

## Eye on Norman

# National Volunteer Week

**GUEST COMMENTARY**  
BY HAROLD E. RICE

Winston Churchill famously said, “We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”

During this National Volunteer Week (April 16-22), I encourage us all to take a moment to thank the thousands of people in the Lake Norman area who give their time to make our community better.

National Volunteer Week officially began in 1974, when President Richard Nixon established it with an executive order. According to data from AmeriCorps’ most recent survey on volunteering and civic engagement, more than 35 percent of North Carolinians volunteer each year – whether helping their neighbors, improving their neighborhoods, or assisting nonprofits that depend on volunteers to serve clients. Their combined 265 million hours of volunteer service was worth an estimated \$6.4 billion, or a value of \$24.15 per hour.

To put that in perspective, during our most recent program year at the Ada Jenkins Center, 587 volunteers spent 8,491 hours with us. The value of their time totaled more than \$205,050, an equivalent of nearly 14 percent of our annual budget. That’s \$205,050 in organizational savings we can instead apply toward direct service for the families we serve.

Several of our volunteers have dedicated years of their time, several days a week – becoming, in effect, not only part-time “employees” but also valued teammates and friends who believe in the work we do, and help us do it better.

Lee Ann Phelan, for instance, retired in 2018 from a career in merchandising and e-commerce. Since 2019, she has

volunteered in almost every program area of the Ada Jenkins Center – even through the COVID-19 pandemic. She has worked with adults in the English as a Second Language (ESL) academic program, assisted clients needing emergency financial assistance, and helped coordinate several fundraising efforts. Her time and dedication are priceless, and we can never express our gratitude enough.

“The Ada Jenkins Center is a special place with exceptional people.” Lee Ann told me recently. “I look forward to coming here every week because I know I’m making a difference. I am grateful that I am able to work with the employees here because they are all so passionate about their role at the Ada Jenkins Center.”

Others volunteer at the Center by working with our LEARN Works program after-school students, helping our food pantry clients shop for healthier food, preparing taxes free of charge through the VITA program, organizing and beautifying our campus, and so much more.

There’s no doubt: volunteers make a powerful difference at nonprofit organizations all across the Lake Norman community. They’re making sure hard-working families in need have access to hot meals, job training, and

medical care. They’re providing school tools and bags of hope, and bringing smiles to neighbors going through tough times.

We celebrate them all. □

– Harold E. Rice is Chief Executive Officer of the Ada Jenkins Center in Davidson, a historic regional hub for education that now offers a comprehensive range of programs – many enhanced by volunteers – serving area residents. Visit [adajenkins.org](http://adajenkins.org) for more information.