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Because They Served First

Twenty-one years ago on September 11, 2001, two-thousand nine-hundred and seventy-seven (2,977) American citizens died at the hands of the terrorist group al-Qaeda when they crashed into the twin towers of the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and a field in Pennsylvania before reaching Washington, D.C. However, “in the chaos that ensued, building security, first responders, and ordinary civilians undertook one of the largest emergency evacuations in American history—an estimated 13,000 to 15,000 people successfully evacuated the towers” (New York State Museum). Without these citizens who so willingly risked their lives to save another’s, tens of thousands more would have passed away on that horrible, unforgettable day. Therefore, service to the community and the country in remembrance of Patriot Day is important because it shows essential citizenship and improves the lives of both the server and the recipient. Service can be performed in this community both through organized efforts and everyday acts of kindness.

To begin, service is a key part of good citizenship. According to Britannica, the definition of citizenship is “[the] relationship between an individual and a state to which the individual owes allegiance and in turn is entitled to its protection. [...] Citizens have certain rights, duties, and responsibilities.” Regardless of what country someone lives in, their rights and responsibilities as a good human being include serving others in ways both large and small. In a world of deranged politics, hurtful and hateful trends, and self-obsessed lifestyles, turning outward to help another is an all too rare event. The people of this nation need to express greater

love and kindness one to another. In an address given by President Barack Obama when the government expanded the American service organization AmeriCorps, the President emphasized that "service isn't separate from our national priorities or secondary to our national priorities — it's integral to achieving [them]. It's how we will meet the challenges of our time." Indeed, those in the service of their fellow men find themselves able to rise and face the obstacles that confront them each day and demonstrate their love for others and their country. The very essence of citizenship is service.

In addition, service opens opportunities for those performing it and makes the world a better place for those affected by it. For example, Dr. Zaher Sahoul, a Syrian-American critical care physician and one of the founders of MedGlobal, risked his life to give medical care to civilians as a much-needed volunteer. The Sikh Mr. and Mrs. Kandharis launched a project, through the Guru Nanak Darbar Sikh temple, to distribute over 30,000 meals every weekend to every person who walks into their doors, no matter religion or race. Another man, Mr. Gabriel, took initiative to organize an effort with refugee teachers like himself and set up "tree schools" to teach the stressed, displaced children of East Africa. (All examples from *Helping the Poor and Distressed*, by President Dallin H. Oaks.) Each of these situations was turned from horrible to honorable through the dedication and benevolence of these citizens. Lives were saved, bellies filled, and children enlightened because of the helping hand these men and women offered. Because of their service, opportunities and pathways for the future that had previously been unreachable were opened to each individual who participated in the process. With many contentions, wars, and rumors of wars besieging the Earth these days, it is increasingly more difficult to envision a bright future. However, spreading charity brings light to individuals' lives, and countries of 340 million people are made up of these individuals. With more service and

more charity, people become brighter, nations become brighter, and the future becomes glorious. Kindness and service open doors for all people touched by them and give this Earth a brilliant possible future.

Moreover, there are many service opportunities available in Carson City, Nevada. Local volunteer and low-profit organizations include F.I.S.H., JustServe, Produce on Wheels, Salvation Army, and Ron Wood Family Resource Center. There are also a handful of projects taking place, such as Ryan's Case for Smiles, billiongraves, and Latchkey. In addition to these wonderful programs, chances to serve pop up every day - people just have to keep a diligent watch for them. Although the idea that even the simplest gestures make a big difference is an overused cliché, it is not entirely untrue. Pushing a small child on a swing, helping a friend with homework even when busy, praying for another - whatever someone's religion may be - and smiling at both friendly and unfamiliar faces are all examples of simple services. These good deeds have a deeper impact than assumed. According to studies from Uppsala University, "other people's smiles actually suppress the control we usually have over our facial muscles, compelling us to smile." And when humans smile, "our [facial] muscles contract, [and] they fire a signal back to the brain, stimulating our reward system, and further increasing our level of [...] endorphins" (*What's the science behind a smile?*, Ding Li). This basic process is one example of a nearly effortless service that makes a difference - a small one - but enough to notice, both physically and emotionally. Over time, small changes to community-wide attitudes and perspectives, such as making it more of a social norm to smile at others, will add up. There are numerous ways to serve in the Carson City community.

Overall, serving the community and the country in remembrance of Patriot Day is imperative because it demonstrates true citizenship and enriches the lives of both the giver and

the receiver. There are numberless ways for citizens to serve in the Carson City community, including the little opportunities that pop up in everyday life and volunteer organizations centered on aid and service. The sacrifice that civilians and first responders made on September 11, 2001, is precious and priceless. Citizens of the United States have an obligation to reach out in service to others *because they served first*.