

Companies volunteer through annual United Way program

By Eunice J. Hart
Special to The Commercial Appeal

Friday, September 19, 2008

Ten employees from Buckman Laboratories set out last week to cheer up Jo Anne Armstrong, 48, whose roommate of 14 years recently passed away.

Armstrong, who is developmentally disabled, exclaimed with joy as the group began clearing away brush to make room for a sensory garden in her backyard.

Her home is one of 80 owned and operated by Shelby Residential & Vocational Services, Inc., an agency of the United Way of the Mid-South.

Once finished, the sensory garden -- complete with a flower garden, bench and colorful paintings for the fence -- will provide a place for Armstrong to sit and enjoy her time outside.

United Way kicked off its annual Day of Caring campaign at Christ the Rock Church and set a 2008-09 campaign fundraising goal of \$26.6 million. Afterward, more than 1,500 volunteers from across the Mid-South went to work at more than 75 nonprofit agency sites, many from companies including Buckman.

Diana Fedinec, public relations manager with SRVS, said the agency can only do so much in providing the basics, so the help is welcomed.

"We're really glad for the United Way because it's the little things that make a difference," she said.

This year is Beth Bazar's 12th year working with the United Way campaign. As she cooled off from mowing the lawn at Armstrong's house, she reflected on why she continues to do it.

"I guess just seeing the benefits and working on the campaign and seeing what the United Way does," said Bazar, a fleet manager with Buckman, adding, "I can be an advocate to get others to help out."

In the three years Pat Plunk has been involved, she has seen her volunteer group grow.

"There's a lot of work put into this, but it's fun for our workers," said Plunk, a human resources technician at Buckman.

The work begins at Buckman Laboratories before the employees even hit the work

site. They have a steering committee that organizes their United Way campaign all year.

"We try to have as many departments represented as possible," said Nancy Glover, Buckman's United Way campaign chairwoman.

Even through all of the organizing and sweat, it all comes down to one thing -- the smile on Armstrong's face once she sees the finished product.

"This," said Plunk, "is the most rewarding part of the campaign."



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