

THEIR VIEW

Resolve to give of yourself

It is Christmas. Our homes have been transformed into enchanted lands of sparkling trees and decorations. Friends and family fill our day with laughter, parties, presents and excitement. We relive the season's magic as we watch through the joyful eyes of children.

Inhale bliss. Exhale gratitude. Repeat.

The "holiday high" need not end, as typically happens in mid-January; we can enjoy the same magic and joy year-round. The secret is simple.

Give. Give of yourself. Give your time, your talents or your money to a local nonprofit organization.

Pennsylvania has nearly 40,000 501(c)(3) nonprofits. Chances are at least one will match your passion.

The holidays are an ideal time to teach children the value of philanthropy, a gift that far outlasts the "must have" of the season. You do not

need to invest hundreds of dollars to make a difference.

The positive effects on givers are enormous. Donating time, money or experience to a worthy cause activates the reward center in our brains.

We experience a surge of dopamine and endorphins that goes deep into our physiology. Those who volunteer regularly have increased cognitive function as well as decreased stress, blood pressure and depression. Supporting local nonprofits instills a sense of community among volunteers, donors and residents. Local nonprofits are typically the first to respond to a community need.

Giving is also pragmatic, as it might help to reduce tax burdens.

Investing in a local nonprofit makes good business sense, too. Nonprofits increase the qual-



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ity of life within a region; quality of life is a key reason people stay within a community.

Those who grow roots in a community are more likely to spend money in that same community. Quality of life attracts out-of-town companies looking to expand or relocate.

Quality of life attracts high-quality professionals. Together, we can improve the quality of life for those living and working in Northeastern Pennsylvania and reap enormous health benefits!

Before giving, however, learn the financial health and business practices of that nonprofit. A responsible nonprofit does not mean "poor." A responsible nonprofit should work toward financial health and sustainability, serving both short-term and long-term needs of an area. A responsible nonprofit

is not "top-heavy" with unnecessary layers of administration. Remember: We have the right to know how a nonprofit operates, how it spends money on services, executive compensation and benefits. Guidestar.org is an excellent free resource.

Soon we will bid farewell to 2015 and welcome in 2016. For many of us, this includes making resolutions for improved health and relationships, less work, more travel and focusing on what really matters. When making your New Year's resolutions, please consider this quote by Mahatma Gandhi: "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

Here's to a beautiful, long-lasting holiday filled with love, laughter, peace and the joy of giving.

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