



Volunteers IN PLANO

Dear VIP Volunteers and Supervisors,

Fall is traditionally the start of what feels like a new year. Children go back to school, new television shows start, families come back from vacation, volunteers check back in and people get back to a routine while others find themselves wondering what to do with their spare time. In Plano, using your skills to help the community is usually on the top of the list. With that in mind, the Volunteer Resources Group has been working with City staff to identify positions that can help continue the work of the city.

To do this, the Volunteer Resources Group invited Kathy McCleskey, a well respected teacher, author and trainer of volunteer managers, to hold a staff workshop on Building Volunteer Capacity. The session addressed trends in communities



Kathy McCleskey has a Masters of Human Relations from the University of Oklahoma and a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Maryland. She has co-authored a book on interviewing skills and a second book on Community Connections. She conducts online courses for graduate and undergraduate students at the University of North Texas, and has developed two online continuing education courses – Are You Really Ready for Volunteers and Seven Steps to a Successful Recruitment Campaign.

KM Consulting and Training Connection

and how to utilize new/professional volunteers. Kathy also explained how to use these trends in developing ideas to successfully engage the citizens of Plano.

Kathy identified facts that surprised everyone. Did you know there is \$38 billion worth of unused labor available in the United States each year? According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, organizations lose that much each year because of their lack of understanding

Corina Sadler Wins!



Corina Sadler Wins National Award for Outstanding New Volunteer Administrator

On June 22 at the National Conference on Volunteering & Service, Corina Sadler was recognized as

the *Outstanding New Volunteer Administrator of the year* by the *National Association of Volunteer Programs in Local Government (NAVPLG)*. The award honors Volunteer Management Professionals with three years or less experience in the management of volunteers in local government, who reflect the high ideals of the profession and whose dedicated efforts allow volunteers to produce significant achievements.

Corina joined Plano's Volunteer Resources Group in March 2008. In her first six months as a Volunteer Resources Coordinator, Corina led the organization in a massive transformation from paper applications and files to a new online data management system. She was involved in the evaluation and decision-making processes for determining the new vendor. Corina also served as the department liaison with the vendor during the exploratory, planning and implementation phases of the process and continues to serve as the contact for problem solving and database management.

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"One of the things I keep learning is that the secret of being happy is doing things for other people." - Dick Gregory



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about how to fully utilize volunteers. She then identified community and volunteer trends, why people volunteer and why they stop. Kathy spoke about how to utilize the new short-term volunteer and explained these were now being called "time-poverty" volunteers. We worked to pinpoint areas where skilled and unemployed people could be utilized. Then we grouped staff so they could identify positions that will assist in accomplishing their department goals. Her creative breakouts gave us a chance to mix and mingle with people from different departments and to share experiences and uses of volunteers. At the end, departments wrote volunteer job requests as diverse as helping libraries with family programming to raising and delivering organic vegetables to food pantries.

One staff person said, "My expectation was to get a review of what I already knew, but this class was much more than that. I learned so many new things." Another said, I was just looking at one area, but it made me think of other ways I could use volunteers."

In this tough economy volunteers are here to augment staff wherever they can. But it is up to staff to decide where that is, to help choose the correct volunteer for that position and to manage them so they feel comfortable doing the job.

Respectfully,
Robin Popik
Robin Popik
Volunteer Resources Supervisor

Volunteer Capacity Building



Corina Wins! cont'd from page 1

In a very short time, Corina became the expert and "go-to" person for the new database. She led the migration from the old database to the new online system and trained volunteer supervisors in the use of the program. Corina also trained numerous volunteers on how to log hours online and sign up for shifts.

"Her enthusiasm and leadership has made the transition from paper to the Web a flawless, enjoyable experience for everyone involved" says Robin Popik, the Volunteer Resources Supervisor. "Since going online, new volunteer applications have increased by more than 30% and feedback from volunteers has been incredibly positive."

In addition to Corina's stellar work on the new online database, she has also brought new life to the Volunteers In Plano (VIP) teen program. More and more students are being required to complete community service hours for school credit, but many organizations only accept adult volunteers. VIP is one of the few programs in Plano to offer teen volunteer opportunities. Corina's efforts have more teens than ever making VIP their first choice for volunteering.

Corina was also recognized at the Plano City Council Meeting on July 27 by Mayor Phil Dyer when he presented her with a special recognition for this outstanding contribution to the City and the VIP program.



