



Homeschool Advocacy Through Community Service

by Mary Alissa Wilson, Charlottesville

Our family has always emphasized volunteering because, for us, it is the right thing to do. I see community service as an incredible opportunity to serve as advocates for homeschooling as well. There have been countless opportunities to teach “do a good turn daily”—the choices are only limited by our imagination. I suspect any community (rural, urban, or city) offers the same, because wherever we live there will be unmet needs.

Simply by being visible in our community (with some time and willingness), we can teach the value of helping others or cleaning up our environment or whatever. Our family volunteer work began when my kids were babies and toddlers. We hosted a small group of severely retarded senior citizens. They were in a day treatment program and had requested to be around a family with babies. They came to our home (with their worker), I provided the babies and it was a good match—the drooling and strange sounds came from both ends of the aging spectrum. We did simple projects like cooking or crafts or games or sweeping the sidewalk, and we had a great time. One day we spent over an hour taking turns blowing out candles.

When everyone in my family

could walk, we added another job and started delivering the neighborhood newsletter for a few streets, including our own. This way, we got to learn more about our neighborhood, who our neighbors were, and some of the political issues. And we were out there, making an impression. Neighbors, mailmen, city workers, even strangers wanted to know (a) why we weren’t in school and (b) how we had the time to do whatever we were doing. This gave us many prime opportunities to talk about homeschooling and to demonstrate how it could enrich the community as well as our family.

Over the years, there have been many short-term projects. Our next long-term commitment was Meals-On-Wheels. For the past five years, this has been our very favorite job. It is the only family volunteer job we still do together, and I hope we will continue this one forever.

As teens, all three of my kids have grown into independent volunteer jobs, which they selected on their own. One was accepted into the teen volunteer program at the hospital and over the years has served in a variety of positions from delivering flowers to answering the phone in the SICU to working in the gift shop. Another has worked for a year as a gallery volunteer at our local Children’s Museum. One began as a volunteer at a bike shop. (It

has grown into more of an apprenticeship than volunteer job, but it started out that way.) This has reminded me that when we are out in the community doing good things for people, we are teaching a larger audience some of the positive aspects of homeschooling. You know you are doing something right when people say, “I wish I could have or would have done that.”

Finally, besides advocating for the larger homeschooling community, we can be advocates for our children through volunteering. We can show them how to do a good job. We can expose them to a diverse group of people and teach that we can make a difference in people’s lives. In a more selfish sense, we can help them establish an incredible resume and strong letters of recommendation. All of my kids have used their resumes more than once, and people they have worked for easily documented their accomplishments. Having an outside source provided another perspective that is often requested in applications.

Community service has exposed us to a broad group of very different people. The fact that we homeschool does come up, all the time. Being proud of our contributions (and competent in our tasks) allows others the chance to realize that those of us learning outside of school are indeed learning—some very important lessons.

Copyright © 2002—Mary Wilson—All Rights Reserved



Visit the VHEA Bookstore
www.vhea.org/bookstore.html

VHEA’s on-line bookstore allows you to support your state homeschool association each time you buy from Amazon.com.





EXciting and EXtraordinary Events

Compiled by Melissa Riemer, Herndon



Summer months bring EXciting and EXtraordinary events throughout the Commonwealth. EXamine this list and EXperiment with some of the EXcellent and EXceptional EXcursions!

CULTURAL EXPLORATIONS

Ashland/Hanover County: May 18, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Celtic Heritage Festival. A celebration of Celtic heritage and traditions. Experience the arts, crafts, music and dance of the seven Celtic nations. Demonstrations of sheep dogs, falconry, athletics, children's activities and more. (888) 364-2560 or www.celticheritagefestival.com

Appomattox: May 4, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Banjo Festival. Marks the fourth annual celebration of Joel Sweeney, the inventor of the five-string banjo, world famous minstrel-style banjo player, blackface comedian and entertainer. (434) 352-2621.

Harrisonburg: June 16-23. Shenandoah Valley Bach Festival. Celebrate the works of Bach and Mendelssohn at Eastern Mennonite University. Films, chamber music recitals and a "Bach Boutique" featuring hand-crafted art. (540) 432-4367.

