



Rob Rogers ◆ Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

GUEST VIEW

## Help is only 3 digits away

### 2-1-1 provides vital connection to services in Rhode Island

By Anthony Maione

If a family member, friend or co-worker were having a heart attack, you wouldn't hesitate to reach for your phone and dial 9-1-1.

If the same person needed to find adult day-care services for an aging parent, or assistance paying utility bills, or affordable day care for a grandchild, or information on Medicare, or help for a friend to get substance-abuse treatment, would you know where to call?

There is a three-digit phone number and Web site that offer not only solutions to the concerns listed above but have answers for nearly everything that worries us most in life. Those three digits are 2-1-1 and the Web site is [www.211ri.org](http://www.211ri.org).

Dialing 2-1-1 is the fastest and easiest way to get connected and get answers to social services needs. It is free, local and confidential. It offers the kind of assistance that crosses all socio-economic lines and ethnic groups.

This easy-to-remember phone number is as simple and ingenious as 9-1-1 or 4-1-1. Information referral specialists work 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year giving help, assistance and solutions to any social services need.

Last year, United Way 2-1-1 in Rhode Island received more than 122,000 calls, an increase of about 20,000 from 2008. The majority of them, 53,887, were requests for information on financial assistance to help pay rent or utilities. Inquires about food assistance numbered 34,429; callers seeking information on housing and foreclosure-prevention advice topped 21,000. Some 13,131 dialed 2-1-1 in search of a homeless shelter. The calls came in from every community in our state. The most amount, about 55,000, originated in Providence.

When health and human services are needed, 2-1-1 should be as much a part of our collective consciousness as 9-1-1 is for an emergency. Yet, before meetings and at gatherings, United Way and 2-1-1 staff members frequently ask attendees to raise a hand if they have ever heard of 2-1-1. Only 10 percent to 15 percent say they are aware of it.

We want every Rhode Islander to be familiar with 2-1-1. It is part of a national network of about 46 call centers around the country. All of them operate as part of a backup system, so 2-1-1 in our state can continue to operate

24/7 during an emergency such as a natural disaster.

Today, which is National 2-1-1 Day, United Way and 2-1-1 staff and volunteers will be barnstorming the state handing out information and answering questions about the important three-digit number.

The following is a snapshot of the type of calls the system receives:

A carpenter, 50, had exhausted his unemployment benefits. He said he had worked for more than 30 years and never had taken a penny from the government. His unemployment officer suggested he dial 2-1-1. He called and an information referral specialist reassured him that no one would be judging him. The specialist gave him the number for food pantries in his area. The specialist pointed out that if he could save money on food, that would free up funds to pay other bills. About a month later, he dialed 2-1-1 again. This time it was to express his thanks and tell the specialist that he had returned to work.

A teenager, 15, had been sleeping in a van with her family for two days. Her parents had lost their jobs, their house had been foreclosed and they were embarrassed to ask their extended family for help. The teenager told her teacher, who contacted 2-1-1. A specialist helped find them shelter. One week later, with the assistance of 2-1-1, the family was living in an apartment in the teenager's school district.

This sampling is just the tip of the iceberg. There are many more such stories.

Information referral specialists at 2-1-1 and [www.211ri.org](http://www.211ri.org) have access to more than 4,000 agencies and organizations in Rhode Island. The staff meets regularly with agencies and organizations to learn more about how they can help Rhode Islanders who need assistance.

United Way 2-1-1 in Rhode Island is headquartered at United Way of Rhode Island in Providence. It is funded by United Way of Rhode Island with support from Hasbro's Children Fund and the state of Rhode Island, and is administered by Family Service of Rhode Island.

On 2/11, help us spread the word about the benefits of dialing the easy-to-remember numbers 2-1-1 and visiting [www.211ri.org](http://www.211ri.org).

