Adding Up the Impact

Universal Orlando’s Volunteer Program
Club 52: the heart and soul of UO’s volunteer program. It’s a club with no dues, but one crucial requirement: members must volunteer at least 52 hours each year. If you can carve out just one hour per week to care for the community, you’ll join the ranks of the most fervent volunteers around. Last year, Club 52 members contributed over 85 percent of the 46,000 total hours volunteered by UO Team Members! If you’re still trying to do the math, you can stop (if you want). That’s over 39,100 hours! And based on the words of thanks that pour in from organizations year-round, it’s clear that TIME + CARING = IMPACT.

Members of Club 52 count their hours, because they know hours count.
Class Acts
Dr. Barbara Jenkins (Superintendent, Orange County Public Schools) has been dedicated to serving the needs of Central Florida students for over 30 years. At the beginning of the year, Dr. Jenkins addressed Club 52 members at a luncheon in their honor. “In Orange County, we have a beautiful tapestry, with children from 160 countries, speaking 132 languages,” she informed. When it comes to students’ success, Dr. Jenkins relayed there’s simply no substitute for mentorship and community support. “You make the difference to the children we serve,” she affirmed.

Multiplying the Good
“Caring about the community is one of the pillars of our organization,” asserted John Sprouls (EVP & CAO, Universal Parks & Resorts). “Volunteers are the physical embodiment of how we do that every year.” During the luncheon, John broke some exciting news to Club 52 members: they would get to award a $1,000 UGive grant from the Universal Orlando Foundation to the non-profit of their choice! Together, with $1,500 UGive grants from Club 52 Elite members, that’s a total of $389,500 going back into the community to benefit over 150 organizations. “UGive grants are a testament to how you give back all year, and it gives us great pleasure to help you give back even more,” John affirmed. To date, over $2 million in UGive grants have been awarded by the Universal Orlando Foundation to over 400 local organizations.

“You remind us that people are good, and really do care about each other. Thank you for not only what you do here every day, but what you do out there.”

– John Sprouls, EVP & CAO, Universal Parks & Resorts

By the Numbers
Take a glance at some stats from 2019 that further demonstrate how the impact of UO Volunteers is really adding up.

46 Thousand
Total number of hours volunteered by UO Team Members in 2019

85 Percent
Amount of total volunteer hours that Club 52 members contributed

360
The record number of Club 52 Members as of 2019

$2 Million
To date, over $2 million in UGive grants have been awarded by the Universal Orlando Foundation to over 400 local organizations
What drives you to volunteer and be engaged in the community?
I believe it is important to give back to your community. Volunteering is the perfect way to share your time and talents with others. I’m proud to live in Central Florida and am happy to support a number of great organizations and programs that serve our community. I am humbled and honored to have been named Universal’s President’s Volunteer of the Year and one of 30 outstanding volunteers in the State of Florida as part of Volunteer Florida’s recognition campaign. I volunteer because I enjoy giving back to the community and I have fun volunteering with so many loving and caring people.

What are the causes closest to your heart?
Helping our community is what makes volunteering so special. I have been a regular volunteer at West Orange Christian Service Center, Give Kids the World Village, The Garden Theatre, Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida and The Orlando Museum of Art.

Are there any memories from your time volunteering that really made an impact on you?
It was so impactful when I’ve had the opportunity to volunteer at Give Kids the World Village in Kissimmee because the children are actually on their wish trip. As a volunteer I have had the opportunity to be part of their wish experience! Being able to help wish children who are wheelchair-dependent to experience an attraction at one of the Village’s fully accessible rides is incredibly special. I will never forget the time a mother of a teenager was crying tears of happiness because it was the first time in her child’s life to experience any type of fun ride. It is moments like that where you realize how taking only a few hours of your time to volunteer can truly make a positive and lasting impact on others.

What’s your secret for inspiring others to volunteer?
I am so thankful to work for a company full of people who are willing and driven to volunteer and am incredibly grateful for every person who has answered my emails and shown up to volunteer at events. What started out as organizing small volunteer events for a few friends has grown into collaboration across departments and I have been able to meet so many new, wonderful people. I believe that everyone can give back to the community in one way or another. Whether that means donating an old pair of prescription eyeglasses to Project Right to Sight, serving lunch to the homeless at The Christian Service Center, or even collecting admission tickets at The Garden Theatre - you just have to find what interests you the most!

Why do you feel it’s important to carve out time for giving back?
Because it is FUN and personally rewarding! I encourage everyone to find an organization or cause that resonates with them and encourage them to give a few hours of their time.

