

the Givers

Their reasons for giving back are as varied as the ways they go about it. For some, it's a donation out of gratitude; for others, it's a helping hand for a cause. What these Bethesda-area residents have in common is that each gives from the heart

By Carrie Dietz

Photos by
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Healing Touch

Jon Levy
Bethesda

Jon Levy wasn't thrilled with his career in computers, so almost 15 years ago the Bethesda resident pursued a hobby in massage therapy that has forever changed his life—and the lives of others.

Since becoming a trained massage therapist, he has volunteered to help area residents suffering from AIDS, cancer, ALS and some who have survived torture. "It's the most satisfying work I've ever done," says Levy, who sees up to eight clients a week suffering from ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord. He also spends one afternoon a week at the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition International (TASSC) in Washington, D.C., using massage therapy as a way of emotional healing.

One client at TASSC, Angelina, was a victim of torture and did not want to be touched. With the encouragement of Levy and Sister Dianna Ortiz, who founded the organization, she reluctantly agreed to massage therapy. At first, Angelina was frightened and cried, but after several weeks of massages, she began to look forward to them. "It was a big change, probably the most dramatic one I've seen, and I'm pretty sure that it was a helpful one for Angelina," he says about the woman's ability to accept human touch again without fear.

Levy, 64, often visits ALS clients in their homes because they are unable to travel. Now retired, he spent several years volunteering in tandem with a full-time career.

Levy feels a special bond with the people he sees. "I do know I'm connecting with people in a very meaningful way, sometimes at the end of their lives," he



Jon Levy works on a patient.

says. Sometimes that connection includes laughter, such as his experience with one wheelchair-bound client with ALS who loved music. "I'd help her to dance in her wheelchair. We laughed every week," he recalls.

Joan Deye, a volunteer nurse with the DC/MD/VA Chapter of the ALS Association who regularly sees Levy in action, recalls a time three years ago when Jon visited a young man with ALS almost

every day. "Whatever that man needed, Jon was there for him until the end."

Levy also helps his clients in other ways—driving them to medical appointments, playing chess with them or simply spending time with them. "I worked my whole life and no one ever told me I completed a mitzvah [a good deed], but when I took a Holocaust survivor to see 'The Pianist,' that's what she told me," Levy says.



Ted Leibovitz, (front), donated \$22,000 to Habitat for Humanity.

Home Maker

Ted Leibovitz Bethesda

After his recent Bar Mitzvah, Ted Leibovitz spent his gift money—all \$22,000 of it—in one place. The Bethesda teen says he’s richer for it.

Leibovitz gave the cash to Habitat for Humanity of Montgomery County to help build a home in Burtonsville for a family of eight. “My dad [Phil Leibovitz, president of Sandy Spring Builders] is a builder and I know what having a home means,” says the 13-year-old. “I didn’t know that much money could really make a difference, and to see that a family could have a home because of something I did, it’s amazing.”

Ted’s mother, Niki Mock, says it was important for Ted to see first-hand how his donation helped someone. Mock worked with the Habitat for Humanity chapter by arranging for Ted to meet the family who benefited from his monetary gift. Ted’s family also helped furnish the home with used furniture Mock collected.

Mock is proud that her son came up with the plan on his own, then followed through with the project. “It was very fulfilling to see that he could think that way,” she says. “Once he made up his mind to do it, he was very committed.”

Hoping that others might be inspired by his giving, Leibovitz spoke about his experience at Washington Hebrew Religious School last spring. “The more kids I tell, the more kids that might want to do something like it,” he notes. “That would be a great thing.”

Donor Divas

Mita Schaffer Rockville

Dinner and a donation go hand-in-hand for the DIVAs of Montgomery County. The 12 women, “Donors Investing in the Arts” (DIVAs), meet several times a year for the sole purpose of helping young people find themselves through the arts.

