

RECOGNITION TOOL BOX

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Goals for a "successful" recognition event

Susan Ellis, www.energizeinc.com

1. to say thank you for anything and everything volunteered to the organization during the past year (the organization's obligation).
2. to have everyone volunteering the above feel appreciated (the volunteers' perspective).
3. to recommit (re-enthuse) volunteers to the coming year of work and, potentially, to recruit new volunteers for vacant positions.
4. to educate everyone attending--frontline volunteers, paid staff, executives, board-level volunteers--about the scope, meaning and value of volunteer services to the organization, and about the diversity and skills of who volunteers.
5. to acknowledge the contributions of (some) paid staff supervisors to the success of volunteers.
6. to report the outcomes of volunteer effort (not just to proclaim the hours spent in effort).
7. to challenge all volunteers through recognition of the special accomplishments of a selected few.
8. to gain publicity for the organization and for the volunteer program.
9. to allow volunteers a chance to have fun and meet one another (something they do otherwise only with people on their shift).
10. to gain respect for the volunteer program and the director of it.

I can actually think of more potential goals, but you get the point. These types of goals set you on a track to creating an event that does these things--so the activities, speeches, reports, etc. become more important than the "meal." Who is invited becomes important, too. THEN you can begin to assess--about three months later--how successful you might have been.

My suggestion (totally untested, I admit) would be to hold focus groups sometime BEFORE and sometime after the recognition event. After all, the only way to assess if the event was successful is if you have a baseline of feelings prior to the event to which you can compare feelings afterward, no? In these focus groups, I'd try to get volunteers to discuss much more than "Do you feel recognized?" If you can get them to identify concrete things, you'll have an easier time doing your evaluation. For example:

1. What do you think the executive director knows/thinks/feels about volunteers? How do YOU know this?
2. Who do you feel values volunteer involvement the most here and how do you know this?
3. In your assessment, what would staff/managers here say are the biggest contributions volunteers make? What do you think is valued the most?
4. Who do you feel knows very little about volunteers?
5. Do you ever feel unappreciated? Explain when and how.
6. When was the last time someone said "thank you" for your volunteer efforts and why?
7. How important is the appreciation of staff in keeping you motivated to volunteer here?
[Note, Sarah, that I wonder if "staff" thanks is not as important as gratitude expressed by clients.]
8. What role do you think recognition events or gifts play in motivating or re-energizing volunteers? Are there some forms of recognition that bother you/backfire?

After the event, I'd ask these questions again, but would then add: "How would you assess the recent recognition event in terms of making participants feel appreciated?" "Did you discover anything new about how the agency feels about volunteers?"

Just some thoughts....

