Volunteers in the Park

2010-2011 Annual Report

Working together to make St. Louis Park a better place to work, live and learn!

Did you know that the City and Schools Volunteer V.I.P. Office involves over 1,700 volunteers a year helping in our city and schools with everything from planting flowers in parks to literacy. Volunteers placed through the V.I.P. Office serve in more than 25 programs and special events. Each year, they donate 16,500+ hours. We are amazed and delighted by the people who volunteer for several years or more and by all the new volunteers who enter the program.

The majority of volunteers placed in the schools through the V.I.P. Office are not parents: they are business people, retirees, students, community members and parents who serve in special programs. For volunteers who come through the V.I.P. Office, they are recruited, screened, trained and placed in volunteer positions where they help on a regular schedule.

Every time they volunteer, they increase their value to the community and the city. Through the V.I.P. Office, over 1,233 people contributed to programs in 2010.

Volunteers placed through the V.I.P. Office serve in more than 25 programs and special events. Each year, they donate 16,500+ hours.

We also want to acknowledge the hundreds of parents who volunteer in their children’s schools without going through the V.I.P. Office.

For the city, the V.I.P. Office places volunteers at Westwood Hills Nature Center, City Hall, in the Parks and Gardens, Adopt A Street program, and with several large special events like the Westwood Hills Nature Center Halloween Party and Parktacular. City volunteers placed through the V.I.P. Office make a difference by expanding the services the city staff can provide, keeping roads and parks clean, and helping to make community events possible.

The dollar value for volunteer service for 2010-2011, as determined by the Independent Sector, is $21.36 per hour. This rate is based on the hourly earnings for private non-agricultural workers as determined by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. That figure is then increased by 12% to estimate fringe benefits to reach the $23.92 per hour rate. The estimated value of volunteer services channeled through the V.I.P. Office is $415,777 (1,715 volunteers with a total of 17,382 hours x $23.92).

Volunteers in our programs range from preschoolers who help in parks with their

parents to our oldest school volunteer who just turned 90. They are long time St. Louis Park residents and people who come to us from their jobs in local corporations as well as surrounding communities. Together they bring a wealth of skill, talent, knowledge, and support to their volunteer work. The involvement of these wonderful volunteers helps keep St. Louis Park strong and vibrant.

We are pleased to be able to tell you about a few of our volunteers (we wish we could tell you about every one of them!) and the volunteer programs.

LITERACY 1st:
Volunteers are trained to work with beginning readers. They spend 1-1 1/2 hours a week in a first or second grade classroom helping during literacy time.

# of volunteers – 12
# of classrooms – 4
# of students – 475
# of hours – 7,255

Literacy 1st is funded in part by a grant from the St. Louis Park Sunrise Rotary and the Park Nicollet Foundation.

What do you do as a volunteer?
I assist in the 2nd grade classroom by interacting on a one-on-one basis with the children. I read to them, listen to them read and coach them in reading skills. I often discuss what we have read about with them and I become a friend to them.

What do you enjoy about your volunteer time?
It is just a delight to see the children’s excitement when they spend time with one adult, especially after having gotten to know me. They respond in a positive way to the special attention and encouragement they receive from an adult volunteer who takes the time to listen to them and who cares about them.

What have you learned from this experience?
I have learned that I receive much joy when I spend time with the children. They “tell me” in their own way, what words they need to hear from me that will make them feel special.
What is your background?
I graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, with a double major in English and History. I have always had an interest in foreign languages and cultures.

What do you do as a volunteer?
Whatever I think will help my students find English more accessible. I have focused more on written communication when I have had deaf students, and more on conversation with a student who is nearly blind. With a student who was not literate in her native language, I worked more on alphabet letters and sounds. I generally don’t mind looking foolish acting things out.

What do you enjoy about your volunteer time?
I enjoy it when my students understand a concept and when we find words that are similar in both their language and English. I learn from them as well. It is wonderful to see their confidence grow as they master different things or pass their citizenship exams.

What have you learned from this experience?
I have learned that parent volunteer participation and a volunteer for many familiar thing in their lives in order to give their children the hope of a better future in a new country. I have learned that people have an enormous desire to communicate. I have learned that my students love to be able to be the teachers sometimes. I have learned about 25 words of Russian.