Volunteer² Status

It has almost been a year since VIP rolled out its new online database and the number of participants has increased by 43%! The new online system makes it easy to log hours, check schedules and review new opportunities. Sustainability and Environmental Services volunteers are taking advantage of how easy the system works. Since December they have logged 5,233 hours online! Volunteer Coordinator Kathi Cavanaugh, an Animal Shelter volunteer herself, has reduced the amount of time it takes her to manage and schedule her 150 volunteers at the animal shelter with the use of Volunteer².

The Live Green Expo, which took place April 18, is a great example of how Volunteer² has transformed our program. Nearly 100% of the 605 event volunteers registered online. They had access to a selection of 60 positions and 244 shifts. Volunteer Coordinator for Sustainability and Environmental Services, Deb Bliss, was thrilled with how the software worked, "From the moment I opened my computer each morning, Volunteer² was assisting me in daily tasks: sending reminder e-mails, quickly gathering data for a report or grant project, finding volunteers with a particular skill to fill a need and serving as a communication site for posting additional activities as they became available. It is efficient, accurate and a wonderful tool for managing volunteers. Using this database for the 2009 Live Green Expo made the management of volunteers and positions possible." More than 3,000 Expo hours were logged using Volunteer².



After evaluating the successes and areas needing improvement, there will be several changes coming to the Live Green Expo 2010 for volunteers. To reduce paper and save time, the check-in process will be enhanced by offering electronic sign-in stations and the ability to sign up for empty shifts through Volunteer² the day of the event. The software listings will also be improved to make it easier for groups and individuals to select multiple shifts.

At the animal shelter we have decreased the time it takes to manage volunteer data, giving Kathi an increased amount of time to spend training volunteers and caring for the animals. Animal Shelter volunteers select their shifts and enter in their volunteer hours using Volunteer². Kathi's tedious duties of filing timesheets and monitoring shift cancellations have all but disappeared, giving her more time to create new opportunities for the 150+ dedicated volunteers. Since December, Animal Shelter volunteers have logged 5,182 hours online.

Volunteer² is an online database, but access is highly restricted. Confidential information such as e-mail and physical addresses are never distributed. VIP staff use this information to send out activity reminders, newsletters, mail certificates and recognition gifts and to enhance our programs with evaluation procedures.

For more information on accessing your online profile or volunteering for the Live Green Expo, please contact Corina Sadler at 972-941-7617.



"It's easy to make a buck. It's a lot tougher to make a difference." - Tom Brokaw



Afework Mamo Helping Preserve Plano's Past

Afework Mamo began his summer by helping the City of Plano's Planning Department conduct research on buildings constructed between the late 1930s and the 1960s. Using his GIS (Geographic Information Systems) skills, Afework creates maps of Plano's mid-century architectural districts. The maps and data collected will guide Plano's historic preservation plan in identifying properties worthy of protection and conservation.

"Volunteering is a great way to serve the community," Afework shares. "It allows people to gain experience and connections that may lead to a new job or career experiences so we improve ourselves."

Prior to this Planning project, Afework assisted on a Building Inspections project. Volunteer Coordinator Corina Sadler remembered Afework had GIS skills when this new project came up and asked him if he would like the opportunity to use them. Afework was eager to put his degree in Urban Studies and Planning to work assisting the Planning Department. "Volunteering is the ideal way to keep my skills current and build my resume," Afework continues. "I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of the Planning

Department and to be able to share and apply my skills and knowledge."

Originally from Ethiopia, Afework and his family moved from California to Plano nine months ago. He feels the preservation project has helped him learn more about Plano than he would have on his own.

"I enjoy work with the staff, they are all so professional and caring," Afework comments on both Building Inspections and Planning Department staff. Liz Casso of the Planning Department says "Afework is a hard worker that learns quickly. Once on the project, he put the information together in a very comprehensive and organized way," Liz said. "I couldn't ask for a better volunteer. He's fantastic."

Afework is part of a growing trend in volunteerism, where more people are looking for opportunities to use their knowledge and skills to make a difference in the community. Some other departments that are utilizing "Pro Bono" volunteers are Sustainability and Environmental Services, Transportation and Public Information.



