

**Social capital: Personal invitations rekindle connections to church**

*By Sarah Colburn*

As religious communities hunt for ways to reel in young adults, some say bulletins and marriage preparation courses are no longer the draw they were years ago.

"You didn't talk about what neighborhood you came from if you were Catholic, you talked about what parish you came from," said Barbara Anderson, program coordinator with the secretariat of family, laity, women and youth at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. "That is no longer the case. The challenge for the Catholic church is to realize that we live in a different culture in terms of how we reach people."

As more young adults marry and have children later in life, the automatic connection to the church fizzles.

However, experts agree an old-fashioned personal invitation is the best way to welcome people back. That, combined with a little technology, can provide ongoing communication about the religious institution to existing and potential congregation members.

#### Personal invitation

Stacey Shaw, 27, has been attending services at Newman Center since 1996. She said that for years the people in the pews around her were familiar though she didn't know their names.

When Shaw officially joined the church in 2002, she received a phone call from a man she'd never met asking her how she liked the church and whether she might consider attending the church Bible study.

"That was really my push," Shaw said.

Shaw's involvement with Bible study led to her role as a leader of the Young Adult Ministries program at Newman. Now, she is the co-president of the church's education committee, and each Sunday she's surrounded by people she knows and can gab with.

"This is God's way of saying this is where he wants me," Shaw said.

#### Multiple marketing

In addition to invitations, Anderson urges religious communities to keep up with technology.

Marketing through a Web site is a way to appeal to those in the 18- to 34-year-old category because it's a natural place for them to go when searching for a religious community, Anderson said.

"We need to be as visible as all the other things out there on the Internet," she said.

Anderson encourages churches to create interactive Web sites where people can enter a chat room and catch up or add to a prayer list. She stresses the Web site isn't meant to take the place of face-to-face contact but can help people stay in touch.

Anderson also suggests religious communities, in addition to handing out their regular bulletin, send parishioners an e-mail update once a month. The electronic message can reach people who missed services or have been out of town, she said.

**Social capital: Youth pastors build relationships early***By Sarah Colburn*

Local youth pastors are grooming kids early to be active, participating members of the church community in hopes they'll maintain the relationship with the church and God as young adults.

"It's not about coming to church," said Kirby St. John, youth pastor for River of Life Assembly of God Church and Breakthrough Youth Ministries. "It's more a relationship. If they take that relationship and it becomes real to them they don't want to ever not be involved."

If kids don't have a connection with God early on, many don't begin with a youth group until high school, St. John said. By then, he said, church has become part of a family routine rather than a relationship. If parents have been making a teen go to church the teen often develops a negative attitude toward it.

"The older you get, the more habits you develop. Whether they're good habits or bad habits, they're harder to break," St. John said.

As teens start with the youth group, St. John said he tries to reach them by talking about issues they face including how to make wise decisions, who they hang out with and involvement with drugs.

The Rev. Willie G. McAfee leads the Nu Way Missionary Baptist Church and is working to develop a youth ministry for his year-old congregation. Eventually, he hopes to begin a ministry for young adults.

"The younger you get them, the better chance you've got to keep them," McAfee said.

The commitment comes through salvation, he said.

"If you can develop a proper base, your retention rate will be greater," McAfee said.

[St. Cloud Times Online Homepage](#)

**Social capital: Religious groups focus efforts on younger adults***By Sarah Colburn*

Amber Hinrichs went to church off and on for a year before she gave up partying and, at age 22, devoted her Sunday mornings to learning more about God.

The Central Minnesota Social Capital Survey shows she's in the minority of 20- and 30-somethings, only 22 percent of whom attend religious services at least weekly. About the same percentage never attend.

The loss of young adults is creating a gap in the religious family, which used to be the hub of social life and family support.

Not only are religious communities missing out on the enthusiasm, time and talent of younger adults, some religious leaders said, the absence of young adults means they can't fulfill their mission of representing their beliefs.

As some young adults opt for spirituality rather than organized religion, religious institutions are looking for ways to bandage the fissure and attract members.

Young adult groups are springing up aimed at providing a social and religious outlet for those who often choose to marry and have children later in life. Some are serving up attractants such as Theology on Tap, a relaxed, no-pressure, topical discussion at a local bar.

A connection

Hinrichs found her connection with Stand and Live the Truth -- S.A.L.T -- at Westwood Community Church.

Hinrichs, who was raised Catholic, began attending Westwood with her college roommate and soon learned about the group targeted to those in their 20s and early 30s. In early June, Hinrichs became a member of the church.

"My life would have been completely different had I not gone there," said the 23-year-old staff accountant at LarsonAllen.

Each week she presents the announcements to S.A.L.T. members gathered in the church's upstairs loft.

She stands in the center of the circle of her peers who lounge on couches. At the July 22 meeting, clad in stylish khaki crop pants and a bright yellow T-shirt that, in Spanish, proclaimed Jesus Loves You, she read the details of the coming fall retreat to Camp Koronis in Paynesville.

All are welcome

As the 20 to 30 regular members of the group entered the loft earlier in the evening, she and other leaders greeted them at the door. Hinrichs is genuine but not bubbly as she greets each with a quick hug or a hello and asks how their week is going.

After 15 to 20 minutes of fellowship and cappuccinos, served from the front desk, the meeting begins. Each member fills out a prayer-request card and the men and women share with their neighbor a blessing from the week.