Sara Yale
Volunteer with the Adult Options Program (working with adults from other countries who are learning English and adults who are earning a high school diploma)

What made you decide to volunteer?
Eighteen years ago, when my children were young and I was going to ECFE (Early Childhood Family Education) classes, I saw an ELL (English Language Learner) class in the same building. I was desperate to talk with adults, so I went in and asked if they needed volunteers and they said yes.

Marian Orinstien
Kindergarten helper and High School math volunteer

What do you do as a volunteer?
I have heard that parent volunteer participation and a volunteer for many familiar thing in their lives in order to give their children the hope of a better future in a new country. I have learned that people have an enormous desire to communicate. I have learned that my students love to be able to be the teachers sometimes. I have learned about 25 words of Russian.

Marian and Ron Orinstien
Kindergarten helper and High School math volunteer

What made you decide to become a volunteer?
Ron: In the army I learned ‘never volunteer for anything’, but in my career I discovered I was good at helping people learn complex mathematics. I wanted to keep doing that. Also, many of our friends’ children went to school in SLP and they all seem to have turned out well.
Marian: I saw the ad in the Community Education book and, as a recent retiree, I was ready to get involved and give something back to my community.

What is your background?
I grew up in a smaller town on a farm; it instilled family values and work ethic upon me at a young age. I moved to St. Paul for college and stayed in the metro area after I graduated. I work at Michael Foods Inc. as an accountant.

What do you do as a volunteer?
Normally I work in small groups with children who are at the same math level. I also try to keep students on task when the teacher is teaching the lesson.

What do you enjoy about your volunteer time?
I enjoy when a child understands something that they didn’t understand initially or were struggling with. When I realize that I helped them it makes me smile.

What have you learned from this experience?
Different approaches than when I went to school on how math topics are taught.

Marilyn Nelson
Adult Options Teacher

What is your background?
Some other cultures don’t seem to have a tradition of volunteering. Many of my students are surprised at what I do, not realizing that I am more than compensated by their growing abilities. I work with at another school in Asia and has commented that does not do volunteer in her native country, but that she was surprised by my volunteering. Now she has become a volunteer.

What do you do as a volunteer?
I enjoy it when my students understand a concept and when we find words that are similar in both their language and English. I learn from them as well. It is wonderful to see their confidence grow as they master different things or pass their citizenship exams.

What have you learned from this experience?
I feel welcome in their new country. I have learned that people have an enormous desire to communicate. I have learned that my students love to be able to be the teachers sometimes. I have learned about 25 words of Russian.

Fred Rose
Classroom VIP volunteer with his 4th grade students

What do you do as a volunteer?
I do pretty much whatever the teacher asks, as long as it’s math or reading related. (And not too difficult for me.)

What do you enjoy about your volunteer time?
I like being involved in the learning experience of the students and watching their skills improve. In many cases it is dramatic. Often it is merely the one on one relationship that motivates them to learn, that and a little psychology. I have worked with the same teacher for 5 years.

What have you learned from this experience?
I enjoy it when my students understand a concept and when we find words that are similar in both their language and English. I learn from them as well. It is wonderful to see their confidence grow as they master different things or pass their citizenship exams.

What made you decide to volunteer?
Ron: I was not a good student in high school. Then I went into the army. With help from the GI Bill, I went to college and turned out to have an aptitude for mathematics. I graduated with a degree in Biostatistics and became a statistician with a corporate career. At one point I taught engineers at Lockheed. After I retired, I went into real estate.
Marian: I graduated from high school, married Ron and raised 4 children. When they were older I went back to work starting as a lab technician for a food company. Eventually I became the lab supervisor and worked on developing new food flavors and products.

What do you do as a volunteer?
Ron: Once a week I help in a high school algebra class. I’m working with low-average students and many of them have trouble paying attention. They are starting to come to me for help. One young man, who had been avoiding me, asked me for help a few weeks ago. He really concentrated and worked hard on the concepts; it felt very good to work with him. I try to help the students understand math so they can do it themselves.
Marian: I’m in class one hour a week. I do whatever the kindergartner teacher needs, from supervising small groups playing learning games (the “Lady Bug Game” was very popular!) to sharpening pencils. At Thanksgiving I get to help with peeling and mashing potatoes for a traditional dinner for the class.

What do you enjoy about your volunteer time?
Ron: I can get through to the kids is it is very satisfying.
Marian: Interacting with kindergarteners is the most fun. They are so eager to learn and enthusiastic. I believe I am helping them.