Susan

101 WAYS TO RECOGNIZE VOLUNTEERS

1. Smile
2. Put up a volunteer suggestion box
3. Treat to a soda
4. Reimburse assignment related expenses
5. Ask for a report
6. Send a birthday card
7. Arrange for discounts
8. Give service stripes
9. Maintain a coffee bar
10. Plan annual ceremonial occasions
11. Invite to staff meeting
12. Recognize personal needs and problems
13. Accommodate personal needs and problems
14. Be pleasant.
15. Use in an emergency
16. Provide a baby sitter
17. Post Honor Roll in reception area
18. Respect their wishes
19. Give informal teas
20. Keep challenging them
21. Send a Thanksgiving Day card to the volunteer's family
22. Provide a nursery
23. Say "Good Morning"
24. Greet by name
25. Provide good pre-service training
26. Help develop self-confidence
27. Award plaques to sponsoring group
28. Take time to explain fully
29. Be verbal
30. Motivate agency VIP's to converse with them
31. Hold rap sessions
32. Give additional responsibility.
33. Afford participation
34. Respect sensitivities
35. Enable to grow on the job
36. Enable to grow out of the job
37. Send newsworthy information to the media
38. Have wine and cheese tasting parties
39. Ask client-patient to evaluate their work-service
40. Say "Good Afternoon"
41. Honor their preferences
42. Create pleasant surroundings
43. Welcome to staff coffee breaks
44. Enlist to train other volunteers
45. Have a public reception
46. Take time to talk
47. Defend against hostile or negative staff
48. Make good plans
49. Commend to supervisory staff
50. Send a valentine
51. Make thorough pre-arrangements
52. Persuade "personnel" to equate volunteer experience with work experience
53. Admit to partnership with paid staff
54. Recommend to prospective employer
55. Provide scholarships to volunteer conferences or workshops
56. Offer advocacy roles
57. Utilize as consultants
58. Write them thank you notes
59. Invite participation in policy formulation
60. Surprise with coffee and cake
61. Celebrate outstanding projects and achievements
62. Nominate for volunteer awards
63. Have a "Presidents Day" for new presidents of sponsoring groups
64. Carefully match volunteer with job
65. Praise them to their friends
66. Provide substantive in-service training
67. Provide useful tools in good working condition
68. Say "Good Night"
69. Plan staff and volunteer social events
70. Be a real person
71. Rent billboard space for public laudation
72. Accept their individuality
73. Provide opportunities for conferences and evaluation
74. Identify age groups
75. Maintain meaningful file
76. Send impromptu fun cards
77. Plan occasional extravaganzas
78. Instigate client planned surprises
79. Utilize purchased newspaper space
80. Promote a "Volunteer-of-the-Month" program
81. Send letter of appreciation to employer
82. Plan a "Recognition Edition" of the agency newsletter
83. Color code name tags to indicate particular achievements (hours, years, unit, etc.)
84. Send commendatory letters to prominent public figures
85. Say "we missed you"
86. Praise the sponsoring group or club
87. Promote staff smiles
88. Facilitate personal maturation
89. Distinguish between groups and individuals in the group
90. Maintain safe working conditions
91. Adequately orientate
92. Award special citations for extraordinary achievements
93. Fully indoctrinate regarding the agency
94. Send holiday cards
95. Be familiar with the details of assignments
96. Conduct community-wide, cooperative, inter-agency recognition events
97. Plan a theater party
98. Attend a sports event
99. Have a picnic
100. Say "Thank You"
101. Smile

Volunteer Recognition and Appreciation

Don't let volunteering be a thankless job. The number one method for retaining volunteers is to make sure they know that they are appreciated. Recognition and appreciation should come from different people in different ways.

There are many ways to thank and recognize your volunteers. In the following pages you will see just a few that we've collected over the years.

You can also put "Volunteer Recognition" into your Internet search engine and find many other ideas.

Make it a priority. Recognizing the work of volunteers is crucial for any organization that wants to retain them and attract others. Designate someone in your organization to be responsible for ensuring that ongoing recognition of volunteers takes place.

Do it often. Recognition of volunteers should happen on a year-round, frequent and informal basis – begin with saying "Thank you" often!

Do it in different ways. Vary your recognition efforts from the informal thank you and spontaneous treats, to more formal events, such as dinners and awards.

Be sincere. Make each occasion you use to recognize your volunteers meaningful and an opportunity to truly reflect on his/her value to your organization.

Recognize the person, not the work. Phrase recognition to emphasize the contribution of the individual, not the end result. "You did a great job!" as opposed to "This is a great job!"

Make it appropriate to the achievement. For example, a paper certificate accompanied by a private thank you may be appropriate for a few months of service but a public dinner and engraved plaque may better suit 10 years of volunteerism.

Be consistent. Make sure whatever standards of recognition you establish can be consistently maintained by your organization in years to come. Holding a volunteer recognition dinner one year sets up expectation for future volunteers.

Be timely. Try to arrange recognition soon after achievement has been reached – delaying until weeks or months later diminishes the value of your gratitude.

Make it unique. Getting to know each of your volunteers and their interests will help you learn how best to recognize each individual and make them feel special.

