

One-thousand hours adds up to nearly 42 days. In 1,000 hours, a person can observe the entire season of Lent, or drive around the entire coastline of the United States nearly five times. It's also the amount of time that Saint Louis University alumna Pat Hofmeister (Grad Ed '93, '98) has given during the past three years as a volunteer at the Saint Louis Zoo.

Hofmeister, a retired teacher and psychotherapist, began volunteering at the zoo as an ambassador and a tour guide at the suggestion of a friend. She helps people find their way around the 90-acre attraction and answers questions about the 16,000 animals that call it home.

Hours logged by alumni like Hofmeister – as well as current SLU students, faculty and staff, and the St. Louis community – are helping move the University's 200-Years-in-One Challenge closer to reaching the goal of donating the equivalent of two centuries of service in just one year.

Tracked by an interactive clock at the corner of Grand and Lindell Boulevards, the challenge currently stands at almost half a million hours. SLU leaders hope the effort, which is in celebration of the University's bicentennial year, encourages service and instills in others the satisfaction of helping those in need.

Hofmeister feels that gratification every day.

She sees service as a way of taking what God has given her and paying it forward to her community. In addition to her work at the zoo, she also volunteers with a prison ministry, chairs a board on mental health and has been active with causes like breast cancer awareness and counseling around unplanned pregnancy.

"We all have God-given talents," she said. "No matter how little you have or how much you have or what your talents are, you can share them with somebody."

Caring for others has been a constant in Hofmeister's life from the beginning. The oldest of six children, she transitioned from caregiver to volunteer in college, when a professor offered her the opportunity to work with individuals facing homelessness in Chicago rather than write papers. Hofmeister took on the challenge and embarked on a lifelong journey of caring for others through service.

Hofmeister credits her Catholic faith and education for her commitment to service and for her involvement with Saint Louis University. After growing up going to Catholic schools for all but one of her master's degrees, attending Saint Louis University for her doctorate was an obvious choice because of the values-based education she knew she'd receive.

She has seen firsthand the way serving another person in their time of need can change a life. But Hofmeister also recognizes the impact her service has on her own life.

"I believe that when you volunteer – if your heart is in it – you get so much more out of it than the people with whom you are working," she said. "It's just such a good feeling giving back."

Interested in being part of SLU's challenge? You can log hours through our app or online. Learn more at slu.edu/200years.