*Anthony Maione is president and CEO of United Way of Rhode Island.*

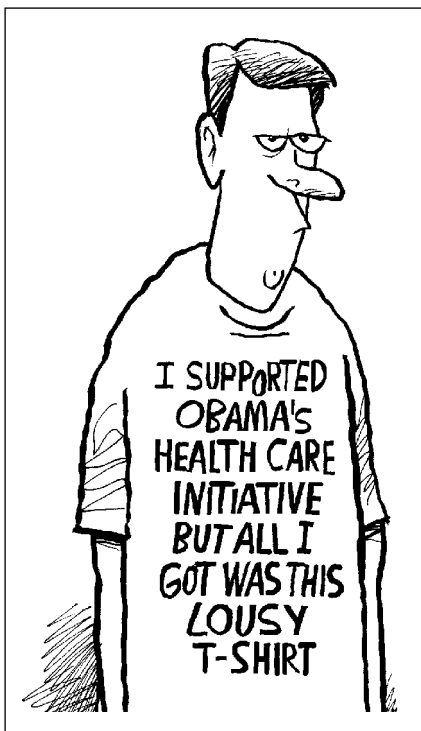
READERS' LETTERS

## Failure to reform health care would be a shame for this country

The house has been built and the roof needs to be put on. Opponents of any reform, not just what is being considered, think that razing the house is the answer to the roof issue.

Inaction is bad enough, but to destroy what has been brought forward by both parties is beyond anything I or my neighbors can believe is being considered. We are a nation that can do and I firmly believe we will this time, too.

I have not worked for four-plus years and take care of an elderly parent so that she does not end up being a burden on the system, which will not be able to support her needs as it currently sits. She is an ex-government employee and sacrificed a lot for her service, the Foreign Service/State Department, as did our family as a whole. We ask for little and have always paid our "dues," but she sustained an injury and was denied care due to a technicality (she has "Cadillac" insurance; we thought they wanted money). She was sent home when she should have been hospitalized. We recovered together, and when this reform effort started to gather steam we were not going to scream bloody murder but try to make sure it does happen this time — not have what happened to Clinton's reforms attempt happen again.



Jeff Stahler ◆ Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch

President Barack Obama is doing the right thing and any blind man can see that. He asks for input, especially if it

works, and we can all benefit, but the petty egos and concerns about old elections and "recovering" the White House seem to be the priority for the Republicans. I am sure they are concerned that any reform will cinch another four-year term for Obama and they cannot stand that. That is not the concern and we, all of us, must rise above ourselves.

As a capitalist nation, we are vulnerable to "having pennies on our eyes" and not being able to see past the money; everything has a price. The world sees that and we are being watched. Most developed nations have national health care and we, the richest, do not. President George W. Bush chose war over health care because \$200 billion was too much, and \$1 trillion later we are still at war with no health care.

We have a chance to do the right thing together and we need to close the deal and get to the next issue of bringing the troops home, among many other issues. We must live up to our own expectations and those of our citizens, our neighbors and our allies. If we are not loyal to ourselves and our national health, then what are we loyal to? Money? A very cold thought.

Paul de Silva, Portsmouth

## Fundraising for Haiti a success

After the Rotary Club of Newport placed an ad in The Newport Daily News soliciting contributions to the Newport Rotary Charitable Foundation for the purchase of shelter boxes to be sent to Haiti, we were most gratified by the response of your readers. Newport County residents' donations, which have been matched by the Rotary Club of Newport and the Newport Rotary Charitable Foundation, have enabled us to purchase and send a half-dozen shelter boxes, thus providing shelter and other

relief for up to 60 people.

To see shelter boxes being assembled and in Haiti, please go to the Newport Rotary Club Web site, [www.newportrotary.org](http://www.newportrotary.org).

The generosity of our community for those in distress is astonishing and we at Rotary thank all of you for your most kind and prompt responses.

David K. McConnell, president, Newport Rotary Charitable Foundation, and Elizabeth G. Wylie, president, Rotary Club of Newport

SOMETHING TO SAY?

We welcome our readers' views. Our letters policy follows:

- ◆ Each letter must bear the writer's full name (no initials, please), signature, full address and telephone number (for verification purposes only). We will not publish a letter without a phone number.
- ◆ We may condense letters, and correct errors of spelling and punctuation.
- ◆ Letters should be no more than 450 words. Proposed guest view

columns should be no more than 750 words.

◆ Because of the volume of letters we receive, we cannot always publish them immediately.

