

**Commission on Economic Opportunity  
Volunteer Appreciation Program  
May 21, 2008**

It's a pleasure to be part of tonight's celebration in honor of the individuals, families, businesses and organizations who volunteer and support the good work of the Commission on Economic Opportunity.

For the past twenty years, I have had the opportunity to work closely with Gene Brady, the staff and volunteers of CEO, as well as the members of the board of directors. This organization had tireless advocate in the late Monsignor Andrew McGowan, who is still present in our hearts.

Every day, CEO is making a difference in the lives of so many in our communities through, as the motto says, "People Helping People."

I know from first-hand experience – and Senator Lemmond can also vouch for this – people call their elected officials when they feel they have no where else to turn.

Like you, my staff and I hear from residents in need almost everyday – people who can't afford to pay for fuel to heat their homes; seniors, families and children who are in need of groceries and nutritious meals; individuals who need help getting a wheelchair ramp, medication, or a roof over their head.

Luckily, the staff and volunteers at CEO are just a phone call away. We can turn to you because you are there to respond and do what government cannot always accomplish.

It has been said, "Some make it happen, some watch it happen, and some say, what happened?"

CEO staff and volunteers definitely make it happen. As your hard work and dedication shows, volunteerism is an important part of what CEO does. Volunteerism is also crucial in today's society.

The need for volunteer services, and for volunteer talent and action, are more important now than ever before. You are leaving an indelible mark on others, on our communities and our nation.

Why do you volunteer? Why do you donate your time and talents to people in need?

The answer is simple – because you care.

You care about others. You care about your neighbors. You care that your community may benefit from the little bit that you, yourself, might be able to do to make this a better place.

When you add up all those “little bits” that people give – those individual donations of time and resources – you create a significant force for the common good.

If you asked CEO what this means in terms of dollars or impact, I know the response would “priceless.” It is difficult to place a set value on such service, but just to give you an idea:

During 2007, over 1,900 volunteers gave 20,000 hours of service to CEO – impressive and significant. According to the Points of Light Foundation, the economic impact of a volunteer hour is a little over \$18.00 per hour. That’s a value of \$360,000 through CEO volunteers – lots of little bits that add up for the common good.

America has a long and proud tradition of volunteerism.

The basic principle of “People Helping People” has built this country. Historians can trace it all the way back to when our first settlers reached this land and did everything they could to survive in a rich, but harsh new world.

Back then, if neighbors didn’t help neighbors, they *all* perished.

The same holds true today.

And that is what makes you so special. You care that somebody may need a hand – whoever it may be. And you are willing to lend it.

CEO volunteers represent men and women from 8 different states, students from our colleges, universities and high schools, seniors and retirees, professionals, and children who are learning the importance of service through organizations such as the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and other youth groups.

The good work you do to support children who need a hot meal and assistance with homework through the Kids Café, the pounds of food that you distribute through the Weinberg Food Bank, the companionship you offer to seniors and widows by sharing holiday meals, and the skill building you provide to help a person find a better job.

Tom Brokaw said, "It's easy to make a buck. It's a lot tougher to make a difference.

At the end of the day, it is really not about what we have personally accumulated in our bank accounts or in possessions that makes us important. It is what we are able to give back - to our friends, neighbors and communities that makes us special – which is why all of you so extraordinary.

Thank you for all that you do and give promise of continuing to do in the future.

Please accept this Senate certificate as an expression of our deep gratitude for your service to our community.