

Recognition Spurs Volunteer Award Winners to Greater Achievements

BY ROY DELAMAR

More than 100 million people in this country volunteer their time, talent and energy to help others, solve social problems and build strong communities. These volunteers represent all backgrounds and beliefs, but share the common goal of working to make a difference.

The Points of Light Foundation celebrates the success of these volunteers and spotlights the impact that various individuals, groups, businesses and families have made in their communities through various award programs.

Here, we revisit three past winners to see how the national recognition that came with awards

helped them to ramp up their efforts and have an even greater impact on the lives of others. Each individual is unique in his causes and his efforts, but they all share an unshakeable belief in, and commitment to, the power of volunteering.

Sharing Lessons from Home

Andrew Ortiz remembers that throughout his childhood his mother quoted a particular biblical passage from the Book of Luke: "To whoever much is given, of him will much be required; and to whom much was entrusted, of him more will be asked."

"I learned at an early age the

"I link leadership and volunteerism. Through my volunteer activities, I've been able to explore many experiences, and to have many doors opened for me. I've learned from great leaders, and I've been able to develop myself and also serve my community."

— Andrew F. Ortiz

importance of hard work and striving when an opportunity presents itself, and also the importance of giving back to

Salute a Volunteer

If you know of a great volunteer who deserves some recognition, nominate him or her for a Points of Light Foundation award. For more information, and to download nomination forms, visit the Points of Light Foundation Web site at www.PointsofLight.org/awards/

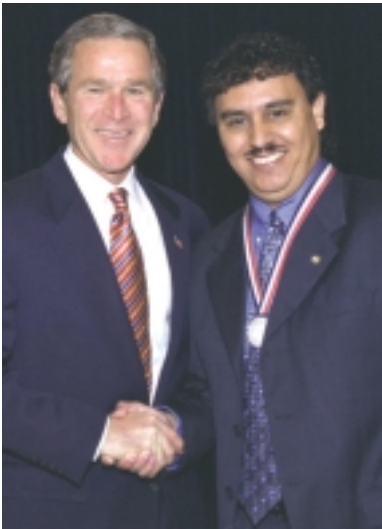
others," he says. "The messages complemented one another."

Ortiz has taken his parents' lessons to heart and worked tirelessly for a variety of important causes. For instance, while a student at Arizona State University, Ortiz co-founded a local chapter of Omega Delta Phi, a Hispanic service fraternity. "To this day, the fraternity has rendered more service hours than any other service group on the ASU campus."

In 1991, Ortiz received President George H. W. Bush's 1,000 Points of Light Award (the precursor to the Foundation's Daily Point of Light Award), the same year he was awarded General Motors Volunteer Spirit Award. In 2002, he also received the President's Community Volunteer Award at a White House ceremony.

"The awards have been very helpful in providing a platform to advance causes I'm passionate about. But it is also very humbling. I know that even though I was being recognized, there are so many others out there who are doing great work who are not being recognized."

Ortiz estimates that since 1993, he has dedicated about 1,000 hours a year to volunteering, an annual commitment that continues to this day. Over the years, he has worked on a wide variety of issues, including



Mary Gaffey

Andrew Ortiz shakes hands with President George W. Bush after receiving the President's Community Volunteer Award at the White House in 2002.

homelessness, legal assistance, community development and diversity and inclusion for minorities. However, Ortiz has one main passion in his philanthropic life: youth.

“I see a lot of young people going through school without any real lessons in leadership. There are many diamonds in the rough out there who have never been encouraged and nurtured. There are so many kids who just need an opportunity to develop their skills.”

To that end, Ortiz serves as a mentor and tutor, as well as a board member of the Boys & Girls Club in Tempe, Ariz., and as a site director for the YMCA’s Minority Achievers Program.

As a Latino, Ortiz recognizes a special responsibility to minority youth. “When I was a kid, I was always looking for people who were achieving, people in my neighborhood who were doing good things, says Ortiz. “Now, sometimes kids see me and they think, if he can do it, I can do it too.”

Caring is the Best Medicine

When he was about 14 years old, Devin Cohen accompanied his mother to a local medical center every two weeks, where she was receiving treatment for a genetic disease. During those visits, Cohen was struck by how little there was to keep the patients engaged while they went through their procedures.

“I thought, what about the kids who are here?” recalls Cohen. “They were reading years-old magazines and books with pages torn out, and playing beat up games.”

Cohen decided to do something to help the young patients pass the time at Westchester Medical Center in Valhalla, N.Y. “I started walking around the community, asking for



Devin Cohen holds Jayda at the Yorktown, N.Y., Children’s Cancer Fund Walk. Cohen worked to get his fellow high school students involved in the walk after Jayda’s brother Marcus died from the disease.

donations — toys, books, video games. And people were willing to help out.”