Clarksville: May 11. Tenth Annual Native American Heritage Festival. Experience the song and dance celebration with Native American dancers & drummers, enjoy freshly prepared native foods and arts & crafts. A living history of Native American life with traditional Native American dancing, drumming, foods, primitive weapons, and crafts. (800) 557-5582.

McLean: May 18 and 19. 18th Century Market Fair. Travel back in time to an 18th century Market Fair at the Claude Moore Colonial Farm. Purchase herb and flower plants, shop for the latest fashions in colonial clothing, jewelry and other fine accouterments. Bob for apples, play quoits and other children's games, or watch a puppet show. Lunch might be fresh corn or asparagus, roast chicken, sausages or bread. (703) 442-7557 or www.1771.org

Chesapeake: June 1 - 2. American Indian Festival. Features American Indian storytelling, traditional dancing and demonstrations. Also, Native jewelry, crafts and food vendors. (757) 382-6411.

NATURE EXCURSIONS

Assateague Island: May 10 - 12. Annual Migratory Bird Celebration. Thousand of shorebirds, over 20 different species, use Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge and Fisherman Island to feed and rest during the spring migration before moving on to their final destination. Three-day celebration includes workshops, lectures, bird walks with birding experts, activities for children, films, guided tours of Assateague Light-house, a 5K race, and much more. (757) 336-6161 or www.chincoteaguechamber.com

Virginia Beach: June 18 through October 6. Dolphin Watching Boat Trips. The Virginia Marine Science Museum hosts trips daily through the summer and on weekends in the fall. Lured by the food-rich waters and balmy temperatures, the dolphins can be observed feeding and frolicking in their natural habitat during two-hour ocean excursions that are staffed with interpretive guides and educators. Reservations required. (757) 437-2628 or www.vmsm.com

Lynchburg: June 1, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. National Trails Day 2002. The theme is "Hike For Health." Guided bike, railroad history, bird and nature hikes and activities throughout the day. Activities for the whole family will include canoe rides, a climbing wall, and horse rides. (434) 847-1640.

Winchester: May 1-5. Shenandoah Apple Blossom Festival. A salute to the area's apple-growing industry. High-quality arts and crafts shows, numerous parades, live music, a 10K race and a circus. (540) 662-3863 or www.sabf.org

SIMPLY EXCITING

Smithfield: May 24 and 25, 8:30 p.m. Ghost Tour. Brings the history of the past alive with narrative humor. Meet some of the town's more infamous and eccentric characters while learning about life in this colonial riverport town. (800) 365-9339 or www.smithfield-virginia.com

Richmond: May 18. Soap Box Derby. Kids ages 9-16 are invited to compete their

self-constructed Soap Box Derby cars—and the lucky winners will rally on to national competition. Organized by the Children's Museum of Richmond. (804) 474-CMOR or www.c-mor.org

Newport News: May 4. Thirteenth Annual Children's Festival of Friends. Attractions fill ten theme pavilions: animals, make-and-take crafts, rides and clowns, organizations that serve kids, nationally known children's entertainers, active games, kids' favorite foods, public safety displays, health exhibits and community exhibits and entertainment. (757) 926-8451

Norfolk: June 7-9. 26th Annual Norfolk Harborfest. The weekend includes live national entertainment, public visitation about tall ships, character vessels and military craft, the largest fireworks show in the area and more! (757) 441-2345 or www.norfolklharborfest.org

SCIENCE EXPERIENCES

Norfolk: May 18 - September 2. Adventures in 3-D. Nauticus's traveling exhibit, "Adventures in 3 Dimensions," explores how our eyes and brain work together to operate in a three-dimensional world and examines the technology used to create 3-D illusions. (800) 664-1080

Sandston: June 15. Air Fair. Celebrate the wonder of flight at the Virginia Aviation Museum's 12th Annual Flight Day. It's included with Aviation Museum admission. Special guests, hands-on activities and special presentations make Flight Day a great time for the whole family. The Aviation Museum has a collection of more than 25 vintage aircraft plus a supersonic spy-plane—the SR-71 Blackbird. (804) 236-3622 or www.smv.org/wvamhome.html

Hampton: June 21-23. Air Power over Hampton Roads at Langley Air Force Base. Dozens of civilian and military aerial demonstrations, static displays, vendors and more. (800) 800-2202 or www.langleyairshow.com