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Our view: In tough economic times, the need is great, but the challenge is to find other ways to give and keep on giving to the community

Many Maryland charities and nonprofit organizations are anxious about the impact of today's economic hard times on their ability to help those in need and improve the lives of others. Financial pressures on Marylanders, from double-digit spikes in utility bills to high food costs to rising gas prices, have meant more visitors to area food pantries and shelters and fewer donations to some fundraising campaigns. But there are other ways to give besides writing a check. This is an opportunity to flip the adage, "Time is money," on its head.

Take the example of Scott Broerman, who owns an athletic store in Annapolis. During his daily runs through the state capital, the 48-year-old retired Navy man often would see homeless people on the streets and notice their shoes, or what passed for shoes. And he would say to himself, "One day I'm going to..." In August, he decided to donate his excess inventory of athletic shoes to clients of the local Lighthouse Shelter. He went to the shelter and measured men, women and children for new shoes. A perfect fit.

Raymond Cain, a retired steelworker, chose Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Maryland as the place where he could make a difference. He has mentored five youngsters, served on the group's board and helped raise money for the organization, a 40-year commitment that earned him the United Way of Central Maryland's Volunteer of a Lifetime award last week. Mr. Cain's example can be repeated, the agency notes, with high school dropouts, preschoolers or senior citizens.

"Giving of your time, talent and treasure," that's how Associated Black Charities President Diane Bell-McKoy defines philanthropy.

It fits the examples of Scott Broerman and Raymond Cain and Sheela Murthy, an Owings Mills immigration lawyer who chose 2008 to make a \$1 million pledge to the United Way that will be used over five years to help schoolchildren and empower women in Maryland and her native India. The economy may be on a roller coaster, but Ms. Murthy says, "if all of us are going to lose our money anyway, you might as well have done your good deed and given it."

That's the spirit of giving.