

# Honoring the Heroes Among Us - Mark A. Winn - A Life of Giving Back

by Danell DeBerg



Mark's life of volunteerism is best summed up by his sister-in-law, Irene: "For as long as I've known Mark, I've known him to give fully and feely of his time, knowledge, money, and energy, and to have fun doing it." His daughter Kathryn said that she cannot remember a time growing up when the weekend activities and family vacations did not involve some type of service project. "Giving back to the community was drilled into my sister Maegan and me since we could walk. Volunteerism permeated our childhood."

From 1985 until 2005 Mark spent a week each summer at his own expense traveling with the Sierra Club serving as cook for a team of 12-25 volunteers, carrying his gear in a backpack on wilderness trails. In 1997 he worked with the Sierra Club Board to expand the program to include families, so that he and others could bring their children. . Although it was hard work, Mark and his daughters played and worked together cleaning and clearing backcountry trails and the girls fondly remember that special time with Dad.

Not that Mark's volunteerism with his daughters was limited to out of town wilderness trips - the girls reminisce about helping their father usher and tend bar on weekends at American Stage and Shakespeare in the Park. They also volunteered together at Boyd Hill's Art Arbor annual festivals where Mark amused his daughters and their friends by letting the face painters decorate his trademark bare feet. "Dad always has been lots of fun and kind of quirky. Our friends all love him."

Maegan and Kathryn remember that Mark created a home where their friends always felt welcome and where he fostered a good time atmosphere. When he made a playroom for his daughters, he

purposefully left the walls unpainted, and gave his daughters and their friends markers to decorate the walls. He was the "class mom" when his daughters were in elementary school, "cookie mom" when they were in Girl Scouts, and mentor to the Math Super Stars. He helped with soccer practice and dance recitals, always doing whatever was necessary to make things run smoothly.

Mark still serves on the Bay Vista School Advisory Committee, even though it's been years since his daughters have been in the Pinellas County School system. As Mark will tell you with great pride, Maegan is now a registered nurse at All Children's Hospital and Kathryn is in her third year of medical school at FSU.

Besides being a fun and involved superdad, Mark also enjoys playing with power tools. He and his stepfather, Tony Todd, traveled to New Orleans on a Habitat for Humanity trip with Hope Lutheran Church, then back to New Orleans again the next year with a team of municipal attorneys. He chaperoned a youth mission trip to the Bahamas, repairing homes and helping with neighborhood cleanup. When Mark, our Chief Assistant City Attorney, learned that a local elderly widow had multiple code violations and had no way to comply, he and his step-father spent several weekends at her home doing all the necessary repairs. Tony said the word got out, and he and Mark continue to spend weekends helping needy St. Pete residents with home repairs.

As a St. Petersburg native, Mark and his willingness to help are well known. Mark attended Pinellas County schools including Euclid, Woodlawn, Northward, Riviera, and St. Petersburg High School. He is a graduate of SPJC, USE, and Stetson College of Law, all with honors. As one of his former interns told me,

"It is when you  
give of yourself  
that you truly  
give."

- Kahlil Gibran,  
The Prophet



“There is nothing about St. Petersburg that Mark doesn’t know.” City Attorney John Wolfe describes Mark as a man of limitless energy who is always willing to do whatever is necessary to get the job done and always available for a good cause. “He is always on top of everything -- I don’t know when he sleeps.”

I did not know much about Mark’s volunteer background when he first approached me about coming to Belize on a medical mission. However, a mission teammate, Edyth James, who had catered several times at American Stage, was thrilled to see that her favorite bartender was coming with us. At the time, that seemed like reason enough to invite him along.

His first trip was to two village elementary schools where he passed out anti-parasite pills to every child. Even though the pills taste terrible, the children flocked to Mark’s table and their laughter and his filled the room. After a week of working in the Belize schools, Mark was hooked. He has traveled to Belize at his own expense twice a year for the past three years and has committed to two trips in 2012. The children run to meet our van yelling “Mark, Mark” and help us set up. On the rare occasion that Mark does not accompany us, the children always ask about him and ask me to take photos to bring back so Mark will remember them for next time. So far, there has always been that next time.

Last summer I took full advantage of Mark’s organizational and people skills and asked him to administer our outpatient clinic in a remote Mayan village. I knew he preferred to work with the children, but by then I knew that Mark would do whatever was asked of him. He coordinated thirteen American volunteers and eight local Belizean

volunteers who worked twelve stations to take care of 125 patients per day. As John Wolfe could have told me, Mark worked with limitless energy, kept on top of everything, and most importantly, kept everyone, volunteers and patients, happy and laughing. And somehow he managed to do it all while making his home base in children’s ministry.

On our mission trips each team member is asked to lead a devotion. Mark’s choice speaks for his life’s work. He shared the children’s story, “The Three Questions” in which a young boy asks: “What is the most important time? Who is the most important one? What is the most important thing?” The boy learns: “The most important time is now. The most important one is the one you are with. And the most important thing is to do good for the one who is standing at your side. This is why we are here”.

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