

Do-gooders dash 'round Hub on a good-will mission

Race to raise funds, perform tasks



Volunteers Melissa Barclay, Julie Babson, Shelli Freidberg, Alane Janulewicz, and Michelle Sierota arrived first at Faneuil Hall. (Michael Dwyer for The Boston Globe)

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| Text size  By Megan Woolhouse

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Think of it as "The Amazing Race" TV show for do-gooders.

Hundreds of volunteers raced through Boston streets by foot and by car yesterday, performing tasks at social service agencies across the city. For many players, it was foreign terrain. Lots of participants had never ventured into Dorchester or Mattapan neighborhoods and had only heard about Roxbury's Mission Hill in news reports.

"I don't really know where I am, but I suppose that's good," said player Elisabeth Aylesworth, standing in the hallway of Dorchester Cares, a service agency in the heart of a neighborhood known in part for poverty and violence.

The race, called the "Dash for a Difference," got many people out of their comfort zones and into the streets. The event was a fund-raiser for Boston Cares, an agency that matches volunteers with social service agencies throughout the city. Twenty-nine teams raised a minimum of \$500 to compete. The goal was to perform a series of volunteer duties at agencies across the city and track down the answers to clues that tested their knowledge of city landmarks and lore.

At the Boston Latin School in Roxbury, players unpacked crates for teachers. In Dorchester, they created baby baskets for young mothers, many of them immigrants. In Jamaica Plain, they prepared meals for Hope Found, an agency that works with the homeless.

Upon the completion of each task, players had their mock passports stamped. Boston Cares organizer Rick Wallwork said the agency hoped to raise \$25,000 through the race, money used to organize 150 volunteer projects each month. The local race was designed by Boston Cares organizers, board members, and volunteers. Wallwork said they have already received requests from groups around the country hoping to copy it.

"First and foremost, this exposes people to volunteering," Wallwork said. "Part and parcel of that is bringing people into parts of the city they've never seen."

Players met at Faneuil Hall at 9 a.m. and dispersed to sites across the city. They had to finish the tasks by 2 p.m. Participants hurriedly prepared baskets with blankets made by senior citizens and fresh diapers and bibs to be given to young mothers. They met, however briefly, people like Maria Andrade, a 59-year-old Cape Verdean woman who delivers the baby baskets to new mothers.

"This is a fun way to get out and be in the community," said 27-year-old lawyer Emily Hodge, who grew up in suburban Dover. "I've never been to any of these sites."

One clue required players to visit the Trotter School in Roxbury, win a card game with a volunteer, and locate a Gothic spire in the distance. The spire sits atop the majestic Museum of the National Center of African American Artists on Walnut Street in Dorchester. Players had to go there, locate park benches on the grounds, and identify the group that built them before they could get their passport stamped.

A clue asking players to find the Ralph Waldo Emerson plaque in Franklin Park proved to be many teams' undoing. Several teams reported wandering around the park for an hour or more.

By the end of the race, only three of the 29 teams had completed all eight tasks. Five fifth grade teachers from the W.L. Chenery Middle School in Belmont took first place and won six Bruins tickets.

Other teams, such as The Loan Rangers, sponsored by the company Accion International, showed up at the finish sweaty and aggravated. They arrived at the last stop minutes after 2 p.m.

"We were so close," said 32-year-old Kevin Saunders, as his teammates hugged and consoled each other.

No one felt too bad. Among their accomplishments, the group had collectively sorted 40 bags of donated clothing in Jamaica Plain, fixed 200 meals for AIDS patients in Roxbury, and packaged 75 baby baskets in Dorchester.■

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