

John McCarron



## How to make yourself feel like royalty

**O** kay, so you won't be spending the next couple of nights swaddled in satin sheets at the presidential suite of the Drake Hotel.

And no, you weren't invited to sit at one of those \$50,000 "benefactor" tables at Wednesday night's black-tie dinner at the Field Museum. It was an oversight, I'm sure, on the part of the host committee for The Royal Visit.

But allow me, my fellow commoner, to suggest a way in which we might all mark this week's visit to Chicago by Her Royal Highness, the Princess of Wales. With apologies to Michael Jordan, who's also looking forward to a big week, my advice is to literally *Be Like Di*.

Following my advice, moreover, will in no way require you to undergo a nasty parting with your spouse or paramour, or to be hounded by the tabloid press or even to keep smiling through clenched teeth even when your feet hurt.

My suggestion, if you want to celebrate Lady Di's visit, is to volunteer for something.

That's because, when you peel away the pomp and folderol surrounding Princess Diana's visit, you discover that the good lady is coming here to raise money for charity. She doesn't have to be in

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Chicago during our spring that never was. She could be riding to hounds at Balmoral or skiing in the French Alps. She could be sunning herself in Bermuda or gracing the baccarat salons at Monte Carlo.

But instead, Lady Di is coming to Chicago to raise money for three good causes. She is, in every important sense of the word, a volunteer.

If all goes as planned, her visit will raise \$1.3 million, the funds to be divided equally between the Robert Lurie Cancer Center at Northwestern University, the Glida's Club cancer support service of New York and the Royal Marsden cancer treatment center in London.

few of us are in a position to have that kind of impact, it's true. But you might be surprised, here in our upstart nation of den mothers and Little League coaches, how much gets accomplished by plain folk who give of themselves. Besides, there's a lot more to citizenship than paying taxes, and a lot more to religion than going to church.

But I digress. The point here is that a willingness to volunteer is a true sign of a royalty-of-the-spirit. It's not her *haute couture* we admire or her royal bearing, but Princess Di's giving of herself for a good cause.

And so, listed below are five sure-fire ways to Be Like Di:

■ Call the Tutor/Mentor Connection at 312-467-2889, and tell them you want to help an inner-city child learn how to read, do homework and generally advance in school to a productive life. T/MC coordinates a network of safe, well-maintained sites around the city where adult volunteers sit down after school (or on Saturdays) with at-risk public school students. Founder-director Dan Bassill is also looking for companies that want to set up their own tutoring programs or give inner-city kids a first taste of the world of work.

■ Call Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS) of Chicago at 312-738-2227 and tell them you want to paint porches, plant gardens, pick up debris and otherwise help beautify the 10 low-income neighborhoods that organization is helping to turn around. Last Saturday more than 2,000 employees of Chicago's largest banks and insurance companies did just that as part of NHS's 9th annual Neighborworks Day. Sign up for next spring's event or find out how you can help year-round.

■ Call the Executive Service Corps of Chicago at 312-580-1840, especially if you're a retired or between-jobs managerial type, and tell them you're available to help solve the management and/or budgetary problems of non-profit organizations. For instance, ESC volunteers recently overhauled operations at the Salvation Army's main kitchen complex, achieving greater efficiencies, lower costs and higher quality meals for the homeless.

■ Call Big Brothers-Big Sisters of Metropolitan Chicago at 312-427-0637 and tell them you want to be an adult role model for, and weekend buddy to, one of the 250,000 kids under 18 growing up in Cook County with just one parent. After a period of screening and instruction you'll be paired with a youngster who probably has never gone to a big league baseball game or walked to the end of Navy Pier... until you came along.

■ Call the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago at 800-935-YMCA and tell them you want to help coach a basketball team, umpire softball games or read stories to kids enrolled in "Y" after-school programs.

If none of the above appeals, get in touch with the Volunteer Center operated by the United Way/Crusade of Mercy at 312-906-2410. They can get you started with any one of 1,500 charitable organizations throughout the metropolitan area. These groups need volunteers to deliver meals, drive patients to health clinics, make minor repairs to the homes of shut-ins and do any number of other good deeds.

Want to be like Di? Be a volunteer. You may never check in to the presidential suite at The Drake, but you'll be no less of a prince or princess.