

## How I LIVE UNITED: Michael Cleveland

Michael Cleveland's face lights up when he talks about Tucson. "I love this city; it is a great place to put down roots and create a life." A resident since 2005, Cleveland is one of the city's most active volunteers. He also encourages friends, neighbors and anyone within earshot to give back to his or her community.



"Public service and civic engagement are two of my passions," said Cleveland. "I am sincerely honored to play a small part in helping people find opportunities to get involved, make a difference and leave the campground better than we found it."

### Grandma (and Mom) Know Best

Cleveland began volunteering as a child. He remembers visiting the community center with his grandmother, who would cook for senior citizens and others who needed a hot meal. "I would help my grandmother pass out the meals and clean up the kitchen," he recalled. Cleveland also learned about citizen involvement from his mother, a social worker.

"Looking back at my childhood, I see now that my mother and grandmother taught me valuable lessons that have shaped my life and my philanthropic philosophy," Cleveland said. "They helped me understand that as a part of the human race, giving back is not so much a choice as it is a necessity."

Albert Einstein once stated, "It is every man's obligation to put back into the world at least the equivalent of what he takes out of it." However, it's up to each person to recognize the moments where his or her talents and influence can be injected into the community, neighborhood or the life of another person.

Cleveland uses his talents to fan the flame of volunteerism among Tucson's young professionals. He is the co-chair of United Way's Young Leaders Society (YLS), an organization of passionate young professionals who actively seek ways to Connect, Serve and Lead in an effort to leave a positive and lasting impact upon the Tucson community.



## **A Family Affair**

However, Cleveland is not alone in his efforts. He, along with his wife and two daughters, devotes several hours a week to working on community projects. The Cleveland family volunteers with United Way, Tucson Urban League and the Saguaro Christian Church.

In addition, the Cleveland clan has decorated holiday cookies for servicemen and women and spent one memorable Saturday enhancing the grounds of a local elementary school. They also helped to clean up a vacant lot that neighborhood children walk through on their way to the library.

“We enjoy the rewards of spending time together,” Cleveland said. “My wife and I want our daughters to grow up understanding how important it is to give unselfishly.”

Cleveland’s biggest community concern is education, which he considers the cornerstone of healthy living and a prosperous life. “As an adult who has returned to college to earn my degree after 16 years, it concerns me that the majority of children today will not receive a substantial education,” he said.

To help children develop a love of books, Cleveland also spends time teaching families about financial literacy, reading to children and collecting items for book drives.

## **Spreading Holiday Cheer and Cookies**

Volunteering in the community provides many lifelong experiences and memories. Cleveland has a vast collection of memories from volunteering, but one that is particularly special to him is from last year’s YLS Cookies with Seniors event.

Every year, YLS members work with elementary schools and senior residents of St. Luke’s Home to bake and frost holiday cookies for our troops. First, they spend an afternoon baking the cookies and creating holiday cards with students at Holaway Elementary School. The YLS volunteers then make a trip to St. Luke’s Home to share in the spirit of the season and create one-of-a-kind edible holiday masterpieces that are delivered to the troops who are serving our country at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base.

It was at this particular cookie-decorating event that Cleveland met a senior resident who was a stock car driver back in the 1970s. “He shared stories with me about the good old days,” said Cleveland.

Cleveland introduced the man to his family, and they all enjoyed hearing stories about when racing was not a commercial product and drivers competed for the

love of the sport. “This day was so memorable to me because one of the other ladies told me that it meant so much to this resident that someone listened to his story and made him feel important,” Cleveland said. “These are the moments that really get me emotional and keep that passionate fire burning to continue the hard work that lies ahead.”

Michael Cleveland is a volunteer every nonprofit would be fortunate to have. Not only is he a volunteer for United Way, he is a volunteer for the Tucson community. United Way is very grateful for his support.

**What does it mean to LIVE UNITED?**

*“When I think of LIVE UNITED, I think of bringing people and resources together to improve the lives of all. I think of smiling children, healthy families and seniors who are living dignified lives.”*

**Michael Cleveland**