Then, the group splits into three groups for Bible study. They've been memorizing five Bible verses this summer. The women remain in the loft while the guys take over a nearby room. The groups discuss what the verses mean to them. Once the Bible work is complete, they share personal stories of how God has been involved in their lives.

When the smaller groups aren't into serious discussion, the members hang out. The group has volleyball nights, a spring formal, many of them get together for a meal after church and some attended a recent Christian music festival.

#### Target market

Similar groups are up and running at other area churches. Newman Center, which its leaders say has a thriving young adult membership, offers Young Adult Ministries. Group members call themselves the YAMS. The 20 or so members meet for fellowship, social time and Bible study throughout the year.

Newman Center also offers Theology on Tap once a month or every other month during the school year. The meeting is targeted to college-age students and last school year, about 30 people regularly attended the gathering at O'Hara's Brew Pub and Restaurant.

The group focused on everything from dating to the war in Iraq.

The Rev. Kevin Anderson of Newman Center leads the often-spirited discussion.

"It's all centered around learning and deep stuff, but also a lot of fun," Anderson said. "If it's only heavy theology and only doctrine, students aren't going to stay with it."

Anderson said it's all about knowing when to preach, when to laugh and when to break the students into groups to discuss complicated questions.

Michael Brixius, 25, has been going for years. He used to be a member of Newman Center but now is a self-described nonpracticing Buddhist.

Theology on Tap, he said, helps him to learn what his Catholic and Christian friends think and believe, and it helps him not to be ignorant of other religions.

"It's the one thing that Newman does that really gets young people," Brixius said. "It's a more relaxed environment than going to church and hearing a homily or getting preached to."

Although Brixius plans to attend the theology discussions again this year, he left Newman Center because Catholic teaching, he said, is hypocritical in regards to homosexuality and other topics.

#### Barriers

Local churches don't keep statistics on the number of young people leaving the church or how many consider themselves members but don't attend regularly when they're 18 to 34 years old.

And, although churches and religious institutions may offer programs for younger adults, some say that's not the only way to be involved with religion.

"A lot of Jewish observance is done in the home or in the community," said Julie Swiler, the director of public

affairs for the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas. "There's a lot of opportunity for families to have Jewish observance without having a synagogue in the area."

Some St. Cloud families travel to the Twin Cities for regular services and some bring their children for religious school because there is no synagogue in St. Cloud, Swiler said.

"Their families lay the foundation when they're in elementary and high school," she said.

A monthly service in St. Cloud, often led by a rabbi, also helps members of the community create that foundation.

However, religious leaders admit there are barriers to young adults becoming and staying involved.

Anderson is aware that communities can alienate young adults simply by failing to talk about them during services.

"In our preaching, we try not to exclude people who are not in a family or in a dating relationship," Anderson said.

Half the mission of Newman Center, a campus ministry, is to help young adults at St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud Technical College and those in the community with their spiritual journey.

Although other churches may not have the same mission, they're striving to meet the needs of young adults.

"I think for a lot of young people, they're not sure of the place of the church in their life," Anderson said. "They're very confident of the place of spirituality in their life but the role of organized religion."

#### Getting involved

Newman Center offers Mass at 8 p.m. Sundays with a specific focus on young adults.

"A lot of people that age are more drawn to programs and events that are specifically geared toward them," Anderson said.

Young adults can help start those programs, he said, citing that many times churches say they don't have the time or money to start such a thing.

Religious leaders agree that having young adults involved in the regular services, through music, reading or a task, is key to other young adults seeing themselves in the community and feeling comfortable.

To encourage young adults to come to services, the Rev. Willie G. McAfee is thinking about bringing the choir of Nu Way Missionary Baptist Church to local apartment buildings to sing and spread the word about the church.

The church just celebrated its first anniversary but is void of 18- to 30-year-olds. McAfee is trying to create a strong youth ministry to retain youths. Then, he said, he'll focus his energy on targeting young adults.

"We have something to offer them," McAfee said.

#### Relevant to life

At Holy Cross Lutheran Church, the Rev. Paul Dare is planning a fall current-events group for young adults. The members would examine current events in light of Scripture.

Couples in the congregation requested a program for young adults.

"The goal is to be able to teach the people where they're at in something they can see is relevant to their life," Dare said.

Young people, he said, often leave the church right after confirmation and most often don't return until marriage or baptism of their children.

"A lot of them see the church as irrelevant or stuck in the past, or see the church as boring," Dare said.

When those young adults return, there's a new challenge in helping them relearn their faith.

"The base of faith you have shrinks and erodes in that time," he said.

Welcoming back

Barbara Anderson, program coordinator with the secretariat of family, laity, women and youth at the United States Conference

of Catholic Bishops, said preparation for marriage and baptism are the perfect times to welcome young adults back.

"We're all the church, and we all have something to contribute," she said.

There's a maturing process where young adults may have been less active in the church as they moved away from home and searched for what has meaning in their life, Anderson said.

It's important to welcome those young adults back no matter how long they may be there, she said.

"The willingness is there, the talent is there, the enthusiasm is there. It's a matter of making young adults feel part of the church and what they do matters," she said.

There's often a stereotype that young adults may be too busy, they don't know enough or they won't be interested. While Anderson admits some of that may be true, she said, it's likely exaggerated.

Anderson credits the church for doing better than it has in the past but said there's more that can be done.

Saying hello to newcomers is key to creating a welcoming atmosphere, Anderson said.

