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Helping and caring for others

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This month United Way of Lamar County kicks off its 2004 fundraising campaign at 11:30 a.m. Wednesday, Sept. 15 with a luncheon at the Boys and Girls Club of the Red River Valley.

It's timely since the mission of United Way seems to coincide with the ideas that I have heard or read through these past few days concerning our purpose in life.

A week ago I shared in my column about well-known caterer Eddie Deen's recipe of life that emphasizes that our purpose in life is to be beneficial to others. Deen believes that if we are beneficial to other people, then we'll be beneficial to God. He practices that principle on a weekly basis as he teaches parolees at a homeless shelter in Dallas.

In last Sunday's Parade magazine there was a powerful article "He Turns Boys Into Men" about former pro football star Joe Ehrmann who is pastor at Grace Fellowship in Baltimore, Md., which has 4,000 members.

The story told about a program developed by Ehrmann called Building Men for Others, which emphasizes two things: relationships and having a cause beyond yourself.

Through the program, he teaches five steps on how to be a better man which include: Recognize the "three lies of false masculinity" — athletic ability, sexual conquest and economic success are not the best measurements of manhood; Allow yourself to love and be loved — build and value relationships; Accept responsibility, lead courageously and enact justice on behalf of others — practice the concepts of empathy, inclusion and integrity; Learn the importance of serving others — base your thoughts and actions on "What can I do for you?;" Develop a cause beyond yourself — try to leave the world a better place because you were here.

The last two steps that Ehrmann teaches — learning the importance of serving others, and trying to make this world a better place to live relate closely to Deen's principle of being beneficial to others.

As a volunteer coach, Ehrmann teaches Building Men for Others to a high school football team in Baltimore. Author Jeffrey Marx writes in the article that the boys are told, "they will make the greatest impact on the world-will bring the most love and grace and healing to people by constantly basing their actions and thoughts on one simple question: What can I do for you?"

Most recently I've been reading Rick Warren's "Purpose Driven Life," which is a guide to a 40-day spiritual journey. On day 16, Warren writes about "What Matters Most" in our relationship to others, and uses Galatians 5:14 as a key verse in the chapter, which says "The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Whether it comes from Deen, Ehrmann or Warren, the same common thread seems to run through each one's thinking concerning our purpose in life, and that is to be helpful and caring to others.

From my experience with United Way of Lamar County through the last 14 years, I believe that same fiber runs through each one of the agencies that United Way serves, which makes this year's fundraising campaign one that we should all support.