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SANDY SUMMERS/DN
Cheera Pieper, a UNL sophomore, plugs in tree lights for the Boy Scouts of America's "Lincoln Lights" at Mahoney State Park on Nov. 14. Pieper is a member of the Alpha Phi Omega Service Fraternity, which was founded on the principles of the Boy Scouts.

Students give from heart to needy during holidays

Volunteers say there are many ways to help

BY IEVA AUGSTUMS
Staff writer

UNL students wishing to give the perfect gift this year won't have to stand in line.

All they need to do is open their hearts, care and be willing to volunteer some of their time to the community.

With the holiday season in full swing, students have decided to dance, string lights and distribute food as ways to give back to the community what the community has given them.

"Volunteering and the holiday season go together," said Jennifer Mackrill, vice president of the Kappa Phi Club, a Christian organization for university women. "It's about opening your hearts to others and caring."

Diane Podolske, assistant director of Student Involvement and UNL Volunteer Service coordinator, said the holiday season is full of opportunities for students and organizations to lend a hand and to help those less fortunate than themselves.

"Volunteering is an important way to give back to your community," Podolske said. "From donating food items to volunteering your time, community service is the perfect gift to give."

Podolske said anyone is welcome to come to the Student Involvement office and look at organizations' event planning sheets.

Many student organizations have already provided services to area organizations, she said.

■ The Kappa Phi Club helped bundle up children and families with a coat collection drive, Nov. 13-20, for the Salvation Army and area shelters.

■ Neihardt Council sponsored a swing dance charity fund-raiser Thursday to bring in food donations for area food banks.

■ The Residence Hall Association will hold its annual Angel Tree project from Nov. 30 to Dec. 5. The project will provide presents for area needy children and families.

Darrell Podany, United Way Volunteer Connection director, said the community needs volunteers for

“There are many ways people can volunteer. From preparing food baskets, distributing toys, to spending time with a member of a nursing home, there's something for everyone.”

DARRELL PODANY
United Way Volunteer Connection director

this holiday season.

With Thanksgiving arriving Thursday, Podany said volunteers are needed to help prepare and distribute food baskets gathered from collection sites throughout the community.

Many soup kitchens and shelters near the University of Nebraska-Lincoln also are in need of volunteers, he said.

"There are many ways people can volunteer," Podany said. "From preparing food baskets, distributing toys, to spending time with a member of a nursing home, there's something for everyone."

Podany said students should become "community-aware and involved" during the holiday season.

"Not only do students acquire skills and knowledge, but volunteering helps build citizenship," he said.

Every day, volunteer needs change, Podany said.

"We appreciate all the help that we can get," he said. "However, all of these needs go on 365 days a year."

For more information about the community's need for volunteers, call the United Way Volunteer Connection at (402) 441-7700 or UNL Student Involvement's Volunteer Service program at (402) 472-2454.