"Somebody has recognized you're there," she said. "You're not just a person who's sitting in the pew."

The next step, Anderson said, is to extend a personal invitation to get involved.

"In many ways, it's like a neighborhood. Find out what their gifts and talents are and how they can contribute," she said.

About the survey

The Social Capital Survey was designed by the Saguaro Seminar at Harvard University and jointly sponsored in the St. Cloud area by the Central Minnesota Community Foundation and the St. Cloud Times.

The conclusions and views expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the conclusions and views of the Central Minnesota Community Foundation.

The \$13,000 survey, completed by St. Joseph-based UpFront Consulting, included calling 501 people who lived in the St. Cloud, Sauk Rapids-Rice, Sartell-St. Stephen and Rocori school districts.

The margin of error is 4.4 percent.

Get connected

To increase your social capital, pick up the telephone and call your local congregation, church or synagogue. Offer to take part in the church council, sing, read or play a role during the service. Ask how to get involved in a fellowship group, Bible study or volunteer opportunity.

Dinner for 8

Want to meet people?

The St. Cloud Times is coordinating dinner groups to help. Just log on and sign up.

The Times will match people and appoint a first-dinner coordinator. Then it's your responsibility to meet for dinner.

The idea is to meet once a month for a year, whether that means meeting at a restaurant for dinner or having a potluck.

To sign up, visit [www.sctimes.com/Social](http://www.sctimes.com/Social) Capital and provide your name, age, town, phone number, e-mail and number of children.

[St. Cloud Times Online Homepage](#)

**Social capital: Link between religious schools, church attendance isn't absolute**

*By Sarah Colburn*

Although parents may drop their kids off at a faith-based school or day care, not all will attend Sunday services or get involved with their congregation.

There is no definitive correlation but some church and school leaders agree that they tend to see families who are involved in school also involved in the church.

"It depends on the individual family and what their connection is to that church community," said Kathy Peters Cziok, principal of St. Joseph's School in Waite Park.

The key to getting parents involved in both, she said, is to make them feel welcomed and invited to participate.

"We try to find out what the people's interests and talents and abilities are and get them involved," she said.

### Involvement

Most of the parents at the school are in their 20s and 30s and that creates an opportunity for connection.

"We do a lot here where parents get together with other parents," Cziok said. "Once they get to know other families there seems to be a natural connection to the school and to the church."

Some parents, she said, were involved with the church before their children became involved with the school. Others, she said, don't address baptism -- which typically comes during infancy in the Catholic church -- until their children are of school age and the parents learn what they need to do to get their children ready for the Catholic school environment.

The day-care program, which isn't faith based and is open to the community but operated by St. Joseph's, is a draw for the school, Cziok said.

### Trends

Northland Bible Baptist Church offers a preschool program and school for those in kindergarten through grade 12.

The Rev. Tom Cucuzza said he doesn't see a pattern and doesn't have any statistics on whether people are more or less involved in the church because their children attend the school.

The Rev. Steve Binsfeld, rector of the Cathedral of St. Mary, said that overall families with children in the Catholic schools are among the more active in the congregation because they get to know people.

Most of the parents who have children at the school are in their mid-to-late 30s or early 40s, he said.

There are always parents who aren't active or attending church but have their children enrolled in the school, he said. That is counterproductive, he said.

"In the school, as well as religious education, we teach our children to be connected through the religious sacraments," he said. "If the parents themselves don't go, or see it as a priority, the influence of the parents is far greater than our influence."

**Social capital: Area churches reach out***By Sarah Colburn*

Many area churches involve young adults in their adult Bible study, fellowship, choirs and bands.

However, some churches offer groups geared toward those in their 20s and early 30s. Many leaders say you don't have to be a member of the church to participate.

Here are places to call for information:

-- Bethlehem Lutheran Church has a fellowship group that meets irregularly for activities. Call 251-8356.

-- Crossroads Christian Church is beginning a ministry for college-age students Sept. 19. The worship services will begin

at 9 p.m. Sundays. Call 230-5301.

-- First Baptist Church's Connections program typically runs during the school year and meets the third Saturday of each month at the church, 1230 Minnesota Highway 23 SE. The meetings start at 6:30 p.m. and are expected to begin in September.

The group gets together for socials and Bible studies. The monthly meeting offers live music, a speaker and hospitality. Call 251-5767.

-- First Presbyterian Church of Foley offers a parenting support group.

It also offers Bible study for all ages and a Young Adult to Middle Age Christians group that primarily focuses on fellowship.

The church has an active mission work team that does projects locally and nationally. Call (320) 968-7928.

-- Harvest Fellowship Church plans to start a program for 20- and 30-somethings this fall. The church has a young couples group that's forming in Sartell. Its members have Bible study and discuss life issues. Call 529-8838.

-- Holy Cross Lutheran Church will offer a fall current events group for young adults. Members will examine current events in light of scripture. Call 251-8416.

-- Holy Spirit Church has a Those in Need Soldiers group open to those in their 20s and early 30s. The group serves others in the area including St. Cloud's homeless. Members have worked at Place of Hope, helped the homebound and sent cards to those who are ill. Call 251-3764.

-- Hope Covenant Church offers Sunday school for college-age students and young adults. The Sunday school runs during the school year and begins at 9:30 a.m. The church also offers Sunday night worship services once or twice a month geared to that age group. Call 257-4673.