How You Can Lend a Hand
Just as Anne says above, even a few hours can make a real difference in someone’s life! If you’re ready to get started, visit the ‘Our Community’ section of UOTeam.com to learn how myimpact is your one stop shop for volunteering. Use it to find a cause close to your heart, log your hours, and truly make an impact in our community.
The Universal Orlando Foundation has been making a difference in Central Florida for over 20 years with the passionate support of Universal Orlando Team Members.

So, when Parks Technology saw the website request from the Foundation (something they had wanted for several years), some of those passionate Team Members got an idea. “When we saw this request come through, we thought: what if we were able to save money on this project for the Foundation, so they could provide more support in the community?” said Troy Meek (Director, IT Information Technology/Digital Platform Delivery). So, the team set out to explore ways to produce the site with little to no cost.

At first, they explored available internal resources to reduce the cost as much as possible – but they knew they had to go above and beyond. After reflection, a lightbulb moment happened – this was a perfect opportunity to leverage their technical expertise and volunteer their time and talents to build the site!

The project required more than just development resources; however, creative, Digicon, QA, and product resources would all be required to complete the site successfully. Incredibly, teams were eager to jump in and volunteer to be a part of the initiative. “Senior leadership in Parks Technology has built a spirit of giving over the years with the support of groups like Habitat for Humanity, UCP, and Second Harvest, so our teams were ready and willing to take on this challenge,” shared Troy. Individuals across teams volunteered their time and efforts over lunch hours, evenings, and weekends to complete the site. “Even during these unprecedented times and while working remote they stayed on track,” said Troy. “This says a lot about the true spirit of giving that exists within our company culture.”

The group of dedicated volunteers partnered with the Universal Orlando Foundation team to understand their needs and vision throughout the project. The result? A sleek, mobile responsive site that is easy to update and offers the Foundation exactly what they needed. “We are so excited to finally have a website to share the great work our local non-profits are doing in the community and how the Universal Orlando Foundation is able to help support these efforts,” said Diane O’Dell (Executive Director, Universal Orlando Foundation). “The fact that the website was created by volunteers makes it even more special. We can’t thank the team enough for taking the time to create such an amazing site.”

Check out the new site at universalorlandofoundation.org

A SPECIAL THANKS
... to all of the talented volunteers who contributed to the site: Cori Puffer, Nithin Timmapuram, Jeff Cespedes, Tabitha Reeves, Swapna Reddy, Steve Dang, James Dahlgren, Ashley Bloskas, Eyad Allhainey, Manish Bajracharya, Manny Azar, Manimala Rathna, Vamsi Ponnada, Angie Allen, Bryan Saenz, Sean Murphy, Tony Mercadante, JP Coulter, and Julio Ballesteros
“Selecting our honoree is a hard thing to choose every year because we’ve got so many people out there in the community doing so many great things,” explains Greg Higgerson, VP of Development for Second Harvest Food Bank. “So it often has to come down to the way that they do it and the spirit that they do it in, and we couldn’t think of anybody more deserving than Dan.” Dan has been a champion of hunger-relief efforts at Universal Orlando for many years. He inspires teams with an imaginative approach to annual food drives, including organizing a holiday “CANstruction” contest that encourages team creativity through themed displays of canned foods. “Dan cares so much about our community and our volunteer family,” says Diane O’Dell, VP of Community Relations, noting that Dan is currently in his first term as president of the UO Volunteer Board. “His energy inspires so many into action, and he is always bringing creativity and something new to the table.”

When presenting Dan with his recognition, Greg shared the story of the award’s namesake, David Pearlman. David was the founder of Kane’s Furniture, a tireless volunteer, and also a pilot. He built his own aircraft and flew them around Central Florida. One day he was up in the sky looking down on the fields and he spotted what looked like orange carpeting down below him: a field of carrots being plowed under because they were just not quite the right size to go to market. “It really struck something in him, that we have people who are hungry and yet there was so much food going to waste,” Greg explained. “David was one of these people that could not go to bed at night thinking that there was food out there that people could be using. It was just something that touched him on a really deep level.” Like David, Dan possesses a relentless spirit to inspire and get others involved in lifting up the community.

“The creativity, and the way everyone gets involved, it has to flow from somewhere,” Greg notes. “Dan is clearly the champion of that.”

“Obviously it’s a very passionate group,” Dan demurs, referring to the countless volunteers he leads, “you can feel it, how proud they are working and volunteering and giving back. So I appreciate this, but it’s really our culture here that’s driven us to support Second Harvest and to do all of these things for the community.”

“Spoken like a true leader,” says Greg. Congratulations on your recognition, Dan!