Sources:

- Making the Most of Volunteer Resources workshop materials, Community Services Council
- Celebrate Volunteers, Volunteer Canada

Seattle Public Schools Volunteer Coordinator Manual, 2003 85

Volunteer Recognition and Retention Practices

Compiled by the Seattle Tutoring Coalition, 2001

When looking for appreciation ideas for your volunteers, always keep in mind ongoing efforts to recognize and support volunteers. For those times when you want to formally recognize volunteer efforts, like the end of the quarter or end of

the year, consider what they would like and appreciate, as well as what resources you have available. Local businesses are a good resource for food or gifts. The PTA or your school staff may well be willing to support a party or other recognition effort. You might make a targeted request to the principal or leadership team for specific funds. Sometimes recognizing specific volunteers individually is appropriate and effective.

Here is a list of methods that members of the Seattle Tutoring Coalition have found successful and not-so-successful.

ONE IMPORTANT NOTE: Volunteers generally do not want you to spend a lot of money to appreciate them.

Successful Methods

- Hand-made gifts from the kids/students
- Photos of tutor-student pairs with frames made by the students
- Framed kids crafts (can get frames cheap or donated)
- Coffee (bag of beans in a coffee mug) or coupons to local coffee shops
- Bulletin Board in high-traffic area with display of “what gift I would like to give my tutor/mentor” written by the students (may encourage nonmaterial gifts)
- Having a key-note speech at an event delivered by a client/student or a parent (sharing their experience, how the tutoring/mentoring relationship has helped them)
- Hand-written notes of thanks (on a very personal, individual level)
- Tickets (to plays, local events, the lottery)
- A large thank-you banner with all of the volunteers’ names (make your you get them all)
- Certificates (that are personalized and accurate)

Not-so-successful Methods

- Not doing anything!
- Overly expensive gifts
- Certificates (that are impersonal or inaccurate)
- Overuse of volunteer catalogue gifts/not well-matched to the volunteers
- Holding big events with small staff and/or volunteer turn-out
- Not asking people to do more
- Developmentally inappropriate (e.g. bunny rabbit erasers for adults)
 - Making ineffective student-volunteer matches to begin with

Recognition Ideas

THE LIGHT TOUCH

- Send anonymous, humorous cards during hectic times!
- Leave candy kisses at volunteer stations!
- Dress in costume at Halloween, St. Patrick’s Day, etc. and pass out treats!
- “Come as you are” surprise party!
- Silly posters!
- Anonymous notes on the bulletin board!

GENERAL

- Stop by while volunteers are working to have a word or two with each.
- Smile and call volunteers by name.
- Remember birthdays, anniversaries, and personal times of importance.
- Coffee cups with names on them.
- Labeled areas to place coat, hat, etc.

- Keep track of length of times worked so as to recognize volunteers accurately.
- Suggestion box.
- Internal/ external training opportunities.
- Job descriptions for volunteers that are specific, clear, flexible.
- Occasional surprise treats to say “ thank you.”
- Holiday parties.
- Kickoff potluck. Invite to school.
- Monthly birthday listing posted for all to see.
- Keeping people up on changes and giving people reasons behind changes.
- Sending “get well” cards.
- Job rotation opportunities.
- Include feature articles on volunteers in the school newspaper.
- Invite volunteers to a special assembly.
- Have students write letters of thanks on the volunteer’s birthday, during National Volunteer Week, or other time.
- Send letters to business volunteers’ employers, citing achievements.
- Give each volunteer a certificate (available from SFSV), flower or small gift.
- Design a bulletin board in a hall that includes the names of all the volunteers.
- Have each class organize a special event and presentation for their volunteer.
- Chart to show accumulated hours for individuals.
- Volunteer of the month /week/ year awards.

More Volunteer Recognition Ideas

The following is a list of volunteer recognition ideas from volunteer program managers from around the world.

Formal recognition events (dinners, teas, dessert buffets, etc.) held during National Volunteer Recognition Week.

Special gifts.

