



Why people volunteer. And it may not be what you think

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By Marcus Lim

National Volunteer Month celebrates those who help others, and nonprofit organizations in Miami are focusing on people and companies who help the cause.

The Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce is encouraging companies to engage in social responsibility this month. To help, the chamber is hosting its first volunteer day on Friday, April 28, and Saturday, April 29, giving businesses the opportunity to volunteer at 10 local organizations.

The nonprofit organizations chosen by the chamber are from around Miami-Dade. Patrick Morris, the chamber's nonprofit committee chair, hopes that the event will help smaller companies get involved.

"We want them to get their feet wet, see what the services are like," Morris said. "We are trying to give people as many options to learn about our community and learn how important the corporate part is in the success of the non\profit sector."

Morris hopes to draw 100 volunteers. While many larger companies typically have partnerships with other organizations, it is the small ones he wants to introduce to the volunteering world, and give them an insight to how nonprofit organizations operate.

"The target is not the big companies that have standard projects all the time. ... I want small businesses," Morris said.

The Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce chose National Volunteer Month of April for their event to raise awareness.



*Pelican Harbor Seabird Station is one of the 10 local organizations to be helped by the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce. **For the Miami Herald***

Best Buddies, which relies on volunteers to create one-on-one friendships with people who have intellectual and developmental disabilities, stresses the importance of volunteering.

“Volunteers truly are the lifeline of this organization,” said Nicole Maddox of Best Buddies. “We find that volunteering changes the lives of not only our participants with disabilities, but it also changes the lives of the volunteers themselves — by opening their hearts and minds to others who may not necessarily have the same abilities or look like them.”

Big Brother and Big Sisters, which specializes in having volunteers bond with youths as mentors and older-sibling figures, is using this month to honor an outstanding individual who has advanced the social cause.

Ari Sweetbaum, a lawyer at Daniels, Rodriguez, Berkeley, Daniels, Cruz, has been a Big Brother for 15 years and was recognized for helping his Little Brother, Keyshawn, with a Florida prepaid scholarship. Sweetbaum met him 10 years ago when he was just 5, and Sweetbaum has been making monthly contributions since then to ensure Keyshawn would go to college.

“I wanted to do something that made me feel good again and giving is a nice distraction from the stress of everyday reality,” Sweetbaum said. “It all melts away when you are with a child. You take the focus away from yourself when you have the child smile.”

Even though Miami has many nonprofit organizations, Miami and Fort Lauderdale have the lowest volunteer rate in the nation out of 51 of the largest metropolitan cities in the nation, according to a [survey](#) by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

The Minneapolis/St. Paul area has the highest rate of volunteering, according to the study.

Sweetbaum said he started to volunteer for a selfish reason. To feel happy.

“We are all benefiting just as much or even more so from just giving.”



*Keyshawn met his big, Ari Sweetbaum, when he was just 5 years old through Big Brothers Big Sisters Miami. In the 10 years they have known each other, they have become very good friends. **For the Miami Herald***