With the help of the Montgomery County Community Foundation (MCCF), the group identifies area children with a passion for the arts who might benefit from scholarship money or gifts such as art supplies, DIVA co-founder Mita Schaffer says. Heading into its third year, DIVAs has supported training for 12 dancers, poets, painters and actors, and has provided smaller gifts to many more blooming artists. “In one case, a musician simply needed money to buy music paper so he could compose,” says Schaffer, co-owner of Martin-Schaffer Advertising in Bethesda. “This year, as we did in our first grant year, we will be supporting programs and not individual youth.”

Schaffer’s business partner, Tina M. Martin of North Bethesda, jumped at the chance



DIVA Mita Schaffer at the Silver Spring train bridge mural.

to join the group when it started. "It's wonderful to be able to give a student the 'shot in the arm' of confidence and assistance," she says. Martin, who has a little voice training under her belt, recalls a candidate whose voice resonated with her and was very pleased to be able to fund voice lessons for the young girl. "She had promise, but needed lessons."

Ever notice the mural under the train bridge on Georgia Avenue in Silver Spring? Thank the DIVAs for making that project happen. "I just smile every time I see it," Schaffer says.

Meeting for gourmet and gab, each DIVA makes a two-year, \$5,000 commitment and together the group selects its scholarship recipients. What Schaffer loves about the DIVAs is a shared interest in the arts, despite its members' diverse backgrounds. "It's a way to have a social outlet and do something good in the community which isn't otherwise being done," she says. Other DIVAs include Dianne Felton of Chevy Chase; Catherine Leggett of Burtonsville; Tina Martin of North Bethesda; Esther Newman of Rockville; Shirley Ballard Miller and Cecelia Ross of Potomac; and Amy Schaffer of Bethesda.



Larry and Mary Freedman have dedicated their lives to helping children.

Family Affair

The Freedmans

Bethesda

From the annual Christmas party the family hosts at the JC Nalle Community School in Washington, D.C. to the weekly art classes Mary Freedman teaches at the National Center for Children and Families (NCCF), the Freedmans of Bethesda take a hands-on approach to giving.

Children inspire the Freedmans, says Larry Freedman, who used connections from the Puerto Rico-based telecommunications company where he works to organize and partially fund a spring 2007 trip to Puerto Rico for 20 JC Nalle students. The community school is a partnership between NCCF in Bethesda, the Freddie Mac Foundation and District of Columbia Schools, enrolling students from Washington's Ward 7, explains Elise Goede, director of volunteers and in-kind resources for NCCF. The school also offers after-school care, summer enrichment programs, healthcare and mental health services and social services.

Mary Freedman, a professional artist, teaches art every Wednesday night as part of the NCCF's Greentree Adolescent Program. After four years of teaching the class, Mary still is inspired that nearly every student creates their art for someone else. "They have so little but still want to give," she says.

Both Ross Freedman, 19, and Scott Freedman, 18, the couple's sons, have volunteered at Greentree Shelter, too. Each was assigned the job of "buddy"—playing basketball with children staying at the shelter or helping them with homework. "The most memorable sight was watching Ross, all six feet, three inches of him, sitting in the nursery having a picnic with plastic food," Mary recalls.

The Christmas party at the school is especially meaningful to the Freedmans. Larry provides most of the funds for the party and—dressed as Santa—delivers a bit of Christmas. "These are kids who may not get a lot of other gifts, but Santa comes to the school because of Larry," says Patricia Reed of Fleischman and Harding law firm, who helps Larry coordinate the ever-growing event.

And does Larry, who is Jewish, mind playing Santa Claus? Not at all, he says. "Some things simply transcend religious boundaries."



Rosalia Miller (left) with National Cathedral School students and volunteers Vanessa Mercado and Julia Rivera.

this for others, too,” she says.

Through the fund, Miller began to organize workshops for parents and school fairs at places like Gonzaga College High School and Norwood School so Latino parents could explore the world of private schools. “When a child has no backing or very little credentials in this town, it’s useful to know someone,” she says. “That’s where we can help.”