Thank you cards

Articles on individual volunteers in organizational newsletter, website or even a web page to salute volunteers.

Volunteer of the Month.

Free coffee and treats for on-site volunteers

Name badges

Articles about your volunteer(s) in the local newspaper.

Pizza for teen volunteers.

Gift certificates or coupons to local restaurants or amusements.

Know their names, the names of their partners, kids or pets and ask about how they are.

Birthday, anniversary and holiday cards. Send cards to volunteers on special days and for special deeds.

Plaques or banners in public places.

Organizational logo t-shirts

Pay registration fees (or part of) for continuing education classes or conferences.

Invite volunteers to participate in workshops and involve them as speakers.

Open house at different sites per month.

Letter to the volunteer’s family letting them know how much the person’s work is appreciated, and thanking the family for supporting the volunteer in their efforts.

Letter to the person’s employer/coworkers

Letter to person’s teachers/academic advisors/school principals

Letter to volunteer from (or a visit with) the beneficiary of the volunteers services. Let the volunteer really see, hear and feel the end result of their work.

A newsletter for your volunteers

Print names of all volunteers in weekly/monthly corporate/ agency newsletter.

Ads for volunteers’ businesses in your newsletter.

A special parking spot for a month.

Tickets to cultural events.

Discounts at local shops.

Free Internet access or Internet training for them.

Item with your logo on it (mug, tool set, post-its, note cards, book mark, etc.).

Photos of volunteers up in a prominent position in your agency.

Donate books to a library in the name of volunteers (with a label with the volunteer's name on it).

Create a booklet with staff and client's quotes about how much volunteers mean to the organization and share it at an event or mail it.

Give volunteers buttons or pins.

Ideas were collected from a CyberVPM poll.

Some helpful hints to personalizing your recognition

Personalizing your volunteer recognition component of your program is the best form of showing appreciation for the contribution of volunteers. A generic message does not recognize an individual's contribution, which is the only external cue that tells a volunteer that they are doing a good and worthy job.

Here are some helpful hints on recognizing your volunteers:

- When your volunteer does something that has really helped the organization, remember to write down the impact, so that when you write a card or give a speech to recognize that volunteer, you will have different messages for each volunteer, instead of using the same language for each one.
- Be aware of volunteers' interests through conversations and observation. That way, when it comes time to give them recognition gifts you can get them something that they will really appreciate, and they will also know that you are interested in them.
- Ask other volunteers, clients or staff about the volunteers' efforts and personality. This will help you to get an idea of how others see this person, and will make the volunteer feel more included in the group, knowing how others perceive them.
- Find out what types of foods your volunteers like - then randomly present them with treats, just to let them know that they are appreciated. Sometimes group volunteer recognition events lose the individual element of each volunteer's contribution, so small, periodic random gifts can help to eliminate this problem.
- Celebrate volunteers' birthdays and let all staff know when that birthday is. For many people, just knowing that everyone in an organization is aware of you and shows interest can help you to realize that the organization appreciates your contribution.

Recognition ideas

The following are a few recognition ideas that you can customize to fit your volunteers:

"Thanks for 'Raisin' All Those Funds

One idea to recognize volunteers is to take a small box of raisins, attach a strip of magnetic tape to the back and attach a small note saying "Thanks for raisin all those funds". These can be put on refrigerators or filing cabinets at work.

Here are a few other versions of this idea:

Give your volunteers a bag of mixed nuts with a note attached stating, "We would go 'nuts' without your support!". This is a great, but simple, recognition for volunteers.

Use votive candles for National Volunteer Week. Wrap them in cellophane and tie them with a note stating, "You light up the lives of so many!". You can also use notes stating, "You lighten our load by volunteering."

Historical context: Fill an heirloom box with artifacts from the organization's past, and include a note that says "Thank you for being part of our history in the making".

