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"One value that was sewn into the stitching of our character at a very early age had to do with our responsibility to help others...We were expected to be of assistance to our neighbors...'Being neighborly' ... was synonymous with being kind, friendly, and helpful to our neighbors and something that we were encouraged to do on a regular basis through firsthand experience." – Beneca Ward, Author

"There is incredible value in being of service to others." – Elizabeth Berg, Author

Volunteers are meshed throughout our community. I cringe to think what our county would be like without them. I could write for days, months, possibly years about the value in volunteering, for both the person volunteering and those served by the volunteer. However, today, we will focus on the coordination of volunteers. Locally, we have many organizations who volunteer. You may recall an earlier column when I visited that subject.

Texas VoAD is the highlight of today's subject! VoAD is short for Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, and they are a very vital part of our emergency preparedness, response, and recovery. Each of the participants brings something of tremendous value to this group – and they are only a phone call away when they are needed! They are a "humanitarian association of independent voluntary organizations who may be active in all phases of disaster. Its mission is to foster efficient, streamlined service delivery to people affected by disaster, while eliminating unnecessary duplication of effort, through cooperation in the four phases of disaster..." Essentially, it's a network for organizations active in disaster. Some members you may be familiar with are Catholic Charities, Mennonite Disaster Service, Lutheran Social Services Disaster Response, American Red Cross, The Salvation Army, TexSAR, United Methodist Church, United Ways, Texas Food Bank Network, and the list goes on.

Here in the Brazos Valley, we have also come together and formed the Brazos Valley VoAD. This VoAD is an active group of local service organization chapters, local churches, emergency management folks, and volunteer organizations. The group meets every other month, usually in Bryan. We share information on services, train together, and work to meet the needs of victims of disaster with the same mission as the Texas VoAD, only on a local level.

I would like to personally invite our Madison County churches, volunteer organizations, and service organizations to consider joining this group next time we meet. By simply sharing a couple of hours with peers with similar interests and goals, we find that we are able to learn from one another and stretch our services to their highest potential. Consider volunteering – and consider working with others who volunteer in the Brazos Valley. Call us at 936-348-3810 and we'll help get your organization onboard! As always, Be Safe Out There!
