

Column: Being a volunteer lifts spirits

By Gerald Krueger, American News columnist

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Whenever there is a chance to help someone out, retired folks are usually more than willing to offer a hand.

Mary Ann and I love to volunteer. She enjoys helping out at the Roncalli Nearly New shop, and I really enjoy volunteering for Farm Rescue.

I just returned from a week in North Dakota helping out a farmer in tough shape by planting 400 acres of soybeans. The farmer was in the University of Minnesota hospital trying valiantly to get well. Meanwhile, not much was getting done at his farm in the way of planting a crop, so we were eager to help out.

When we finished with this farm, we moved 50 miles northwest to another farmer with more trouble than anyone would want. He was fighting that terrible debilitating malady cancer, and it wasn't certain whether he would beat it. But he was also valiantly trying his best to get his crop in by himself, and once again we were glad to be at his farm to help. We planted about 750 acres of wheat.

We use a donated behemoth with the largest tractor John Deere makes, pulling a 60-foot-wide seeder, followed by a huge cart that can hold 230 bushel of product, as we call the seed and fertilizer. On a good day without too much to slow us down we can plant nearly 400 acres.

The use of this behemoth was graciously donated by RDO Implement of Aberdeen. Most of us volunteers take bets about the cost of this entire giant but it has to approach \$500,000 at least.

The farmer furnishes the seed, fertilizer and diesel fuel for the entire operation. We get a scrumptious side benefit because the farm wife or daughter prepares unbelievably tasty meals for us.

Those who operate the equipment are volunteers who are all very nice. They're capable of understanding that the complicated machine and the associated technology of the devices in the cockpit (oops, sorry got airline on ya) is very involved to operate. In fact a CD was sent to all the volunteers to instruct us in the operation of the various aspects of the auto-steer and setting the seeder to the amount of product that farmer wants to be applied.

We would go in shifts operating the machine. It gets a little getting used to, but after awhile of herding the beast back and forth we got the hang of it.

It has been said that when you do something for folks, you should not expect anything in return, but I can testify that we volunteers take much more from these activities than ever expected. The personal satisfaction we receive from helping out in this endeavor is really overwhelming.

We know the farmer and his family are so grateful for our efforts. The best thing, though, about the entire process is we always leave the farm with a new special friendship and a solid invite to return again and again. We receive more than we give. Nuff said.