

Valley a hotbed of volunteers

There are no hard statistics on this, but a higher ratio of people in our valley volunteer their services, talents, cash, and do more all-around do-goodery than most communities.

We may be talking about you. Whether you give a million bucks to build something benefiting society, or volunteer to sell merchandise at a thrift store benefiting crippled children or AIDS patients, or bake a batch of oatmeal cookies for nursing home residents, you probably do what you can.

Donating his voice

Most of us know Perry Wood best as a handsome, sexy cabaret singer around town or entertaining at special events.

But every Friday, Wood's audience is not a ballroom of sophisticated adults, but a roomful of wondering 7-year-olds.

Wood's volunteerism of choice is to read books to the students in Katharine Wezdenko's second-grade class at Bubbling Wells Elementary School in Desert Hot Springs. Under the auspices of the Screen Actors Guild Foundation of BookPALS (Performing Artists for Literacy in Schools), his aim is to make the printed word come alive for the youngsters. Sometimes he dresses the part of the book's character, and, of course, uses their voices.

A couple of years ago, on his second day on the job as reader, some of the kids were acting up. It was catching, as misbehavior sometimes is, and soon it was a classroom of uncontrolled mini-monsters.

Above the din, on a hunch, Wood announced that a hidden camera had been installed in the room the night before. Today's children watch the crime shows and are wise to such things as surveillance. The kids instantly switched from temporary brat to compliant angel.

Wood has shared his "hid-



allene arthur

den camera" trick with teacher acquaintances.

Now, two years later, Wood is still reading, doing Dr. Seuss voices, and turning second-graders on to the written word.

Recently, he received 18 handwritten and illustrated thank-you notes from Mrs. Wezdenko's students. This one was his favorite:

"Dear Perry you are friendly and nice and you are funny and you are good at reading and Perry you are smart and thank you for coming each Friday. And I like your books. And you are kind. And you are fun. Perry you are a fun reader, and you are good at reading Book. And you are fun. And you are a smart reader. And you are silly. I like the way you are. And I like your glases. They are cool. I like you. And I like your hair it is brown. The end"

Resourceful dame

Winnie Moss of Cathedral City sometimes feels like a river behind a dam. Now in a wheelchair, she still wants to flow but is limited by her handicap.

Formerly a busy, peppy, go-getter as a traveling manufacturer's rep, she still had enough zip left over to collect funds for major charities and teach a youth group at church.

Believing that all should "give back," and now feeling hamstrung, Moss decided to use what was still working well — her brain, her voice, her hands.

She volunteers from her wheelchair, writing letters, making phone calls, sewing,

Some examples of what Winnie calls "making myself useful" are:

■ She has a list of elderly people living alone, like herself, whom she checks on with a daily phone call. As efficient as a filing cabinet, Moss keeps beside each name the phone number of a neighbor, a relative, a doctor.

■ She writes letters to shut-ins like herself all over the country. Winnie gets their names from church, relatives, former co-workers — people who know she will soon be chatting by mail, sending tips about how to cook from a wheelchair, remembering birthdays, etc.

■ She's as swift and precise with a needle as she once was with a tennis racquet. Moss makes dresses and shirts for disadvantaged children and also knits sweaters for them.

The lady is the living, breathing Exhibit A that you don't need to be young or wealthy or even be able to walk in order to contribute.

Quotable locals

■ Alden Godfrey (professor emeritus): "As a patriot, I admire the wisdom of our Founding Fathers who only guaranteed us the right to pursue happiness with no promise of overtaking it."

■ Carol Ann Hall (dental assistant): "Whenever I feel the urge for a change, instead of changing jobs or moving to a new town, I just change the color of my hair."

■ Hovak Najarian (art historian): "When a person has not had experience in a particular field, they have no idea how much time and labor is involved."

■ Clancy Grass (film and television producer), when asked if it was fate that brought him to his wife Albeth: "No, it was hormonal drive."

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