-- Karmel Covenant Church in Princeton has a Young Adult Christians group. The group has Bible study led by a pastor and its members meet at the Finish Line Café in Princeton at 7 p.m. every other Sunday. Call (763) 389-3169.

-- Kimball Church of Christ has a Sunday evening in-home Bible study made up chiefly of college students. The Bible study group also plans social outings. In addition, the church offers a young singles group targeted toward college students and a fellowship group for 20- and 30-somethings who are married. Call Bryan at (320) 398-3660.

-- Living Waters Lutheran Church of Sauk Rapids has a Twenties and Thirties group that meets Mondays from May through September for Bible study, discussion and social activities. Call 255-1135.

-- Lutheran Student Fellowship is a St. Cloud State University campus ministry that meets for Bible study, retreats, game nights and social activities. Call 259-1577.

-- New Hope Church has groups for single men and women and couples. The groups focus on Bible study and socializing. In the men's and women's groups the members talk about how the Christian faith relates to daily life. Call 656-5234.

-- Newman Center offers Theology on Tap once a month or once every other month during the school year for college-age students. The church also offers the Young Adults Ministries group that meets regularly for social activities, fellowship and Bible study. Call 251-3260.

-- Princeton Evangelical Free Church is creating a full-fledged ministry for those aged 18 to 25. The group will have a Bible study and fellowship component, as well as an accountability and prayer component. Call Chad at (763) 389-3831.

-- Resurrection Lutheran Church ELCA has a campus ministry at St. John's University and the College of St. Benedict that's open to students from the area. Call (320) 363-4232.

-- River of Life Assembly of God Sunday night small group, in-home Bible study. Call (320) 597-7777.

-- St. Louis Church in Foreston has a weekly women's Bible study that begins again this fall. The group is primarily made up of those in their 20s and early 30s. Call Angie at (320) 982-1437.

-- Trinity Lutheran Church offers ChristCare groups for people in their 20s and 30s. The groups meet in homes for fellowship, Bible study, prayer and worship and service to others. Call 252-3670.

-- Westwood Community Church offers Stand and Live the Truth for people

in their 20s and 30s. The group meets weekly for Bible study and fellowship. It also has social activities outside of regular meetings. Call 230-6700.

If you know of a church or religious organization that isn't on this list that offers programs specifically for those in their 20s and early 30s, call Sarah Colburn at 202-5418 to include the information on the St. Cloud Times Web site. Information can also be e-mailed to [scolburn@](mailto:scolburn@stcloudtimes.com)

[stcloudtimes.com](http://stcloudtimes.com).

[St. Cloud Times Online Homepage](http://stcloudtimes.com)

**Social capital: Recreational athletes interact on the field***By Tom Elliott*

Like most of his 20-something teammates, Juan Colon connects with a softball much more often than he connects with his community.

The St. Cloud resident is busy with a job and a family. His two nights a week playing recreational slow-pitch softball at Whitney Park are as much about physical fitness as anything else.

"For me, it's just exercise," said Colon, 28, a city resident for nine years. "Have fun. Stay in shape. If you win, you win. If you lose, you lose. It's all fun and games."

Experts say Colon's investment in social capital is not unusual, especially for the 18-to-34 age group.

While the Social Capital Central Minnesota Survey does not specifically measure recreational activities, indirect numbers suggest that St. Cloud's recreational ball fields and gyms are an excellent place to spot this particular age group. It's also a place where they may establish a community identity.

The Central Minnesota Community Foundation sponsored a telephone survey of about 500 area residents last March. It found the 18-to-34 age group to be less connected to its community than any other.

Softball is Colon's opportunity to develop a stake in his town.

He's not politically active -- "it just leads to arguments," he said.

He isn't an avid church-goer or volunteer, because he and his wife, Laura, are busy with jobs and taking care of their two children, Alexis, 8, and Diego, 4. At that age, school issues are important to him.

Being from Illinois, he's impressed with Minnesota's system.

Mostly, Colon connects with his teammates in a social setting.

"We're playing in a tournament in Mankato, and I haven't been able to get to the other ones, so I'm looking forward to that," Colon said. "I'm pretty booked up working."

"This is about meeting people as much as anything. When I'm out here, I'm socializing and meeting new people. It's just about having fun."

Rec sports count

Tom Sander, executive director of the Saguaro Seminar at Harvard University, says recreational activities such as a pick-up basketball game can count as social capital.

The important part is the ties formed, Sander said.

"If the same group of 10 is meeting every Monday night for a drink at the corner of Main and Seventh, friendships are likely to be durable and useful if one needs help getting a job or something like that," he said. "It's informal, and there's no membership requirement or anything like that."

The quality of the ties and interaction makes the social interaction meaningful, he said. For example, sports

teams born from another organization, such as a baseball team filled with church members, probably have stronger bonds and more social capital interaction than ones that get together just to play baseball and probably have no other ties.

"If those in basketball leagues never have any conversation outside of basketball, then it might not be a strong tie," he said. "It might not be social capital then."

### Group dominates

Gayle Stonehouse, the St. Cloud Recreation Department's director, said softball, volleyball and basketball are where to find 18- to 34-year-olds.

"Noon basketball, there are dozens of 'em. They show up like clockwork," she said. "Those guys are the most dedicated people. You can count on seeing them every day."

An area where numbers are up is recreational volleyball. Last winter, St. Cloud's leagues had 79 teams and about 750 players, said Steve Krueger of the recreation department. He's overseen the adult and youth volleyball leagues for three years.

