

Boomers

Volunteering: The Boomers' Way to Make a Difference

Trying to effect change, from working for a political candidate you believed in to protesting the Vietnam war, was part of the experience of most boomers who grew up in the sixties. Is that spirit of activism still alive, or have boomers abandoned their ideals as they've aged?

Linda Blackman, a Certified Speaking Professional and president and founder of The Executive Image, Inc., thinks there is a strong desire among boomers to contribute in some way to the community. "In the sixties, there was an intense yearning to make a difference, which now manifests itself through volunteering," Blackman said. "People are searching for something to be passionate about. If they are not satisfied with their jobs, they may look for that passion by getting involved in a non-profit organization, for example. Even those who are totally happy with their jobs and their lives enjoy volunteering, because it gives them something else to focus their energies on. It allows them to diversify," she said.

"For example, I know people who spend their entire lives in public relations, but when they join a board, they volunteer for the finance committee," Blackman said. "It gives them an opportunity to learn and be helpful at the same time."

Blackman says volunteering is not only good for the heart and soul,



■ Linda Blackman

but a great way to meet new people, broaden your horizons, learn more and perhaps increase business opportunities. Volunteering is a way to help validate who you are and enhance your self-esteem, regardless of your economic level. "It makes you feel good to be appreciated and, when you give, those feelings come back to you," she said.

Blackman is a motivational speaker, trainer and coach, who has focused her career and personal goals on helping people. Blackman is a former coast to coast television news anchor reporter and talk show host. Today, she speaks to large

association and corporate audiences on how to more effectively sell, present, talk to the media and enhance leadership skills. In addition, Blackman also has a proven track record of success in coaching executives in small group formats and one-on-ones. Blackman recently received the 1999 YWCA "A Tribute to Women" Award for the Professions, the first time that award was given to a professional speaker.

"Linda's strong commitment to our business community is equaled by her dedication to the community at large through her volunteering," said **Rebecca Herbert**, YWCA director of financial development. An active volunteer on several boards, Blackman sees her involvement as a way to help make a difference in the community for those who need a voice and to ensure the survival of things she believes are important, like the **Pittsburgh Symphony**. She serves on the symphony's New Leadership Board, founded to discover ways to encourage a new generation to attend the symphony, with programs such as the *Fiddle Sticks* concerts geared to younger children. "I want the symphony to be here for my children when they grow up, should they choose to stay in Pittsburgh," Blackman said. "One of the ways we can do that is to get parents involved in the symphony and ask them to bring their children, which ensures a consistently devel-

oping love for music and our symphony."

As a board member of **Pennsylvania Educational Network for Eating Disorders**, Blackman is working with PENED to spearhead efforts to build an outpatient recovery facility where those affected with eating disorders can go after discharge from the hospital to work through the emotional issues surrounding such disorders. "I've seen a growing increase in people with eating disorders," Blackman said, "and I wanted to know what could be done to help educate them."

Blackman serves on the board of **Allegheny East Mental Health and Retardation**. She was the first woman president of the **Pennsylvania Speakers Association** and is a two-time past president of the **Greater Pittsburgh Business Association**, a networking leads group, as well as past program chair of the **Executive Women's Council**.

"There is a respect given to volunteers because of their willingness to give their time," Blackman said. "It's one of the best feelings in the world to know there is an immediate acceptance and thankfulness when you volunteer, and that you can make a difference. We may not all be able to give money, but we all have the ability to give of our time and, to me, time is more precious than any gift we can give."