

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

Volunteerism

Service

Talking It Over

By Hillary Rodham Clinton



1,010 volunteers keep White House in top form

What do a retired anthropology professor, a costume designer and a children's author have in common? And what about a volunteer archaeologist, a retired Navy officer and a magazine publisher?

Answer: Each of them is a volunteer in my office.

Last week, we celebrated National Volunteer Week, and at a reception in the Rose Garden, the president and I had the opportunity to thank all the wonderful men and women who volunteer in the White House. Among others, we recognized a husband-and-wife team and a college student who comes in every morning at 4:30 to work in the press area before going off to a full day of classes.

It is no exaggeration to say that the White House — and certainly my office — could not function the way it does without the hours put in by volunteers. Let me share some pretty amazing statistics:

There are 1,010 active White House volunteers. (Thanks to the overwhelming number of willing and able applicants, there is always a long waiting list for these positions.) Each is committed to work at least 16 hours each month, but most work more. Since the beginning of 1998 alone, they have logged more than 60,000 hours. We expect them to top 225,000 by the end of the year. This commitment of time and energy saves the federal government over \$1.2 million in wages each year!

More than 30 White House offices benefit from the services of these capable, experienced and well-trained citizens. The vast majority — about 80 percent — work in the Department of Correspondence. They do the painstaking work of opening and sorting the mountain of mail we receive each day.

If you've ever called the White House Comment Line, you've spoken with a volunteer. They field thousands of calls each day! And, if you've ever received a card from the White House, it was probably addressed by a volunteer.

Right now, our team ranges in age from 19 to 92 and hails from 46 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and 29 foreign countries. Most live in the Washington area, but several commute, some from as far away as Delaware, Pennsylvania and even Chicago. In addition, "Arkansas Travelers" come to Washington for one-week stints.

Although each of our volunteers is committed to serving this president, several have worked under as many as six administra-

tions, going back to Richard Nixon. The numbers do not adequately tell the story of how important these men and women are to my husband and me. Not only do they help the White House function, they also embody the ethic of service that is one of the themes of this presidency. Many of them give generously of their time and talents to other nonprofit organizations and agencies as well, from the Holocaust Museum and the National Gallery of Art to the Audubon Society, the Salvation Army, Common Cause and the American Association of Retired Persons.

Anyone who peeks in the door of my office will find almost 100 volunteers. At the receptionist's desk, the first person a visitor to my office meets is a volunteer. On the sofa next to my favorite reading chair is a needlepoint pillow stitched by our Monday receptionist, Phyllis. It's a beautiful recreation of the cover of my book, "It Takes a Village." I hear Phyllis is working on a pillow for my husband depicting the bridge to the 21st century. We have a special spot in mind for it and can't wait to see it.

Over the years, our volunteers and staff have come to feel like one big family. We've celebrated births and weddings together, we've grieved over the loss of colleagues and friends, spouses and children, and we've encouraged and supported each other through both good times and bad. I take strength from the examples set by each of these men and women. Not only do they help my office function smoothly, but they regularly go above and beyond the call of duty to help others.

Shortly before Christmas last year, volunteers in my correspondence office were moved by a letter from a young couple trying to adopt a baby from another state. Faced at the last minute with a seemingly impenetrable tangle of red tape, they turned to the White House for help. We were able to refer them to the appropriate officials, who worked together to untangle the issues and unite a very happy couple with their new daughter by Christmas.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers who've done so much for my husband and me and for the people of this country since we moved to the White House. At the same time, I want to thank all the rest of you who take time out of your busy lives to serve your community and your country. We couldn't do it without you.

• To find out more about Hillary Rodham Clinton and read her past columns, visit the Creators Syndicate Web page (www.creators.com).