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A Perspective on Our Most Valuable Natural Resource

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A Perspective on Our Most Valuable Natural Resource

By Brenda S. Thompson
UCF Forum columnist
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I am inspired by many of today's young people, who are essential in today's world.



(Photo by StreetMuse on iStock)

What are America's most valuable natural resources and where can they be found? These questions are as important today as they have ever been.

Natural resources have essential life-sustaining and economic value. Most reference sources identify examples of them as minerals, water, forests, fertile land, coal and even diamonds, gold and silver. Natural resources benefit all of us and, without a doubt, we

know how precious they are. That is why care must be taken to protect these resources in order for them to renew and grow.

Through the lens of an educator, natural resources may also include people. For centuries, public and private schools, colleges and universities have participated in developing our habits, culture, skills and intellect. And most recently, millennials (generally, young adults born 1981-1996) and members of Generation Z (individuals born since 1996) are receiving great attention demonstrating their value as a resource.

I am inspired by their desire to care for the planet, improve the human condition, take action for social justice and lead the way for others.

As we benefit from their efforts, let's help them grow, develop their talents, guide and renew their energy. These high schoolers, college students and young adults are just as essential to our lives as other natural resources.

Several years ago, I joined a wonderful and progressive professional women's organization whose mission is to invest in education. Each year, the organization awards scholarships to deserving high-performing female college students who have demonstrated a financial need and who also give back to their communities.

The past two years I volunteered to serve on the scholarship committee and was one of several members who reviewed application packets. As in the past, standards were very high for the \$2,000 award. As part of the process, applicants had to provide evidence of community engagement and write an essay on why they should receive the scholarship.

The scholarship committee reviewed more than 150 applications and we were all very impressed with this year's group of young women. Although every eligible applicant had a grade point average that exceeded 3.0 on a 4.0 scale, the stories about their individual and family struggles, perseverance, resilience, passions and concern for others were most impressive and heartwarming.

Many of them struggle daily to rise above their current situations and fulfill their dreams. They are strong, bold, informed, courageous and caring. They are forward thinkers and are searching for ways to impact society as they give back so much to their communities.

I am inspired by their desire to care for the planet, improve the human condition, take action for social justice and lead the way for others. In my view, these contributions are just as essential as the air we breathe, the water we drink and the soil that provides the food we consume.

As these labeled generations mature and take on greater societal roles, their contributions will become more evident as essential. And as with other natural resources, our young adults will need to be nurtured and protected.

Where can we find the newly identified natural resource? They are in Anytown, USA, and are every place we go, working in food banks and animal shelters, pointing out injustice, tutoring and mentoring others, and helping the homeless.

Look around and hear their loud voices, see their young caring faces and feel their strong passion for justice. America has at least one essential natural resource that is not dwindling in supply – in fact, it is flourishing and gaining momentum.

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