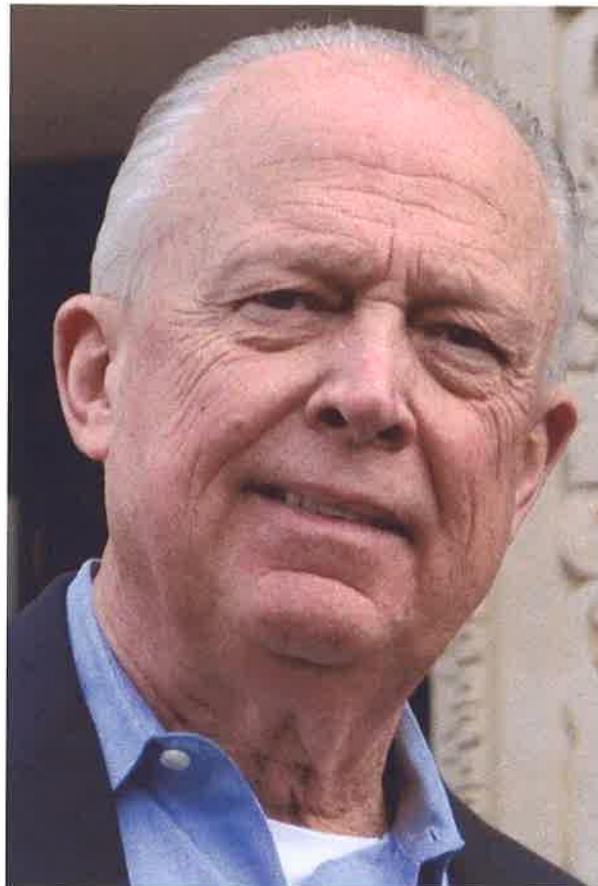


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Richard Eckstrom column: Let's recognize those who give of themselves to make a difference

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Richard Eckstrom

Given how bad news tends to dominate headlines – and how misdeeds are far more likely to find their way onto the nightly news than acts of kindness – it's easy to lose sight of the basic goodness and generosity of people.

Yet all around us people are making a difference in ways large and small – sharing with those who aren't as fortunate, lending a hand to neighbors in need, extending kindness to strangers or working to improve our communities in some way.

As we count our blessings this Christmas season, it's worth saluting those among us who chip in to make

a difference. Here are a few noteworthy examples I've come across within just the past few weeks:

- USC and Clemson took their rivalry off the field for a couple of worthy causes, with fans competing in a blood drive and food drive. Nearly 4,700 people donated blood to the Red Cross, and thousands of pounds of food were donated to stock the shelves of Harvest Hope and Golden Harvest food banks. (The Tigers won the blood drive, while the Gamecocks won the food drive.)
- Students and teachers at Philip Simmons High in Berkeley County have opened a charitable food and clothes pantry at the school, according to the Daniel Island News. The pantry benefits families of students at the school, and others nearby, needing help with food and clothing. According to a teacher who helped organize the project, "Philip Simmons students... manage the pantry like a retail store, except everything is free."
- Some good folks in Pelzer recently held a hot dog cookout for Anderson County public safety officers as a way of showing appreciation, according to the local weekly newspaper The Journal.
- A Mount Pleasant orthodontist dedicated a percentage of receipts from new patient treatments in October to support women battling breast cancer. According to The Moultrie News, Kelley Orthodontics donated \$2,900 to SOS Lowcountry, a nonprofit that helps breast cancer patients.
- On a recent Saturday, high school and college-aged volunteers made repairs to seven Columbia homes whose owners were without the means to fund the work themselves. The project was sponsored by Home Works, a Midlands-based Christian ministry that fixes up the homes of people in need.
- Wanting to help comfort and encourage people battling cancer, four Upstate cancer survivors decided upon a novel approach: They authored a book – which they're distributing for free – to share their personal stories. It's titled "Four Stories of Hope," and it's available by calling 864-455-5809 or emailing ksusko@ghs.org. According to WSPA-TV news, the writers are members of a cancer support group sponsored by Greenville Health System's Cancer Institute.
- If there's a silver lining to the recent catastrophic flooding wrought by Hurricane Florence – which devastated communities and upended countless lives – it's the way ordinary folks stepped up to assist in the recovery effort. Months later, those efforts are continuing. The Warehouse, a Conway restaurant and music venue, holds a weekly spaghetti plate fundraiser to assist uninsured homeowners who lost their homes in the flood. According to the Horry Independent, area musicians contribute weekly by providing entertainment, and local dignitaries wait tables.

And the Herald-Advocate in Bennettsville reported that Carolina Panthers defensive end Julius Peppers and a team of volunteers were in town recently to help gut flood-damaged homes, so the structures can be repaired.

- The Bar-B-Q Grill in Ridgeland teamed with the Marcus Lattimore Foundation to offer free Thanksgiving meals to local residents, according to Bluffton Today.
- The Summerville Journal-Scene reported that Summerville police collected and delivered Thanksgiving turkeys to 40 grateful area families.

The holidays will include other acts of generosity and goodwill, most of which might never be publicized. With the limelight so frequently focused on our worst qualities, rather than our better angels, it's good every now and then to acknowledge those who give of themselves – a little or a lot -- for a cause beyond their own interests.

Thanks to all whose good works help make our communities better. Merry Christmas to everyone!

Richard Eckstrom is a CPA and the state's Comptroller.