

Yeah, we know. You've worked hard all your life, paid taxes and raised your kids. Now, in those so-called sunset years, you're entitled to enjoy relaxing vacations basking at the shore, yodeling in the mountains, tossing dice in Vegas, sipping vino in Tuscany, dining at an outdoor Paris cafe and/or reeling in big fish at Key West.

Of course that's what you deserve, and no one can argue about it. However, how about making a slight change in some of your future travel plans? You can do something as enjoyable as a great vacation, while at the same time earning the great satisfaction of knowing you're doing something to help others.

Remember what John F. Kennedy said many years ago, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country". Have you ever thought of donating some of your time, labor and skills where they are needed. In some cases, desperately needed?

Volunteers are needed in America and other parts of the world, with projects including building homes, disaster clean-up, archaeology digs, teaching, nursing, ecology, protecting endangered species and hundreds more.

In some of the projects, all living expenses are provided free; in others, senior volunteers may be required to pay a token fee or full charges. While most of the activities accept both young and senior volunteers, many others are geared specifically to the physical limits of participating seniors. For instance, many seniors wouldn't be comfortable climbing and hammering on Habitat for Humanity home-rebuilding projects. However, they'll be physically able to take a class of inner-city pre-schoolers to the zoo in San Francisco or clerk at a hospital's gift shop.

How do you sign up for volunteer senior vacations? Check the many sites on the internet, find out if your church, synagogue or social club is planning a project. Contact local branches of familiar community agencies, such as the Red Cross and Salvation Army. Many government agencies, such as the Department of the Interior, Army Corps of Engineers and individual national and state parks welcome senior volunteers.

Many private, non-profit organizations offer senior volunteer vacations that range from just a few days on a specific task, to weeks and months of long-term projects.

An example is Earthwatch (Earthwatch Institute, 3 Clock Tower Place, P.O. Box 75, Maynard, MA 01754-0075; (800) 776-0081 or www.earthwatch.org) This worldwide volunteer enterprise offers more than a hundred individual projects in 18 states and 44 countries. Some of its projects include archaeological digs, improving world health, and protecting oceans from pollution.

Another is Global Volunteers (Global Volunteers, 375 E. Little Canada Road, St. Paul, MN 55117-1628; (800) 487-1074 or www.globalvolunteers.org) The non-profit organization also offers more than a hundred programs throughout the world. Projects involve volunteer efforts at schools in urban areas.

Whatever your choice in making your next vacation a volunteer one, you can be sure you'll

return home with pride and satisfaction that you've done something meaningful to help others.