Volunteer Helps to Save the Environment

The City of Plano is actively involved in a national movement to measure and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, which have serious effects on public health and quality of life. As an initial step to measure the City's 2007 baseline emissions, the Sustainability and Environmental Services (SES) Department sought the assistance of summer intern Jenny Mai, an Environmental Science student from Vanderbilt University.

Jenny worked on the Greenhouse Gas project under the direction of Yarcus Lewis, SES Project Management Coordinator. Her duties included conducting environmental assessments and protocols supported by the Environmental Protection Agency, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI). The first stage of the project was to acquire and organize utility and lifestyle data for a citywide GHG emissions inventory. This involved collaborating with various departments of the City. Once the required data was provided, Jenny organized, entered the calculations and generated different reports as required.

"As a member of ICLEI and a participant in Cities for Climate Protection Campaign and the U.S. Conference of Mayors' 2030 Challenge, the City is committed to addressing GHG emissions in its own operations and within the community. This initiative was undertaken with both the global environment and local benefits in mind. By reducing GHG emissions, we help to improve local air quality, save significant energy and lessen the impact of rising energy costs," explains Yarcus.

Jenny produced a GHG Emissions Inventory Report with software provided by ICLEI. Sources analyzed

included electricity, natural gas, refrigerants and petroleum fuel. Jenny's work allowed the team to forecast GHG emissions for the years of 2012 and 2020. With this information, the City can set feasible targets and timelines for the reduction of GHG emissions.

Jenny's college degree in analysis applications was very helpful in completing the project. "I was very interested in this project because I wanted to learn more about environmental services and sustainability," Jenny shared. "Sustainability and Environmental Services was the perfect choice for me to learn what this work would entail while allowing me to use the skills I learned in school and apply them in a real life situation."

The SES staff found Jenny's skills to be a perfect match for the project. "Jenny was invaluable to our effort," Yarcus continued. "Her command of computer applications made the implementation of the ICLEI software much easier. Additionally, her efficiency at data collection and manipulation was remarkable."

Jenny described her volunteer experience as informative and fun. "I really enjoyed working on this leading edge initiative and working with such talented professionals," Jenny stated. "I feel volunteering is a necessary part of my life because I want to contribute my skills and experiences to others, while at the same time, I want to learn. Volunteering with Plano had been a real pleasure for me."

The SES team wishes to thank Jenny for her tremendous contributions and congratulates her on being accepted into Baylor Law School this fall.



Tell-Us-Your-Volunteer-Story...

The VIP Insider wants to feature VIP Volunteers and groups in upcoming issues and we need your help. Please share your volunteer story with us and inspire others to volunteer.

To submit your narrative and photos, please contact Alana O'Brien at alanao@plano.gov or 972-941-7436. If you don't have a recent photo, we'll be happy to come take one during your volunteer shift.



Teens Rock at Garden Work Parties

Off busy Plano Parkway, between Coit and Preston Roads, there is a flourishing organic community garden. Here, on the last Saturday of each month, teens 13 and older join the Live Green in Plano volunteers for a morning Garden Work Party. Working together, teens and adults paint, build, weed, mulch, add soil to thriving plots, construct hose stands, prune decorative plants and anything else needed to keep the area looking good and working well.

“Community gardens promote healthy communities and provide food security for many low-income persons. The Plano Community Gardeners provide over 1,200 pounds of fresh produce each year to food pantries in Plano,” Environmental Education Coordinator Erin Hoffer explained.

The community garden volunteers are a varied group of people. They include scout troops working to earn badges and project credits, and National Honor Society students in middle and high schools among other programs requiring community service projects. Church groups, area college students interested in pursuing careers in “green” professions and individuals just looking to try something new also lend a hand.

“Gardening at the community gardens is better for me than gardening at home, because I love talking with all the new friends I made while I work,” Manjari Ganti, a 13-year-old volunteer, reported. “I’ve also learned a lot of new things like the proper way to prune and how to plant.”

On July 25, students from Robinson Middle School, Rice Middle School, Ereckson Middle School, Curtis Middle School, Plano East Senior High and Richland Collegiate High School along with recent college graduates from Ashworth College and University of North Texas came out to work in the gardens.

“When teens volunteer in the Plano Community Garden, they learn gardening skills like mulching, weeding and pruning. They also learn life skills like responsibility, teamwork and leadership,” Hoffer shared. “When we compost, we teach about the plant life cycle and how composting is the original recycling process. Teens see that they have choices and that each choice has an impact on the environment.”

