: <http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hunger-facts.aspx>