



Robert Miller

[Archive](#) |
[E-mail](#)



Phyllis Bernstein compiles a long list of Dallas volunteer work

12:00 AM CST on Sunday, February 10, 2008

You may have noticed a story that ran next to my column Wednesday that said the number of volunteers declined nationwide last year for the second year in a row.

Make no mistake: Volunteerism is alive and well in Dallas.



MIKE STONE/Special Contributor
Phyllis Bernstein (right) with Carol Francois, Girls Inc.'s 2008 board chairman.

Our city's honor roll of volunteers would stretch from here to the horizon and back, and is typified by such dedicated volunteers as Lyda Hill, who will be honored Monday at the Volunteer Center of North Texas Heart of Texas Awards Luncheon.

Cheering the winner on will be a roomful of volunteers like Phyllis Bernstein.

Ms. Bernstein started volunteering at age 10 in New Orleans, where she was born and grew up.

"A group of kids in the neighborhood wrote a play and invited parents and kids to come. Some of the parents baked cookies and made lemonade. We sold tickets and raised \$25, which we gave to UNICEF," she said.

"I worked as a teenager at Newman High School, reading to kids. When Hurricane Betsy came in the 1960s, I volunteered to handle the phones at City Hall."

After graduating from Tulane University's Sophie Newcomb College, she majored in audiology in graduate school at the University of Texas at Austin. She was hired by Callier Center for Communication Disorders in Dallas.

Ms. Bernstein got married and, when her second child was born, she resigned and became a full-time volunteer.

"I began with the National Council of Jewish Women, a United Way affiliate with around 20 programs, all but two dealing with communitywide issues, by teaching English as a Second Language at Franklin Middle School.

"Then I moved on to other things there, eventually becoming the president of NCJW."

Pregnant teens

Her work with the National Council of Jewish Women included working with pregnant teenagers at the Health Special High School, a magnet school of the Dallas Independent School District. "I did intake interviews, exit interviews, tutoring and just being a mentor and listener to these girls. I did this for over 10 years."

Ms. Bernstein said there were a couple of mothers as young as 11 years old and six or seven mothers as young as 13 every year.

When a girl has a baby before the age of 15, statistics say there is a better than 50 percent chance she will have another child before the age of 18, Ms. Bernstein said.

"I realized that I wanted to volunteer with girls before they become pregnant, so I started volunteering with Girls Inc.

"I am a past chair of the board, and now I am the chair of the auxiliary council. I also worked in a program called Baby Think It Over," a pregnancy prevention program.

"We met twice a month for a year, working with middle school-age girls to talk to them about what it would mean to them to have a child before

graduation from high school and what it would be like to get an education first, including college."

More boards

Ms. Bernstein served on the national board of the National Council of Jewish Women for six years and has been on the following boards since the 1980s: the Dallas Commission on Children and Youth of the Community Council of Greater Dallas, the Dallas Concilio of Hispanic Service Organizations, and the Coalition for Responsible Parenthood and Adolescent Sexuality, a part of the Community Council.

She is a past member of the board of the Greenhill Parents' Association and the Center for Nonprofit Management, where she now sits on the advisory board.

"Because I was president of NCJW, I served ex-officio on the board of United Way. I was part of the Success by Six Steering Committee and on the community investment committee.

"My son nominated me to be a torch bearer for the 2000 Olympics. I was very proud to be accepted, and my son, Brad, also got to carry the torch."

This honor led to good-natured ribbing between mother and son when they learned that Troy Aikman would pass the torch to Ms. Bernstein.

Troy Aikman!

"Brad thought that he should be the one who received it, and the men in the project agreed with him. But the women participating agreed with me and thought that I should receive it."

The women won.

She is a member of the board of the Volunteer Center of North Texas and the chair of its Dallas council. "I have been involved there for many years," she said, "starting with the Youth Leadership Program started by NCJW and the Junior League of Dallas.

Ms. Bernstein and her husband, Richard, work with Dallas Social Venture Partners, a nonprofit organization whose members invest their money and, more importantly, their time and managerial expertise to help nonprofit agencies become more efficient.

Mr. Bernstein, who's retired, shares his expertise in business valuation, the specialty of his former business, Bernstein, Conklin & Balcombe.

This is only a partial listing of Ms. Bernstein's résumé.

She served in leadership roles in religious organizations and spent plenty of time stuffing envelopes and helping in other ways.

Another current interest: "I am involved in a program that the NCJW is researching that seeks to improve women's access to health care, especially those aged 17 to 24, who may be suffering from diabetes, hypertension, mental health issues, obesity, etc."

Ms. Bernstein is learning to say no more often, but, she said, "I have no intention of letting go." How could she? She offers the mantra of volunteers everywhere: "When you volunteer, you get back more than you give."