

## The Summit of Volunteerism

by George Collins

The name Philadelphia echoes the noblest of sentiments in the relations among man. The City of Brotherly Love. And it has lived up to that high ideal in the national life of the country. It has been the site of more than just one seminal event of our history. It is the birthplace of our nation, the place in which the sweetest phrases of liberty were set down. And it was the center of anti-slavery agitation to extend that liberty to all the inhabitants of the land. It is therefore not surprising that Philadelphia was chosen to be the site of the "Volunteer Summit." The Summit was the inaugural event in a campaign to address in a personally compelling way a problem deemed the most crucial facing our society at the approach of the 21st century. The problem of our lost, alienated, ill prepared, impoverished youth.

The challenges and opportunities of the technological wonders, the global reach of competition and the sad state of

intractable urban poverty threaten us with complexities with which we are unprepared to cope. The fate of 2 million children is declared to be at risk. The dreadful waste of mental power of which Henry George spoke 118 years ago, now demands more than government, religion and organized philanthropy can manage. The genuinely nurturing care

of personal attention to which our failing youth are most apt to respond, all else having failed, must be mobilized to combat the scourge of drugs, alcohol, crime and want that stunt so many.

A national call to arms was needed. The most eminent public figures of our day have been enlisted to the cause. Two former Presidents, a former First Lady, our most prominent soldier-hero at the helm, and the President himself convened in Philadelphia to sound the call and lead the charge. They spent a day painting walls and raking trash. They displayed personal commitment and involved participation making direct connection with the young, demonstrating responsibility, interest and care. The President spoke of the problems facing our children as "...problems of the human heart..." and General Powell described the gathering as a "...pledge that those of us who are more fortunate will not forsake those who are less fortunate."

Getting John Q. Citizen to sign on even to this high minded effort is recognized to be no easy task. Various strategies will have to be employed. The young and the old and families in between must be brought into the program. Dual careers and second jobs are only two of the strategies that already stretch too many families to their limit; getting their cooperation will take some doing. Encouraging corporate commitment of its personnel has created discussion of what is being called "mandatory volunteerism," a phrase that sounds much like the "request" with which every G.I. is familiar: "I need three volunteers; You, You, and You, let's go."

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But naturally, our resourcefulness has already given birth to its corollary, "Compensatory Volunteerism."

But hyperbole aside, we must come to terms with the present and future dangers of a growing phalanx of educationally ill equipped and socially alienated youth within our midst. The fact of the matter is that the great alarm being expressed is from a well placed fear as much as of any other concern. Nevertheless, put in best possible terms, the urge to give of oneself to someone arises from some feeling of genuine connection - something we call love. Being of help to others in need is an act of charity. We can fully agree with Henry George when he said, "I would not be understood as belittling that spirit which finds expression in works of benevolence, and which seeing suffering, hastens to do what is nearest at hand." But justice, he reminds, is necessary for charity to have true beneficence.

High in character and genuine in motive as the leaders of the "Volunteer Summit" and all who will add their efforts to the cause

may be, we should be mindful of George's further caution that it is all too easy for programs to have "...something which is really not charity, but the reverse - a conscious or half-conscious desire to use the cloak of charity to hush conscience and still the demand for justice."

That justice is recognized by the afflicted as the sovereign need in the

campaign to rescue our children can be deduced from what has been described in news reports as "...skepticism, born of hard lessons among local residents who watched volunteers paint and rake on Germantown Avenue..." Said one resident, "If lives are to improve here, there must be more jobs and better housing."

The promise held out in the goals of the Volunteer Summit fades in the shadow of those two ever-growing, continuously enhanced deficiencies of our monopoly-ridden system. The well meaning volunteers will very early find their efforts merely ameliorating the condition of a lucky few while the need grows, their enthusiasm wanes and dependency increases. The transitory nature of "good works" which achieve so much when applied to unique situations and in emergencies can only be despairing when measured against our chronic social issues.

But a volunteerism of a more enduring kind is demonstrated in the simplest acts performed in the cause of justice. Like the patriots who in this city gave root to the tree of political liberty and the abolitionists who taught that individual liberty was indivisible, the volunteers for economic justice gathered here in this little house in Philadelphia serve a cause that when embraced will touch the lives of all the millions who will ever trod this land. Equal access to the bounties of nature is the only real cure for the lost, alienated, ill-prepared and impoverished of any age in any century. Your service, unsung by all but those who serve with you, is at the summit of all volunteerism.



### Volunteer Celebrated

On May 10th, thirty-plus supporters of the Philadelphia Henry George School who had taught classes, recruited students, organized programs, promoted the School and made financial contributions were recognized at an Annual Awards Dinner at the Henry George Birthplace. A special tribute was given to Lu Cipolloni in honor of her 60 years of volunteer service as Secretary, Treasurer, Registrar, assistant to the Director and sometime substitute teacher. These volunteer efforts were contrasted with the highly celebrated Volunteer Summit inaugurated in Philadelphia in April, by Guest Speaker George Collins.