

Those who give back

By Louise MacLellan-Ruf | Jun 09, 2016



Source: File photo Mayor Louise MacLellan-Ruf with Cargo, "Mayor of the Boardwalk."

What have you done for Rockland this year to make it a better, happier or kinder place?

A fair question to ask ourselves. There is so much that creates community, creates connection. It is often the small kindnesses that keep the heart of our city beating. We still live in a time when neighbors mind their own business. But also a time when neighbors know if they need something, it is simply a door knock away.

Here are just a few shout-outs to our community members. I will only use first names, as these individuals give back to our community effortlessly and with no expectation of public acknowledgment.

Harry plows the snow off the Sandy Beach path in the winter so seniors can safely walk. A guy named Greg on Broadway also clears paths and sidewalks for those in need.

Peta gave 28 years of her life (which by the way she will never get back) in service to the city. Also, Joanne, tirelessly keeping us all in check.

Brenda clears away bamboo from a park. Newty gives her recyclable cans to the man on the bike. She also fills her bags with food to give away.

Mike never turns a vet away. Dunkin' Donuts of Rockland offers Munchkins and coffee for events. Ira is fighting the opioid epidemic.

Beth, always quietly giving back. Sally, flowers in the dead of winter. Kendall leaves a poem wherever the need or inspiration arises.

The Apprentice Shop sails for the day to help hospice. Catherine and Carol are always cleaning up Snow Marine Park. Shari cleans up Route 17 and receives waves and hellos.

Georges River Land Trust partners with the City for a coastal clean-up. The Rockland District Nurse Association Zumbas its way to gather funds for the community. Nick gives rides to people without cars.

"Out and About with Al" provides wildlife and entertainment for his viewing public. Amanda and Josh plow elders out. Sharon and her daughter Cassidy coordinated a Facebook page to help a family in need.

Jay and Denise help to beautify Rockland. Terry plants trees. Greg finds art in the most unusual places.

St. Pete's, St. Bernard's and AIO feed hundreds every day. Chris provides entertainment and laughs. Not to mention all of the city committee and commission volunteers.

These are names that just scratch the surface of why our community succeeds.

I was lucky enough to be invited to an awards ceremony at Oceanside High School last week. The cafeteria was filled with the palpable energy of smiling youth and their families. This was an award ceremony for students who fight the odds and succeed. In many ways their challenges are harnessed by acknowledgement that their challenges exist: low incomes, lack of interest in school, so attending classes is not a priority. Many of the students are dealing with family and social functioning issues.

Luckily for these students there is a program called Jobs for Maine Graduates. This program is a perfect fit for these students. The program engages students with a "yes you can do it" belief system. There were speeches from many of the students. Teachers recounted the shy student who would not engage. They talked about how a year later that same student is now a leader and mentoring others.

JMG offers a leadership program. JMG teaches students how to fill out job applications. Students are taught interview skills. Some even take college-credited classes.

Many awards were given out that night. Several times students' names were called but no one stepped up to receive the award. Turns out the program is working so well that many of these students were at their jobs.

These students, teachers and parents should be very proud of the successes the students have achieved. Those in the group that I saw are able to juggle, life, school, work and life impressively.

The night rang with laughter and applause. Toward the end of the night one of the teachers, Scott Browning, was recognized for being an outstanding teacher. A worthy Hall of Fame teacher. It was clear from the students' reaction that Scott is a well-loved and respected team player. It was heartwarming to hear the respect and love the group feels for Scott. It takes people of Scott's

character and veracity to inspire these students to believe in themselves, to believe that they matter. It is clear that Scott cares about these students. Well done, Scott. Enjoy your achievements.

I also was invited to another recognition event. The President's Volunteer Service Award hosted by Penquis and RSVP. This is "the premier volunteer awards program, encouraging citizens to live a life of service through presidential gratitude and national recognition." The room was full of seniors who have donated thousands of hours of their time, giving back to the community.

The story of a volunteer who collects vases and fills them with flowers was shared. She takes them to the hospital. Attached is a note that says, "Please feel free to take these flowers." After hearing the story, Valerie, also a volunteer, piped up and said, "I have a bunch of vases at home I can donate."

A beaming Maria Bartlett received the award for volunteering over 500 hours at St. Bernard's soup kitchen. Like our students, many of the volunteers were unable to attend — they were volunteering.

These individuals easily can answer the question about what they have done for Rockland to make it a better, happier and kinder place. Can you?

Louise MacLellan-Ruf is mayor of the city of Rockland.