Social capital is measured best in the co-rec leagues, where recreation intertwines with intense competition.

"What I think you're talking about, you see in the co-rec leagues," Krueger said.

"You have to remember that most guys don't play volleyball in high school. In many cases, this is their first exposure to it competitively. They're able to pick it up in the co-rec leagues."

### Softball is king

The recreation department's most popular sport is slow-pitch softball. There are almost 1,400 participants in the nightly leagues at Whitney Park.

About 75 percent of those participating are in the 18-to-34 age group, John Anderson said. Anderson oversees the softball program and has worked in the recreation department for 18 years.

"I think it's a way for people after high school to connect with their high school friends," Anderson said. "For a lot of them, softball is their favorite activity. But their second-most favorite activity is going to the bars. It's no accident that bars sponsor many of our teams."

Colon's teams are sponsored by Teders Oil and Salem Lutheran Church. He says many of his friends are involved in softball.

He could see a time when he hangs up his spikes that he might find other ways to be involved and possibly volunteer.

"It's a good way of meeting people," said Colon, who also plays pick-up basketball. "For a lot of these guys, this is the only time I see them. It's definitely a social thing."

Times staff writer Kelly Scott contributed to this report.

### About the survey

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The margin of error is 4.4 percent.

Get connected

Interested in playing slow-pitch softball or recreational volleyball? Those are just two of a multitude of activities available at St. Cloud Recreation. To sign up and for information, call St. Cloud Recreation at (320) 255-7256. Or, visit the rec department at the Whitney Recreation Center, 1529 Northway Drive.

There also is a Web site at [www.ci.stcloud.mn.us](http://www.ci.stcloud.mn.us). Click on the "Register Online For Recreation Programs" link.

Dinner for 8

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The Times will match people and appoint a first-dinner coordinator. Then it's your responsibility to meet for dinner.

The idea is to meet once a month for a year, whether that means meeting at a restaurant for dinner or having a potluck.

To sign up, visit [www.sctimes.com/SocialCapital](http://www.sctimes.com/SocialCapital) and provide your name, age, town, phone number, e-mail and number of children.

[St. Cloud Times Online Homepage](#)

## **Volunteering isn't just for older adults anymore**

*By Amy Bowen*

Time-strapped 18- to 34-year-olds take heed: You don't have any excuse not to volunteer.

The United Way of Central Minnesota created a Web site for people who don't know how to help or where to look for volunteer opportunities.

With a click of a mouse, users can browse offerings by 85 organizations and customize results by sex, age, interests and location.

The Web site represents the United Way of Central Minnesota's latest attempt to encourage volunteering, especially among young adults.

It's a desirable market for organizations relying on volunteers because younger adults offer talents and insights, and often connect with younger clients who might feel more comfortable with people their own ages.

But the 18- to 34-year-old age group isn't giving its time, despite a growing need, experts said.

Central Minnesota residents volunteer more often compared with others nationwide, according to the Social Capital Survey Central Minnesota.

The survey found 77 percent of 501 respondents volunteered at least once in the past 12 months, compared with 55 percent of a national sample of 3,003 surveys. But only about 49 percent of people 25 to 34 in Central Minnesota said they volunteered.

The Central Minnesota Community Foundation sponsored a telephone survey of 501 area people in March. The survey examined how people connected with their community.

### Changing image

The findings don't surprise volunteer-driven organizations. Many want to change the stigma that volunteering is only for older adults.

Young professionals want to know what they'll get out of the deal, said Noreen Dunnells, chief professional officer, and Betty Schnettler, director of community impact, both for the United Way of Central Minnesota.

"I think a lot of them do it because it'll look good on their

résumés or for grad school," said Kim Gillitzer, a social worker and volunteer coordinator for Birthline Inc., a pregnancy resource center in St. Cloud. "But they really enjoy it, and they continue on."

Dunnells and Schnettler said they hope features, such as the volunteer Web site, will work in recruiting. It already has had more than 1,300 referrals from all age groups, United Way officials said.

"They can search all kinds of opportunities without getting harassed," Schnettler said. "They can do it without a commitment."

Nate Maddux understands the need for volunteers. The

26-year-old St. Cloud man coaches St. Cloud's Cathedral High School's ultimate Frisbee team as a volunteer. He spends his springs practicing and taking students to competitions.

"It's not like we examine our conscious," Maddux said of volunteering. "We rarely say we should give back to the community. We either work or play."

The problems

There will never be too many volunteers, local organizations said.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Minnesota observed a huge call for adult mentors in the past couple of years, said Perry Rollings, the organization's associate director.

About 80 children aged 7 to 15 are waiting for mentors. Of that, most are boys, Rollings said.

"We have an influx of population in the area," Rollings said. "The economy has caused families to be displaced. The divorce rate has gone up."

Several volunteer-driven organizations serve children, teen-agers and other young adults. And sometimes those clients respond better to volunteers closer to their ages, Gillitzer said.

Birthline's 120 volunteers serve up to 600 men and women each year, with most of their clients aged 19 to 23, Gillitzer said. The problem arises when volunteers grow older and don't feel comfortable mentoring young adults with unplanned pregnancies, she said.

Erinn Hawkins, 27, thought her experience as a young mother could benefit the clients of Birthline. Hawkins married young, and was pregnant while student teaching.

Three children later, the

St. Cloud woman said her experiences help her clients relate to her when she volunteered.