***Namesake Awards**

Use a special method of recognition by naming awards after long-standing, stellar volunteer role models. Additionally, they have a 'batch' of volunteers that enter their organization together, during specific times of the year. These groups are usually 'named' after an extraordinary volunteer, a namesake, if you will. Part of this group's orientation includes information about this individual, and if possible, the honoree also addresses the group.

Historical context: Include as much historical background about this person as possible in the orientation.

***Bookmark**

Use children's drawings to make a bookmark. Laminate it and include a message on the back. It's a wonderful token and also inexpensive!

Historical context: Pictures could be of a past charitable event and the message could be historic.

***Thank-you posters by Children**

The United Way does the usual recognition dinner, certificates, plaques, personally signed letters, etc. However, the United Way of Gloucester County's most popular recognition program is "Thank You Posters" created by children from local agencies. These hand-drawn posters are very popular and hang in the main lobby of several large companies. They don't cost much to produce, just some posterboard and crayons/markers. Plus, the children enjoy creating them and often create more than one. They have been doing this for five years now and the activity gets more popular each year.

Historical context: Have youth depict their vision of how volunteering has helped shaped Canada's values and identity.

***Volunteer Caring Kit**

The Volunteer Caring Kit can include:

- Paper clips: Paper clips have many uses, just like each volunteer has many talents. Paper clips are also used to hold a program together and provide guidance to youth.
- Rubber Bands: Rubber bands represent the flexibility that all volunteers need to have. You can adapt to any different situation. As volunteers, you can also stretch your own abilities to have new opportunities.
- Band Aids: Band aids help others and are sensitive to others feelings, just as volunteers have to be keyed-in to the feelings of those they work with.
- Coin: This coin represents a quarter to call and ask for help and to remind you that you are not alone.
- Paper Bill: this money calculates the contribution that volunteers make to a program through their donation of time.
- Balloon: This balloon expands and grows as you learn from others.
- Heart Sticker: This heart represents the ability to reach out to youth. You care about our youth and what they are doing.
- Mint: This mint represents the fact that each of you is worth a mint. Volunteers are very special and really make a difference.
- Lifesavers: Lifesavers represent the special contribution to a program that each volunteer makes and emphasizes that each of us are unique and different just like the rainbow of colour of lifesavers and that there is a place in the organization for everyone.
- Safety Pin: A safety pin to remind you that you are bright and sharp and utterly indispensable.

Compile all these items in a bag and photocopy the "instructions of the caring kit". Give each volunteer a small token.

Historical context: Include one artifact from your organization's past and include a note about how all volunteers make a difference.

***A Personal Note**

It's not earth-shattering, but volunteers really appreciate and respond to the personal notes sent out periodically by the Wheelchair Recycling Program Manager. On their organization's note-cards, or specially chosen cards for the individual volunteer, the volunteers are reminded of how important his/her efforts are to the organization. A recently accomplished task or project is emphasized and shown how it affected the organizations operation. When a volunteer group is hosted by the organization, the number of volunteers is multiplied by the number of hours they've worked, then divided out to let the volunteers know how many (non-stop!) eight hour days it would have taken the tiny staff to complete the same volume of work. It's often quite staggering!

***Personal Notes from Recipients**

One agency that serves the deaf by reading and interpreting information recognized their volunteers in a very special way. The volunteers didn't usually interact with the clients, since the reading was done over the radio. At the recognition event, each volunteer had a letter at his/her plate that was dictated by a listener of the show for which the volunteer read. The letter spoke about the reader and how his/her tone of voice made the listener feel and how it helped the listener to hear the piece of the newspaper that was read (or whatever). The letters were typed on special paper and framed nicely. The coordination of it was work, of course, but the recognition didn't take any time away from the event, which already had a full agenda. The volunteers reported it was the

recognition with the most impact they had ever received. They heard directly from their listeners and learned how important they were - personally.