This summer alone, more than 60 teens worked in the Plano Community Garden giving 1,080 hours to help feed hungry families in our community. Garden Work Parties will continue through the school year and VIP teens are encouraged to sign up early.

“Initially, I began working in the gardens to fulfill service hours for National Honor Society, but soon the work became fun and relaxing,” Hannah King, a 16-year-old teen leader said. “Instead of sitting at a desk for hours on end, I get to actively help the community in the company of great people.”

To find out more about Garden Work Parties and other teen volunteer opportunities, please visit the VIP Web site at www.volunteersinplano.org.



President's Initiative suggests days when people can volunteer and make an impact

This past month on the anniversary of **Sept. 11**, students demonstrated their community's unity with volunteer work. Teens from Clark High School walked and cleaned the trails at Oak Point Park & Nature Preserve, the University of Texas at Dallas Office of Student Volunteerism helped freshen up the Animal Shelter, while younger teens worked at the Discovery Garden and manned a Friday Night Friends event for the Therapeutic Recreation Group.

Make a Difference Day, Saturday, Oct. 24, 2009, is the largest national day of helping others and is sponsored by USA WEEKEND Magazine. We are encouraging groups to sign up for projects to show their support. VIP has already organized similar activities where groups and organizations can participate and help the community. Projects include: Discovery Garden Work Party; Animal Shelter clean-up day; Oak Point Park & Nature Preserve Trail Day; Therapeutic Recreation Friends Night Out; Amphitheater at Oak Point Park ushering; along with Live Green in Plano campus, park and creek clean-ups. If you know anyone interested in these projects, they can register online at www.volunteersinplano.org.



Teens find summer fun in volunteering

"Instead of sitting at a desk for hours on end, I get to actively help the community in the company of great people."

- Hannah King



"I love talking with all the new friends I made while I work."

-Manjari Ganti



"I learned how to open up to new people and new experiences and working as a team instead of doing everything all by my lonesome self."

- Jennifer Varavithaya

Jonathan Sennetti Keeps Plano Connected When It Counts

Jonathan Sennetti has been a member of Plano Fire Rescue Associates (PFRA) since November 2001. Currently Jonathan serves as vice president of PFRA, webmaster and part of the elite photo squad. As vice president, Jonathan helps manage new projects and activities within the group and coordinates ongoing programs between PFRA and the Plano Fire Department.

Captain Peggy Harrell of the Community Outreach and Education Office said, "As webmaster, Jonathan coordinates the wonderful PFRA Web site which includes a nationally recognized photo gallery of fire scene photos and photos from all different types of incidents and training." The PFRA Web site, www.pfra.net, receives over a 100,000 hits each month, largely due to great number of fire action shots taken by the photo squad. "He is quick to update



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City of Plano
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Volunteer opportunities,
photos, newsletters &
annual reports may be
found on our Web site at
www.volunteersinplano.org

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the site with news and photos of the Plano Fire Department,” Captain Harrell continued. “Whenever there is a story on PTN about the Fire Department or PFRA, Jonathan wastes no time in linking it to the PFRA Web site. Jonathan also makes sure the Web site has posted sign-up capabilities for all types of PFRA volunteer activities.” Jonathan also serves as a Plano Balloon Festival shuttle

driver and assists with fire-safety events, fundraising and many other PFRA activities.

Aside from maintaining www.pfra.net, Jonathan also enjoys serving as a photographer on the Fire Department Photo Squad. These approved photographers take pictures of an incident and provide them to the Department for investigations, training, publications, or general distribution to field and administration personnel. Jonathan explains, “As a member of the photo squad, I'm notified when there is a working structure fire or a large rescue incident. Although our response is voluntary, I try to make it to every scene no matter the time of day or night. Photographing a big fire can be exciting, but I mostly enjoy the ability to give the firefighters pictures of themselves to share with their families.” Jonathan lives in Plano with his wife Nancy, who is a PFRA member, and their two sons. He is also an emergency medical technician and an amateur radio operator.

Plano Fire Rescue Associates (PFRA) was founded in 1995 for the purpose of raising funds to support the Plano Fire Department Annual Awards Banquet. Today PFRA raises funds for programs and scholarships and they promote public education and fire-safety programs.