"When you're dealing with sex, STDs and pregnancy, it does make a difference," Hawkins said. "People sometimes relate better to people who look like them."

Greg Medvec of South Haven has counseled men at Birthline for two years. The 39-year-old has heard horrible stories from his clients: 20-year-olds having three children with three mothers and unrelated teen-age boys and girls living in the same room under a parent's supervision.

Clients turn to him for guidance, Medvec said. They want to be good fathers but don't have anyone to turn to, he said.

"I don't sit around anymore complaining how bad kids are these days," Medvec said. "At least I have an opportunity to make a difference now. If we all sat around and complained, nothing would ever get fixed."

Time concerns

Maddux spreads his time thin.

He works full time at G.L. Berg Entertainment and gives his time to Create CommUNITY, the St. Cloud Area

Chamber of Commerce and the Cathedral High School Alumni Association board.

But Maddux realizes he's in the minority. Young adults are career-oriented, starting families and socializing, thus leaving no time to volunteer, Maddux said.

"Kids don't volunteer at these ages, but this is the time when we can make a difference," Maddux said. "It's frustrating."

Volunteer organizations have become more flexible by offering programs giving people control of how much time they spend.

St. Cloud Area Faith in Action attributes part of its success attracting 20- and 30-somethings to its lax time requirements, program coordinator Lois Gaetz said. Volunteers can give as much time as they want helping people with everyday chores, such as light housekeeping, grocery shopping and weekly visits. The group's about 125 active volunteers are asked to make a year commitment to the organization.

"If you put a lot of requirements on people, you're going to lose a lot of them," said Cherise Robb, the program's volunteer coordinator.

### Advertising

Advertising on tight budgets can be tricky for volunteer organizations. Instead, groups mostly rely on word of mouth, open houses and tidbits in church bulletins and other newsletters.

Big Brothers Big Sisters changed its national advertising campaign to attract volunteers.

A few years ago, the organization printed black-and-white brochures and signs showing lonely children. The goal of the ineffective advertising campaign was to "guilt people" into volunteering, Rollings said.

The group gradually introduced a brighter campaign showing children and adults having fun together. The successful campaign also incorporated pictures of local volunteers.

"Volunteers want to know what's in it for them," he said. "I know it sounds selfish, but it's human nature."

### Personal connection

Appealing to people's emotions or personal experiences helps get young people in the door.

Volunteer organizations have abandoned most generic forms of advertising for more detailed descriptions of the people in need. Potential volunteers relate to stories, experts said.

Brianda Cediél needs help staffing the nursery for her program, Hands Across the World. The program teaches English and the American culture to non-English speakers.

But between teaching and transporting students, Cediél can't find anyone to staff the nursery.

"It's understandable here because it's summer and you want to enjoy the weather," she said. "Volunteers don't want to volunteer during the summer. But the demand in the community

doesn't stop."

To curb the shortage, Cediell will give internships this fall to students from St. Cloud State University and St. Cloud Technical College. She thought of the idea after one of her students wanted to start a day care.

Cediell also encourages young mothers to bring their own children while volunteering at the day care.

"It would be very interesting if young mothers would come in and interact with the students," Cediell said. "They would see that the students are normal. There is no difference between us. We're all the same. We are all brothers and sisters."

Sandy Bromenschenkel, 35,

of St. Cloud, volunteers for four organizations, including the United Way of Central Minnesota. She started donating her time after people helped her when she was a single young mother.

Bromenschenkel said she owes it to those who assisted her.

"Once you start volunteering, it's much better than a paid-for position," she said. "It feels good to do something and not expect something back."

[St. Cloud Times Online Homepage](#)

**Workplaces can help cultivate involvement***Kelly Scott*

Everyone in the room got a penny.

Each person at the table was supposed to tell a memory from the year their penny was minted. The problem for Julie Anderson was that she hadn't been born when her penny was made.

She's only 25.

Sitting at a table of United Way leaders wasn't a fluke for Anderson, who leads the United Way committee at Bernick's Pepsi.

While some in the 18-to-34 age range are involved and connected to others in the St. Cloud area, a recently completed survey found that group is less likely to have ties than older Central Minnesotans.

Experts and those Anderson's age believe that while the age group encompasses people at many different life stages, working is something most share.

It might be the key to increasing the group's connectedness and involvement in the St. Cloud area, they said.

Workplace opportunities to connect and education about community needs can help, Anderson said. And an attitude shift among older adults could help establish expectations.

"It's sometimes a mind-set where you don't get involved in the PTA until you're over 30," Anderson said. "But it's easy to get involved."

**Work connection**

In Central Minnesota, people who work are more connected than those who don't, the survey found.

That's something experts believe younger women and men could capitalize on to develop their connections and involvement.

"A business's community commitment can certainly contribute to the social environment," said Jan Hogan, a University of Minnesota professor who lists social capital as one of her specialties. "That can appeal to younger people."

Emphasizing family, a social conscience and pride in involvement can appeal to young men and women. Adults 18 to 34 are diverse in their interests -- with some married, dating, focusing on careers, reveling in being single, starting families, finishing college and getting jobs. The group's values can fluctuate based on self-discovery, she said.

That's the case for St. Cloud Surgical Center, said Lisa Klehr, the administrative assistant. But, giving employees the chance to be involved and socialize with one another helps emphasize the company's values.

"When you work with them for so many hours, they become good friends, too," said Brenda Prokott, 35.