Tim Rivera knows Miller’s generosity well. The teen is a sophomore at Yale University and received funding from LSF to attend St. Albans School in Washington for high school. Tim’s mother, Becky Rivera of Silver Spring, says it’s because of Miller that Tim set his sights on the prestigious Ivy League school when the time came to look at colleges. “Rosalia guided him through the college application process,” Becky says. “She’s always encouraged him to shoot for the stars.” Tim also spent the summer of 2007 working part-time for the Guatemalan Embassy thanks to Miller, who introduced Tim to Jose Guillermo Castillo, the Guatemalan Ambassador.

Sue Temkin, an attorney with Patton Boggs, which provides pro bono counsel for LSF, says that whatever the cause, Miller always finds a way to help. “When the earthquake and tsunami hit in Sri Lanka in December of 2004, Rosalia volunteered with CHF International to do art therapy and set about to find a kiln, supplies and transportation to bring the supplies to the affected children in Sri Lanka.” Miller, an art and Spanish teacher at National Cathedral School in Washington, spent five weeks in Sri Lanka helping children work through their grief by creating art.

Giving back is in Miller’s make-up. In addition to serving as chairperson for LSF, she is the community service coordinator for the National Cathedral School’s lower school and is a member of the Colgate University board of trustees. “I was blessed with this energy, and I try to be disciplined and focused to help others,” the 63-year-old says.

Rainmaker

Rosalia Miller Chevy Chase

Chevy Chase resident Rosalia Miller has helped more than 900 Washington, D.C.-area Latino students get into—and pay for—private schools.

Miller founded and serves as chairperson of the Latino Student Fund (LSF), which provided more than \$100,000 in scholarships to 67 students during the

2006-07 school year. “I’m a shy person until it comes to asking for money for education; then I just go for it,” she says. In the early 1990s, Miller, a native Nicaraguan, began her quest to offer better education to Washington-area Latino immigrants who couldn’t afford private school. After watching her daughters’ babysitter unsuccessfully attempt to navigate the public school system, Miller helped the sitter’s own children get into and pay for private school. The idea took hold. “I realized I could do


Teen Angel Tommy Kramer Bethesda

Tommy Kramer has done a lot of giving in his 18 years. “There are too many kids in this area that are disconnected with what goes on in the world and how others live,” says the 2007 Bethesda–Chevy Chase High School graduate, now a freshman at Stanford University. “There are people in our own backyard who need help.”

In 2005, Tommy got an up close look at those in need when he renovated the baseball field at the JC Nalle Community School in Washington, D.C., as part of the Lazarus Leadership Fellows Program—a community service leadership program for students at B-CC. He then ran a free, monthlong baseball clinic on the newly renovated field using equipment paid for by \$1,000 he had raised. Kramer returned the following year to help incorporate other sports into the camp, such as basketball, kickball and soccer. “I really learned that kids are color-blind, which is how it should be,” he says.

Karen Lockard, assistant principal at B-CC High School, says Kramer was the force behind the effort to turn the school’s “Super Fridays” from fun to fun with a purpose. “It’s a day where we play music and games, but Tommy encouraged students to incorporate fun with giving, such as a cake walk for charity.” Kramer also initiated a staff versus Montgomery County Police basketball game, which benefited Bethesda Cares.

While in high school, Kramer spent three weeks in New Orleans with Habitat for Humanity. His job was to tear down houses destroyed by Hurricane Katrina to make room for new construction. An elderly woman appeared at one home and asked Kramer to find the ring her grandmother had hidden in the hollow of the bedpost. “I walked through rooms full of litter and thought, no way; but there in the bedpost was the ring,” he says. The homeowner began to cry and Kramer said it dawned on him how important a glimmer of hope can be.



Teen Tommy Kramer helps other kids through sports.