***Mini-Grants to Volunteers**

For several years, the County Commissioners (of Colorado USA) have awarded mini-grants to volunteers in the County government volunteer programs. Volunteers submit proposals for grants that will benefit the work of their volunteer program, the clients served by the volunteer program, or the program volunteers. Examples of this are: a demonstration project; the enhancement of a current project; the purchase of a piece of equipment or supplies that will improve or enhance the volunteer experience or the volunteer program; training or publications that will increase volunteer skills or knowledge. Awards are made at a Commissioners' meeting followed by a reception. The volunteers are recognized publicly as are the very creative programs in which they work.

***More than a Plaque or Certificate**

Some ideas that are not the usual plaque or certificate:

- Send a "thought-you'd-like-to-know" letter to the volunteer's employer, acknowledging his or her positive contribution to your organization.
- Ask volunteers or staff members to train other volunteers or staff members, to lead meetings to give presentations, etc.
- Forget separate luncheons for deserving staff and volunteers. Bring them together for a joint recognition lunch in their honor.
- Send an anniversary card to volunteers or staff, highlighting their year(s) of service. Note how they made a difference in your organization over the past year.

Historical context: Prepare a short history of each volunteer's involvement in the organization and how it has made a difference to the community.

***Ice Cream Sundaes Show How Volunteers Help a Program**

One Community Action Agency relies heavily on volunteers for everything from filing to riding school buses. An event was celebrated recently where each of the program directors discussed how volunteers helped to run the programs. While each director talked, their staff helped to build brownie sundaes. One program started with the foundations (plates), the next put the brownies, then the whipped topping, cherries and nuts until we had 150 sundaes. It symbolized visually how our volunteers affect each part of our organization and by working together we can accomplish great things!

***A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words!**

For two months before the recognition event, the director of volunteers of a mental health centre began to take photographs of volunteers while they were "on the job". They thought this was for PR purposes. At the event, each volunteer received a photo of him/herself in a matte frame imprinted with a 'thank you' message.

Historical context: Use black and white film and develop the pictures with a sepia tone and put in an old-fashioned frame. The message on the frame could say "Thanks for being part of our past, our present, and our future."

***A Lasting Impression**

Graduating student volunteers can be given a special seminar on resume writing, with emphasis on how they can describe their volunteer work as a credential that would impress prospective employers or university admissions officers.

***Volunteer Mural**

Many years ago South Carolina had a construction project going on downtown with a rather ugly protective wall. The Volunteer Centre coordinated a community-wide volunteer recognition event that started with permission to paint this wall (it surrounded a complete city block) and the donated services of an artist who painted an outline all around it of people of every description tugging together on a rope.

The local agencies were asked to submit photographs of a representative volunteer. The photos were blown up and placed on the faces of the painted people in the mural. And then, on a designated day, all the volunteers from all the agencies were invited to come out and paint in the rest of the mural with all sorts of colours! The

mural painting itself generated publicity that day (and new knowledge of volunteering in the community) and the mural stayed up for the duration of the construction project.

Historical context: The mural could depict volunteers through time and what they may have done in the community.

Student Recognition Certificates

-Volunteer Victoria

Volunteer Victoria recognizes the valuable contribution of youth volunteers by sending Youth Recognition Certificates to high schools and elementary schools. The certificates are presented at the schools' Awards Day ceremonies.

Commemorative Tree

-Community Volunteer Centre Association of Lethbridge

Each year, a commemorative tree is planted in honor of the community's volunteers, with a different volunteer group representing Lethbridge's volunteer corps each year. The city donates the labor to plant the tree in the Volunteer Grove of Trees, a local business sponsors the tree, and an agency dedicates the tree to volunteers.

Park Bench

-Halton Social Planning Council and Volunteer Centre

The centre dedicates a park bench to the area's volunteers. The bench-which overlooks a lake-is bought with a grant from the city. The centre holds a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the dedication of the bench.

Volunteer Certificate

-Sefton CVS Volunteer Bureau

The certificate, which is signed by the city's Mayor, is believed to help enhance a volunteer's job prospects, promote good practice, and raise the status of volunteering. In order to qualify for acceptance into the Volunteer Certificate activity, voluntary groups must adopt good practice and agree to a job description with the volunteers.