Cohen did more than just collect in-kind donations. He went into the hospital, played with the kids and often developed friendships with them. “The distractions did wonders for their treatment,” he says.

In 2003, the Foundation recognized Cohen as a Young Hero for his generosity of spirit and commitment to helping children facing serious illnesses. “It was the first recognition I got, and I didn’t really know how to react,” says Cohen. “I never expected this to put me in the spotlight. I wanted recognition for the kids and the hospital.”

After the honor, Cohen was featured in numerous newspaper and

“It’s not about me. It’s about the program. I’m just one of the people who are trying to get the message out. I just represent a much bigger idea. When people say, ‘I can’t do what you do,’ they’re just doubting themselves. My advice is to be persistent and there’s no limit to what any of us can accomplish.”

— Devin Cohen

television interviews and profiles. He credits the exposure with helping to grow his program from just one hospital to 26 hospitals across the country today.

“It gave me credibility. If you go into a corporation with an award from a nationally recognized organization like the Points of Light Foundation, or an article about your work in *The New York Times*, they’re more willing to listen and help you.”

While it would be impossible to come up with an exact figure, Cohen conservatively estimates that he’s received more than \$150,000 worth of toys and other donations.

In addition to being recognized by the Foundation, in 2005 Cohen received scholarships from AXA Foundation, the Coca-Cola Scholars Foundation and the Prudential Foundation. This year, he completed his freshman year at Brown University.

Before leaving for college, Cohen created a teen committee that

developed Walk the Walk, a fundraising event for Westchester Medical Center. Cohen was able to leverage his contacts on behalf of Walk the Walk. “Coca-Cola donated all the drinks to the event because they knew me because of the scholarship, and they were willing to support the cause,” he says.

In 2005, the walk raised \$250,000 for the hospital. This year, the total climbed to \$600,000. “I left for school, and it continued to grow,” says the 19-year-old from Briarcliff Manor, N.Y. “It was great

same restaurant the following week. But instead of being accompanied by just two students, he brought ten.

So began the Brunch Bunch Mentoring Program. Each week, Siegman brought together students and adults from different backgrounds with the goals of breaking down racial and cultural barriers and demonstrating that young people can start and maintain something positive. In nearly five years, more than 700 people took part in the brunches, including Siegman, who personally attended

himself entirely to 11-11-02 since its creation, Siegman remains an unpaid volunteer.

In 2002, Siegman received the Daily Point of Light Award. He has also been recognized by Princeton University as one of the nation’s top social entrepreneurs under 40. The 11-11-02 Foundation itself has also received the Daily Point of Light Award, as well as the Jefferson Award for Public Service.

Siegman has chosen to focus most of his volunteer work on three specific issues — breaking down racial, cultural and social barriers; helping students get to and through college; and engaging others in volunteering. “My commitment to the causes and issues I’m involved in are the result of things that happened to me, or things I saw happening around me, while I was growing up.”

These days, Siegman travels around the country visiting schools, universities, companies, organizations and conferences to share his volunteering message.

He has also co-written two books about his philanthropic work. One book, *The First Thirty Years*, chronicles the first 30 years of Siegman’s life and the first 30 things he learned from his successes and failures along the way. Schools and organizations across the country have used the book to encourage volunteering.

More than anything else Siegman wants to spread the message that sharing time with others is something that everyone can — and should — do. “I think the real potential benefit of receiving an honor is that it can create additional opportunities for you to do what you do and/or encourage others to get involved in doing it too.” ♦



Heidi Zeiger

Daily Point of Light winner Greg Forbes Siegman (center) poses with two representatives of University of Chicago Hospitals, Michelle Obama and Leif Elsmo, at the UCH’s 66th Annual Volunteer Banquet where Siegman was the keynote speaker.

“Virtually everything I have done, especially in terms of volunteerism, has required no experience, no wisdom and no money. Just time. Almost without exception, the things I’ve done are things anyone can do, as long as they’re willing to put in the time.”

— Greg Siegman

that the event meant enough to people that they not only kept it going, but made it even bigger and stronger.”

Finding Good in a Bad Situation

A 24-year-old substitute teacher was sharing milkshakes with two of his students in a Chicago area restaurant in 1997 when they experienced an act of racism by a customer at the next table. Instead of being deterred, Greg Forbes Siegman vowed to return to the

the first 243 weekly brunches.

The success of the Brunch Bunch inspired Siegman to create the 11-11-02 Foundation (named in honor of his 30th birthday) in 1998. Built on the belief that young people can make a difference, the foundation began a fledgling mentoring program and set out to raise funds to provide support to students and to schools.

Today, the foundation provides educational scholarships and grants to students and schools across the country. Although he has dedicated