◆ We will run no more than two letters per author per month.

To send letters:

Mail: Letters to the Editor  
The Newport Daily News  
P.O. Box 420, Newport, RI 02840

Fax: 849-3306

E-mail:  
Editor@NewportRI.com

# Manliness is back, with snow shovel in hand

WASHINGTON — Much time and many volumes have been devoted to Freud's famous question — what do women want? — with little commensurate attention to the male counterpart.



KATHLEEN PARKER

What do men want?

The simple answer is well-known, but a more nuanced answer has presented itself the past several days during "Snowmageddon."

Shovels. Men want shovels, the bigger the better.

No sooner had the first flakes begun falling in this crippling winter smackdown than the attendant quiet was interrupted by the scrape of metal against brick.

There was Craig, festooned in winter-defiant red jacket, battling snow with his Great Big Snow Shovel. Barely a doughnut's dusting had yet settled on the sidewalk, but one can never get started too soon in the battle against accumulations to come.

**There is a reason 'the best snow shovel on the planet!' is called simply, 'Manplow.' I think I can safely assert that no woman has ever suffered shovel envy.**

Lest I be accused of sexist stereotyping, let me tweak the record to reflect that many women were also out clearing sidewalks and unearthing cars no longer identifiable as such. But most women do these things because they must, while men apparently can't wait to do them.

Maybe not so much today as a few days ago. As I write this, we're bracing for up to 20 more inches on top of 2 feet in much of the Washington area. The novelty is cooling off. But there is a reason "the best snow shovel on the planet!" is called simply, "Manplow." I think I can safely assert that no woman has ever suffered shovel envy.

Since the blizzard began, the shovel

has become not just a tool of necessity, but a symbol of purpose and meaning, about whose absence the usual existential lament is more acute in a city that lives so much in its head.

This is the axis of wonkery, after all, where men (and women) spend most of their waking hours in a seated position, staring at a computer screen or talking by phone. Interruptions to these mostly mental rigors involve other seated endeavors, such as the power breakfast and lunch, or the ever-popular drinks-and-dinner duet. Whatever ambulation is required in between is hardly enough to satisfy the muscular memories of our tranquilized DNA.

Oh, we "work out." Gym memberships are as common as Metro cards, and personal trainers nearly outnumber cab drivers. Washington has a disproportionate number of triathletes, which is testament both to Washingtonians' principal source of animation — stress — and to the city's miles of friendly running and biking paths.

But purpose-driven exercise is of a different order than shoveling

snow. One is a to-do item on the calendar of obsessive-compulsives; the other is a taunt from Nature, a call to survival to bestir all those little lizard brains in repose. Man is never happier than when he is called to action, in other words. That is to say, when he is needed.

Much of today's cultural angst can be plotted around that simple observation. We've gone to great strides to prove how unnecessary men are. Maureen Dowd even wrote a book about it, "Are Men Necessary?" to which, just incidentally, I responded with another title, "Save the Males."

Women can't be blamed for wanting to become independent and self-sufficient, but smart ones have done so without diminishing the males whose shoulders they might prefer on imperfect days. Add to the cultural shifts our recent economic woes, which have left more men than women without jobs, and men are all the more riveted by opportunities to be useful.

Craig, though a gainfully employed USA Today columnist, further volunteered to shake the snow

from garden trees bent double from the weight of crushing snow. My son, not to be outdone, grabbed a small garden trowel and hacked at the ice on my lethally steep steps. Neither male is seeking feminine favor, it should go without saying in the case of my offspring. As for Craig, he's been happy the past 25 years with Jack, who, though he pleads a bad back, cooks a mean stroganoff, from which I have benefited twice since the snows began.

Doubtless, such displays of manliness — which in my view includes feeding the hungry — are, like the weather, passing diversions. And these jottings but a wee contribution to the annals of gender study. But if one should ever stop pondering the malaise of modern woman long enough to consider what men might want, the answer is obvious to any except, perhaps, Congress.

Give a man a job, and he'll clear a path to your door.

*Kathleen Parker is a syndicated columnist. Send her e-mail at [kathleenparker@washpost.com](mailto:kathleenparker@washpost.com).*