

Rochester: 5th in U.S. for volunteering

David Riley, @ritzd 6:52 p.m. EST December 9, 2015



(Photo: KATE MELTON)

Here's a national ranking that can make Rochesterians proud.

One in three residents in this region worked as unpaid volunteers at some point last year. That makes this the fifth highest-ranking metropolitan area in the U.S. for volunteer service, according to a report this week from the [Corporation for National and Community Service \(https://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/\)](https://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/).

The federal agency based its ranking on a monthly survey of about 100,000 people and looked at the 51 largest cities in the country.

"I think it's great. I'm so proud," said Mary Rose McBride, vice president for marketing and communications at Lifespan, which helps hundreds of local people who are 55 and older to find volunteer opportunities. "Finally, we can have some good news about Rochester."

McBride was referring to other rankings that earn Rochester less flattering headlines. Think of the often-cited statistic that this is the [fifth poorest city \(/story/news/2015/01/08/rochester-poverty-act-community-foundation-report/21452093/\)](/story/news/2015/01/08/rochester-poverty-act-community-foundation-report/21452093/) out of the top 75 metropolitan areas in the U.S.

The annual volunteer ranking shows a different side of this region — a comparatively large number of residents who want to give back to their community.

Other takeaways from this week's report:

- Consistently since 2007, a higher percentage of people volunteered here than in the U.S. as a whole.
- Rochesterians volunteered at a much higher rate than New Yorkers overall. Just under one in five state residents volunteered last year, ranking New York dead last among the 50 states.
- Slightly fewer people in greater Rochester volunteered last year than in 2013 — 33 percent versus 36 percent.
- More than a third of local volunteers gave their time to a religious organization last year. Twenty-two percent volunteered in an educational setting.

Past surveys found that a small army of older volunteers [help to bolster Rochester's ranking \(/story/news/local/2013/12/25/rochester-climbs-volunteering-survey/4201003/\)](/story/news/local/2013/12/25/rochester-climbs-volunteering-survey/4201003/).

There are roughly 700 people registered with the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program administered by Lifespan alone, according to McBride. Another 350 or so people volunteer at Lifespan, many of whom are retired professionals, she said.

"They want to give back, and they want to do something meaningful," McBride said.

Younger people are stepping up, too. Rochester's ranking didn't surprise Amy Button, 37, who co-founded [Flower City Philanthropy \(http://flowercityphilanthropy.com\)](http://flowercityphilanthropy.com) earlier this year.

When the organization's website launches, it is supposed to help people connect with local charities, nonprofits and volunteer opportunities.



In the meantime, the group has an active presence at [facebook.com/FlowerCityPhilanthropy \(http://facebook.com/FlowerCityPhilanthropy\)](http://facebook.com/FlowerCityPhilanthropy).

Its offerings will be available to anyone online, but Button and co-founder Alyssa Belasco are looking in part to connect with other young professionals, many of whom already volunteer, she said.

"It's very rare that myself or Alyssa comes across a young professional that is not involved in some way," said Button, who also is marketing and events manager at Foodlink and serves on the board at the cancer support organization Gilda's Club.

Button said Rochester's ranking is good, but why not aim even higher? Why not be first in the U.S.?

(Photo: Provided)

"I always encourage people to get out there and volunteer with an organization or a group that's doing something that is meaningful to them," she said.

The large number of local nonprofits gives people plenty of opportunities to get involved, McBride said.

Since 1999, Nona Maurer and her husband, Jim (</story/news/local/columnists/bryant/2015/02/06/bryant-valentines-day-clutter-contest/22974555/>), have run Community Wishbook (<http://communitywishbook.org>), a website and printed guide to help local people to find ways to donate or volunteer.

Maurer said demand for volunteer help has remained fairly steady over the years, and almost anyone willing to help probably can find a way to do so.

"Some people don't think they have a skill or a talent, but it's just amazing," she said. "If they'd go through the categories in the Wishbook, something should be able to jump out at them that would be of interest."

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(Photo: TINA MACINTYRE-YEE / @tyee23/staff photographer)

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