

Happy Valentine's Day!

For many people, Valentine's is the most romantic day of the year. But not everybody feels that way. Some people are single. Some are divorced. Some are widowed. Others don't think the idea of spending money on flowers, chocolates, and fancy dinners is romantic at all and may resent the feeling that society "expects" them to do it.

In truth, though, the day is about far more than romance. It's about showing others they are loved and appreciated. Recently, we came across several stories of people who are doing just that: Using Valentine's Day to spread love in their communities and show appreciation to those who need it most. In honor of the holiday, we thought we'd share three of those stories with you.

At Rush University Medical Center in Chicago, many of the patients are veterans. Most of these wounded warriors are there for the long term. Some are injured in body, mind, and heart. Others are elderly and frail, their bodies finally on the verge of giving up the long fight.

All have dedicated their lives to serving their country.

So, every Valentine's Day, a group of local teenagers take the time to show these veterans how much their service and sacrifice mean to the community. Working with the residents of a nearby senior living community, the teens craft Valentine's Day gifts by hand. First, they paint dozens of bowls, then fill them with paper hearts and cranes. Each is carefully shaped, cut, and folded with as much care and love as possible.

The students were not the first to do this. The tradition started eight years ago with former students and has continued ever since. And they know they will not be the last.

According to the hospital staff, "It lets [the veterans] know we love them, and we appreciate them. When they get these [Valentines], it really warms their heart."¹

And as one gift giver put it: "By showing love for other people, we can be their Valentine in a way."¹

When it comes to showing love, nothing on Earth shows it better than a dog. That's why, in the Philippines, some people choose to spend Valentine's Day giving love back.

Every Valentine's Day in Manila, an animal shelter charges guests about \$10 to spend half an hour with a rescue dog. Many of the dogs came from abusive households or experienced trauma. The fee goes to running the shelter, which cares for over 240 dogs and cats. The guests can choose one or more dogs to walk and play with, and many will choose to adopt their new furry friend. But all the dogs benefit, because it helps them relax, improve their social skills...and yes, feel more loved.

Says one of the caretakers: "A lot of animals in the shelter can give all the love that they can give, but they aren't given a chance."² But now, many dogs will get that chance.

Thirty minutes with a dog. Who could ask for a better date on Valentine's Day?

As you know, few gifts are as romantic as flowers – making Valentine's like Christmas for the floral industry. In fact, 250 million flowers are sold around the world every Valentine's Day!

For some people, though, Valentine's Day doesn't trigger feelings of romance, but of loneliness. This is especially true for those who have lost their spouse or partner. Back in 2021, a florist in North Carolina decided it was time those people felt loved around the holiday, too.

It all began when the florist, Ashley, delivered a bouquet to her son's preschool teacher as a gift. It meant so much to the teacher that Ashley started thinking about others who might enjoy a similar gift. With the help of some volunteers, Ashley decided to deliver free flowers to widows in her community. Using Instagram to get the word out, Ashley built a list of 125 people.

The next year, that number increased to 800.

Since then, Ashley has raised \$50,000 and recruited over 1000 volunteers to help make Valentine's Day special to those who have lost their spouse or partner. The initiative has become so popular that she no longer does regular business on Valentine's Day. Instead, she spends that time knocking on doors and delivering flowers to those who least expect them...and most appreciate them.

"It's a total surprise, and [at first] there is a lot of confusion," Ashley says. "But on a day that may be sad, you open your door, and there's a young person there with a bouquet and gifts saying, 'We just want you to know you're loved today and every day.' We flipped the script and turned it into a holiday that is not just for people who are married or have a partner to celebrate with. When we see the smiles on people's faces, it's encouraging to know there are a lot of good people in this world, and it takes one movement to create a ripple effect."³

To us, these stories prove that Valentine's Day isn't just for romance, as fun as that can be. It's a day for spreading love throughout our community. A day for letting those around us know they are appreciated, valued, and seen. And that, to us, makes it a special day indeed. So, on behalf of everyone here at Hudock Capital Group, we want you to know how much we value and appreciate *you*. Have a wonderful Valentine's Day!

Sincerely,



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Michael J. Hudock, Jr., CPM®
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¹ "For Valentine's Day, Chicago teens, seniors spread love with veterans," *CBS News*, www.cbsnews.com/chicago/news/valentines-chicago-veterans/

² "Animal lovers book Valentine's with shelter dogs," *Reuters*, www.reuters.com/lifestyle/philippines-animal-lovers-book-valentines-dates-with-shelter-dogs-2023-02-14/

³ "Charlotte florist gives flowers to widows on Valentine's," *CBS News*, www.cbsnews.com/news/valentines-day-flowers-charlotte-florist-widow/?intcid=CNM-00-10abd1h

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