What have you learned from this experience?
Ron: I get to see what teenagers are like these days. I’ve learned what a tough job teachers have and that if I stick with these kids, eventually they respond.
Marian: Working with the children is a give and take; I learn from them and they learn from me. I also learned that kindergarteners have more technology and resources available to them then when I went to school.

Cathleen Miller
Math volunteer with corporate release time from Michael Foods, Inc.

What made you decide to become a volunteer?
I was required to do community service time in college and tutor/mentored them and really enjoyed it. Six years ago, when my employer, Michael Foods, Inc., started a program granting employee release time for community service, I took advantage of the oppor-

MATH PROGRAM
Volunteers help once a week in math classes in grades 2-12.
# of volunteers - 25
# of classrooms - 19
# of students - 475
# of hours - 651

“IV has been, all in all, an enjoyable experience and a real eye-opener. The kids are all very different.”
Ron Orinstien
High School math volunteer

Cathleen Miller
Math volunteer with corporate release time from Michael Foods, Inc.

What made you decide to become a volunteer?
I was required to do community service time in college and tutor/mentored them and really enjoyed it. Six years ago, when my employer, Michael Foods, Inc., started a program granting employee release time for community service, I took advantage of the oppor-

adult students’ learning English or working on new skills. We are in the school once or twice a week in the classroom curriculum. They are in the school once or twice a week in the classroom curriculum. They are in the school once or twice a week in the classroom curriculum. They are in the school once or twice a week in the classroom curriculum.

Other comments: The VIP Office has also involved me in the DECA business program and doing “Mock Interviews”: role-playing job interviews at the senior high. DECA judging is a wonderful experience. For DECA, I help judge high school students who have prepared presentations on various business plans. What is most impressive is the amount of volunteer participation at the annual west-metro DECA competition.
What do you do as a volunteer?
I observed English, Journalism and Read 180 several days a week, where I was allowed to interact directly with students, giving feedback on writing assignments, helping them work through classroom homework and improve their reading skills, as well as teaching mini-lectures. It was both valuable to me as a future educator and fulfilling as someone who wants to give back to the community.

What do you enjoy about your volunteer time?
I loved how supportive and full of advice all the teachers were, not just the ones I worked with in particular. But most of all, I liked working with the kids. With limited interaction with children in my previous career, I think I’d forgotten how funny they are, how smart they are and how inspiring they are. It was a joy to watch them learn and be a part of that process.

What have you learned from this experience?
I learned (in part) what teachers experience day-to-day in the classroom and what some of their challenges are. It was a joy to watch them learn and be a part of that process. I have learned what teachers experience day-to-day in the classroom and what some of their challenges are. It was a joy to watch them learn and be a part of that process.

What do you do as a volunteer?
I work in both the Read 180 program and the Media Center. At Read 180, I work with fourth, fifth and sixth grade students on reading. We take turns reading from their books, after which there is a quiz. In the Media Center, I mostly shelf books; this frees the media staff to do other work and I know this helps them.

What do you enjoy about your volunteer time?
I spend 30 minutes with each of them assisting with their letter and number recognition. I have learned that the “one on one” experience is so valuable; it gives the students time to shine on their own. The extra individual support is very important in building their confidence.

What have you learned from this experience?
Children do not have the same sense of intimidation about art that adults sometimes do. They approach it from their own perspective, and can easily say what they like or do not like about each work. I am having a lot of fun and definitely plan on volunteering again next year.
I am originally from Albuquerque, NM, but have lived in Minnesota for 25 years. I worked as a reporter for eight years, then at a PR agency. For the past 10 years, I have been an independent communications consultant and writer. I specialize in health care and medical technology communications.

What do you do as a volunteer?
At Westwood Hills Nature Center, I have been a program assistant, helped care for the center’s red-tailed hawk and have been a chaperone for two of the summer environmental learning center trips for sixth to eighth graders. One trip was to Eagle Bluff in southern Minnesota. Last year we went to Wolf Ridge on the North Shore. These adventures included hiking, canoeing, rock climbing and high ropes courses that challenged both the kids and the adults.

What do you enjoy about your volunteer time?
I enjoy spending time outdoors and with the great staff at the nature center. I love helping young people learn about and explore nature. It brings out that youthful wonder about nature in me, too.

What have you learned from this experience?
I have met some great people and learned a lot about the nature center, which is a wonderful community resource. I also have gained new skills and been challenged to try new things that are sometimes outside my comfort zone.

Other comments:
If you have never visited Westwood Hills Nature Center, come out and see us!