

Giving Spirit

Longtime volunteer loves working at JFS' Fall Fix Up.

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Contributing Writer

Sara Voight is not a morning person. Even so, there comes a Sunday in November, rain or shine, when the leaves have fallen and cold drafts begin to creep through windows, that she happily greets hundreds of volunteers ready to help seniors in the Jewish community with Jewish Family Services' annual Fall Fix Up.

On Nov. 4, JFS celebrated the 20th anniversary of this event, which Voight has either participated in or coordinated each year. She started in 1997 helping to clean windows for an elderly couple. She said she cleaned for "hours and hours" while getting to know the couple she otherwise would never have met. She finished the day feeling good and wanting to do more.

That is why, for 20 years, volunteers can find Voight greeting them early in the morning with her genial smile handing out rakes, gloves and cleaning products as they head out to their assignments.

This year at Congregation Shaarey Zedek in Southfield, she did so on a crystal-clear morning with mild temperatures. Good weather is one thing Voight and her other committee members cannot control for the annual cleanup, but she wagered that even in inclement days, volunteers would still show up.

"Volunteering should not be an obligatory box that one must check off to meet some requirement for community service," said Voight, 47, who was recently appointed to the JFS board. "With volunteering, everyone is looking for something to do that they will enjoy and will give them satisfaction for doing a job well done."

Voight attributes the day's success also to the capable JFS staff and the level playing field of a collaborative planning committee.

"As the Fall Fix Up planning committee prepares each year, we get calls from volunteers asking to work at the same



20-year volunteer Sara Voight

home," she said. "At the end of the day, I see people coming back smiling and energized with even more ideas of how to help. Each year, the event grows and we have found the registration slots fill very quickly."

Voight attributes her volunteerism to values instilled by her parents, Mark and Diane Voight of Novi, who taught her and her sisters that "life is all about participating, doing for others and getting involved."

Growing up in Novi, where there were not many Jews, Voight learned it would take some extra effort to be connected to the Jewish community.

"My sisters and I had a choice, we could either join BBYO or United Synagogue Youth, but not joining a Jewish youth group was not a choice," Voight said. "But it was worth it because through BBYO, I gained many leadership skills and made lifelong friends."

Her leadership skills continued during her years at the University of Michigan. She worked her way through college as a guest receptionist

at the student union, led college tours to campus visitors and chartered the community-service-oriented Delta Zeta sorority with some of her BBYO friends.

A financial reporter by profession, Voight also applied her "bean-counting, number-crunching" savvy to serving on the finance, insurance and retirement committees at the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit.

"In no way do I take my volunteer work as a begrudging obligation," said Voight, who works as director of finance and administration at SMZ Advertising in Novi. "I love to learn from people in different professions. Every time I volunteer on a committee, I have gained a new skill and a new insight." *

See Fall Fix Up story, page 23.



Volunteer Ariana Mentzel picks up supplies at this year's Fall Fix Up.

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