Prokott attended a recent employer-sponsored night at the River Bats game intended to help employees socialize. Knowing one another well makes employees want to participate in other activities, she said.

"Really, we're not pressured at all," she said.

Hogan recommends businesses value connections and involvement to the point that they become expected. That needs to be expressed to younger employees, too.

Some question the individual value of connections and involvement when it happens at work only. That's because the friendships and involvement could be intended to help a career.

"It's a place where things are required of people," said Tom Sander, executive director of Harvard University's Saguaro Seminar. "We collaborate and are friendly with supervisors."

The motive of such interaction is hard to gauge, he said. The action might not mean much in terms of improving the level of connections or involvement, he said.

Hogan said the motive might not matter much because people are more likely to do something again that they've already done once. That could make it worthwhile regardless.

### Lifestyles

At 23, C.C. Hughes understands the role the workplace can have in determining the amount of time and energy she can give to the community.

It can make or break the chances for it, and in her case it means community involvement comes in second.

Opening and owning St. Cloud's Pok Sakura restaurant cut the amount of time she can give. She went from working in her mother's restaurant for 4 1/2 days a week to working six days a week in her own restaurant.

"Since I opened the restaurant, I just haven't been too terribly involved," she said.

She believes the limits are temporary, and she still teaches Sunday school at the local Korean church. She hopes to encourage her employees to be involved through example.

That's something Anderson does, too.

Anderson has been on Bernick's United Way committee for about three years. This year she's leading it. She acknowledges that she's usually the youngest one in the room during committee meetings.

"What others don't realize is that if they don't deal with it today, they might not have the program there 10 years from now when they need to use the program," she said.

Through Bernick's, she's trying to get others in her age group involved. She's organizing a one-day softball tournament that will showcase community needs.

"I think it's more of an awareness issue," she said. "We drown them sometimes with requests for donations. Sometimes they need educational events to know what's needed."

Options help, too, she said. Some have the time to give. Some have money to give.

### Decision-makers

From a corporate perspective, most business leaders believe giving younger employees a chance to get involved and connect is worth their while.

Incorporating community involvement as a core value can encourage employees to do it, too, leaders said. But each has a different way to accomplish that.

"If you get them involved, then they meet the right people who have good attitudes and want to give back," said Mike Heinen, president of The Bernick Companies. "Being able to walk the walk is important."

Bernick's treats community involvement as part of the company's culture, a standard set through the years, he said.

Bankers Systems believes in diversifying the ways to get involved, spokeswoman Peggy Wilson said. They vary in time commitment and type.

Choices help involve all age groups, she said. Examples of options include participating in Toys For Tots and food drives. Or, employees can use paid time to volunteer to deliver meals or pick up litter through the Adopt-A-Highway program.

Mentoring younger workers to focus on community involvement can help introduce them to such connections, said Al Marcyes, president of Bremer. Community involvement also is part of the job description for management positions, he said.

Bremer Bank also operates a matching program that means the company matches employee donations for things such as walks, charities and other community programs, said Brenda Schermerhorn, community marketing manager.

#### Attitude

Options are good, but attitude is equally as important.

Anderson volunteered with a committee at Madison Elementary School awhile ago. While she eventually befriended most of the other volunteers, she initially felt others didn't take her as seriously because of her age.

"Nothing against it, we did a great job and had a lot of fun," she said. "But because of that and some other factors, I chose not to do it again."

She doubts she's the only one who's made such a decision.

"I think older generations need to look to that younger age group to begin to take responsibility and participate in the general city government," said Les Green, a member of the Central Minnesota Community Foundation's board of trustees.

Green said he believes expectation needs to exist for younger generations to fulfill them. That responsibility falls to those in decision-making roles.

"The thing is that we have to give people room to fail, too," he said. "We've got to be willing to let them do it their way. Sometimes the creativity from young people can get the rest of us to see it in different way."

He also sees this in terms of diversity among the age group.

"We focus so much on it that we sometimes forget about similarities," he said. "Younger people are more in tune with trying to be individuals in terms of their cultural heritage. It gets in the way of being connected because you can forget about all the things they have in common."

#### About the survey

The Social Capital Survey was designed by the Saguaro Seminar at Harvard University and jointly sponsored in the St. Cloud area by the Central Minnesota Community Foundation and the St. Cloud Times.

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The \$13,000 survey, completed by St. Joseph-based UpFront Consulting, included calling 501 people who lived in the St. Cloud, Sauk Rapids-Rice, Sartell-St. Stephen and Rocori school districts.

The margin of error is 4.4 percentage points.

#### Our challenge

So, you've read the whole series and you're wondering what you can do?

Well, the St. Cloud Times has a suggestion.

Our challenge to employers and employees is to find a project or a way to help someone on the 13th annual Make A Difference Day.

Make A Difference Day is Oct. 23 this year. It's sponsored and created by USA Weekend magazine, which is owned by the Times' parent company, Gannett.

You can do anything -- volunteer somewhere, have a food drive, help with a political campaign, raise money for a cause, send cards or supplies to the troops, plan a class for children or just spend time with someone in a nursing home. The key is to do something.

As you plan your project, let the St. Cloud Times know about it.

We'll track the projects and businesses on our editorial page. Just e-mail Randy Krebs at [rkrebs@stcloudtimes.com](mailto:rkrebs@stcloudtimes.com).

#### Dinner for 8

Want to meet people?

