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## The Greatest Gift — Our Flyer Selves

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# The Greatest Gift — Our Flyer Selves

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Wednesday December 18, 2019

By Eric F. Spina

On a chilly, overcast Saturday in Mesa, Arizona, I only felt the warmth of the season when I joined 15 University of Dayton alumni and friends sorting clothes at Central Christian Church for the homeless and working poor as part of “Christmas off Campus.”

We were a small contingent of a bigger army of 100 “servant ministers” providing people with breakfast, clean clothing, haircuts, bicycle repairs, and a variety of other resources in a community outreach effort called ACTS Homeless Ministry.

With pride, I watched our alumni jump seamlessly into the diverse mix of volunteers as they sorted, folded, stored, and handed out clothing. Proudly wearing Flyer attire, they humbly carried the Marianist spirit 1,800 miles from the University of Dayton campus where they honed their servant-leadership skills. In all, more than 750 alumni in 35 alumni communities this month are continuing the University’s tradition of service and are learning anew one of life’s greatest lessons: when you serve others, you improve the world for all.

Nothing showcases the University of Dayton's mission quite like these events, fashioned loosely after Christmas on Campus, which has become the country's largest single-day community service project on a college campus. Every year, more than 1,000 UD students share the magic of Christmas with Dayton school children as they transform the campus into a winter wonderland.

Meanwhile, in Denver, alumni decorated cookies, made ornaments and served lunch at Mt. Saint Vincent Home, which provides mental health treatment and foster care services to children and their families. In Raleigh/Durham, our graduates volunteered with Children's Cancer Partners to throw a holiday party for ill children. In Seattle, Flyers helped prep, cook, and serve breakfast to families staying at the Ronald McDonald House. The Washington, D.C./Baltimore community hosted games, crafts, and lunch for an Easter Seals Christmas party for military families with children with disabilities.

And this heartwarming list goes on and on and on. These scenes are playing out all over the country in what's become the Alumni Association's signature event over nearly three decades.

We can thank Brian '79 and Renai '75 Lowry, former co-leaders of the St. Louis alumni community, who befittingly received the Alumni Special Service Award. In 1990, while most alumni communities hosted Christmas parties, the Lowrys and other alumni bought gifts for a needy area family and gathered at a Mass celebrating the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Slowly, the idea for Christmas \*off\* Campus caught on, and today alumni, parents, and friends carry on this simple, yet extraordinary, tradition of service.

This is the greatest gift we can ever give — ourselves in selfless love to others.

*(Photo depicts members of the University of Dayton's Indianapolis alumni community, who provided lunch, carnival games, and crafts for the local families of Hawthorne Community Center.)*