A Call to Serve

Inaugural Global Day of Service to take place in April

In the spirit of Lemuel Murlin, the BU president who in the early 1900s envisioned a university “in the heart of the city, in the service of the city,” the BU Alumni Association is launching its first Global Day of Service, giving alumni and others the chance to reach out to their communities, in unison, wherever they may be.

The Alumni Association, along with the BU Community Service Center, is organizing community service sites across the country and around the globe where alumni can volunteer in honor of BU on Saturday, April 17. The Global Day of Service is open to anyone connected to BU.

“The Day of Service is going to engage alumni and so many others — parents, students, faculty, and staff — in service projects that are meaningful and rewarding,” says Meg Umlas, executive director of alumni relations.

There will be at least fifty sites in the United States and abroad, including Madrid, London, Shanghai, Brussels, Sydney, and São Paolo. Service can be as simple as cleaning up a neighborhood park or helping out in a local road race. Umlas says, but it can also be focused on graduates’ area of expertise.

“Many alumni boards are interested in serving areas that reflect their constituency,” she says. “For example, School of Hospitality Administration alumni have expressed interest in working in soup kitchens. School of Medicine students are considering providing free care. There are School of Law alumni interested in doing pro bono work.”

Alumni who want to volunteer can visit bu.edu/dayofservice to learn what sites are near them, which ones need leaders, and how to sign up. “Captains” will serve as liaisons between BU and the site, coordinating volunteers, taking pictures to post online, and organizing tasks throughout the day.

If volunteers aren’t available on that Saturday, the Alumni Association is encouraging service in the days before and after April 17, says Kelly Cunningham, director of alumni communications and new media.

“We want to make this opportunity available to everyone; to constrain it to only one day would exclude service, although we are pushing April 17 as the unifying day.”

She adds that those who can’t find a BU site near them shouldn’t hesitate to get a smaller group together to volunteer. “If you live in Topeka, Kansas, and no one else is signed up to serve, you can go on your own to a local site,” Cunningham says. “Even if there’s not a high concentration of alumni in their area, they’re just as much a part of the BU community as those in Boston. This is a chance to mobilize our community on behalf of those who really need it — we want to be as inclusive as possible.”

Umlas hopes the day of service will benefit not only communities, but also participating alumni. “We hope they get a meaningful and rewarding opportunity that allows them to contribute to a local community and connect with fellow alumni,” she says.

“We hope they feel good about doing something in honor of BU — this will be a milestone event and the start of a wonderful new tradition.”

BRITTANY REHMER (COM’11)