The St. Cloud Times is coordinating dinner groups to help. All you need to do is log on and sign up.

The Times will match people and appoint a first-dinner coordinator. Then it's your responsibility to meet for dinner.

The idea is to meet once a month for a year, whether that means meeting at a restaurant for dinner or having a potluck.

To sign up, visit [www.sctimes.com/SocialCapital](http://www.sctimes.com/SocialCapital) and provide your name, age, town, phone number, e-mail and number of children.

[St. Cloud Times Online Homepage](#)

## Politics draws in few but rewards participants

*Lawrence Schumacher*

From opposite sides of the political spectrum, Alexia Netter and Maggie Perham agree on one thing -- politics rewards those who get involved.

Whether volunteering long hours or picking a candidate for the first time, those who get involved in politics and public service say it gives them a sense of accomplishment and connectedness to their community.

"Sometimes, you need to feel like you can make a difference," said Netter, 19, a St. Cloud State University sophomore and secretary of the College Republicans.

"I get to meet a whole lot of people and spread a message for a good cause."

Interest and involvement in politics is high among people aged 18 to 34, according to the results of a recent survey of 501 Central Minnesotans.

However, the Social Capital Survey of Central Minnesota found that younger adults are less likely than older adults to become involved in politics and public service.

The two women have volunteered for political campaigns -- Netter for the Republicans, Perham for the Democrats -- door-knocking, marching in parades, planning voter registration drives and doing the office work that keeps a campaign running.

Some young adults may be too busy to follow politics and national affairs, said Perham, 21, a St. Cloud State student and member of the College Democrats.

Others believe elections and government don't relate to their lives, she said. Cynicism and lack of trust in the political system keep others away, while some young adults would get involved if only they were invited to participate, she said.

"Look at the Howard Dean movement in the (Democratic presidential) primaries," Perham said. "So many young people came out of the woodwork and responded to him because they felt he got to the truth and because he invited them to join."

### First steps

While not many of the 130 young adults polled in the survey were likely to work for a campaign or attend a political rally, a majority say they're interested in politics and national affairs.

An even larger number -- seven out of 10 -- say they're registered to vote. Yet voter turnout is low for young adults, especially those younger than 25.

Nationwide, only 42 percent of adults age 18 to 24 voted in the 2000 presidential election.

"Voting is just a fraction of the big picture, but if people aren't even voting, then the other stuff's not in there either," said Dan Beard, an 18-year-old Technical High School graduate who is getting his first shot at voting this fall.

The war in Iraq and rumblings about a military draft may encourage more young adults to vote, Beard said, but

he's not betting on it.

Many young adults register to vote at 18 but then vote once or don't vote at all, said Garner Moffat, 22, a St. Cloud State student.

"It's an endless cycle. People don't feel like elected officials represent them, so they don't vote," he said. "They don't vote, so politicians don't pay any attention to them."

#### Removing hurdles

Trust, or a lack of it, is a major barrier, said Moffat, who ran for City Council in 2003. He has been active in the Green Party of Minnesota and serves as chairman of the city's Charter Commission.

Less than four in 10 young adults who responded to the survey said they trust their national government. Slightly less than 50 percent trust their local government. Both are disappointing numbers but not surprising, Moffat said.

"Most people don't like either of the two major party's candidates much and they end up feeling like they're voting for the lesser of two evils," he said. "Local issues are pretty hard to relate to when you're young. A lot of people I talked to when I was campaigning had no idea what a city council does."

Family, school and exposure to the issues appear to be big factors in whether young adults get involved in politics. For Moffat, it was watching the 10 p.m. news. For Beard, a high school civics class raised his interest.

Netter shares her political views with her family and friends. Perham credits her parents for bringing up social justice issues as she was growing up.

#### Alternate forms

Political information and participation comes to young adults in many ways that aren't so familiar to people of other generations.

Beard gets some of his news from network television, but also an equal amount from "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart," a cable satire of network news shows.

"I can weed out the sarcasm, but he's very straightforward on the issues, and I think that appeals to people my age," he said of Stewart, a comedian and the show's host.

"Fahrenheit 9/11," the politically controversial movie by Michael Moore, is also having an effect on young adults, Beard said, though he hasn't seen it.

Young adults get political information from "Saturday Night Live," as well, Moffat said.

Political participation among young adults can often take forms that are unusual to older generations, including signing and forwarding e-mailed petitions, Internet chats and blogs, and attending Meetups, issue-oriented gatherings organized through the Internet.

The survey did not ask questions about the popularity of some of these more nontraditional forms of participation.

8/19/04

## Recommendations

Young adults need to learn about how politics connects with their everyday lives, Perham said. She advises finding an issue to care about rather than following a politician.

Social Security, a potential military draft, Internet spam and file-sharing are all issues that matter to young adults, but they don't make most politicians' radar screen because young people don't vote as often, Moffat said.

Though he is involved on the local level, Moffat suggests national politics are where young voters can concentrate their votes and make the most difference.

"To get people involved at the local level, they've already got to be involved in politics and that can only really start at the federal level, where the issues are bigger," he said.

To Netter, nothing beats a good conversation.

"I have a lot of friends who are Republicans and a lot of friends who are Democrats," she said. "We have a lot of fun just talking things out."

## Get connected

Ask an elderly neighbor if they need help getting to the polls on election days, or talk to your neighbors about voting together as a group.

## Dinner for 8

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