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At-A-Glance Ideas

Thanks to the Volunteer Centre of Kitchener-Waterloo for these great ideas:

Recognition when a volunteer joins your agency

- Send a letter of welcome (maybe a small welcome gift too)
- Provide a good role description, Issue name tag, ID card, etc.
- Provide an orientation (including an agency tour)
- Assign a space to the volunteer (place to put coat, purse, on- going work, etc.)
- Publish names of new volunteers in employee / volunteer newsletter
- Introduce the new volunteer to other staff
- Connect the volunteer with their team leader
- Develop a talent inventory of the volunteers
- Provide a nursery

Recognition on a daily or weekly basis

- SMILE!
- Informal thank you from staff and the volunteer's supervisor
- Document their time for future evaluation
- On the job praise - with specific comments
- Provide good supervision
- Seek feedback from volunteer (suggestions / improvements)
- Show awareness / sensitivity to religious practices of the volunteer (holidays, customs, prayer rituals)
- Have agency board members talk with the front line volunteers
- Take time to talk

- Say "We missed you."
- Recognize personal problems and needs
- Use a volunteer suggestion box

Recognition on a monthly basis

- Volunteer of the Month
- Set aside time for supervision and evaluation
- Articles in newsletters
- Provide scholarships to volunteer conferences / workshops
- Letters to the editor about your agency's volunteers

Recognition at the Completion of a Special Event Project

- Say "thank you"
- Send letter of thanks to the volunteer, their boss, their school or their staff supervisor
- Write an article about the project for local newspapers or agency publication
- Take the volunteer(s) out for lunch or a coffee break
- Promotion, give the volunteer more responsibility
- Wall of fame, post up a picture of the volunteer with a summary of the project
- Write a letter to prominent public figures

Recognition at Meetings with Staff or Groups

- Tell about the volunteer projects and individual volunteer accomplishments
- Praise the volunteers to others (have staff who are experiencing success with volunteers in their programs become your best advocates with the staff who may be struggling)
- Show slides or video of the volunteers at work
- Invite volunteers to staff meetings
- Provide volunteers with outside training resources

Recognition on Occasions, at Events, etc.

- Send your volunteers a birthday card
- Have an informal birthday party (a cupcake with a candle)
- Send a get well card
- Remember special event in their lives (child's wedding, job promotions, anniversary)

Recognition when a Volunteer Leaves the Agency

- Give a letter of thanks
- Give a certificate / pin of appreciation
- Write a letter of recommendation
- Write a letter of appreciation / commendation to present employer
- Have an exit interview

Where to Recognize Your Volunteers

- Volunteer Office or lounge
- Hallway in building / cafeteria
- In the community

- At shopping centres - display boards
- In the media, newspaper articles, cables TV shows, professional journals
- In your organization's newsletter or on your Web site

Ways to say "Thank You!" and other recognition ideas

Here are a few ideas that your organization might wish to use when recognizing the work of your volunteers:

- Have a calligrapher write the volunteer's name on an appreciation certificate
- Wrap a few cinnamon buns or cupcakes with a note saying, "Thanks for working your buns off!" or "You take the cake!"
- Give a potpourri packet with a note saying "You've given our project the sweet smell of success!"
- Take a small box of raisins, attach a strip of magnetic tape to the back and attach a small note saying, "Thanks for raisin' all those funds." These can be put on refrigerators or filing cabinets at work.
- Smile, and say "Thank You!"
- Give your volunteers a bag of mixed nuts with a note attached stating, "We would go 'nuts' without your support!"
- Wrap candles in cellophane and tie them with a note stating, "You light up the lives of so many!"; or "You lighten our load by volunteering."; or "No one holds a candle to you!"
- Fill an heirloom box with artifacts from the organization's past, and include a note that says, "Thank you for being part of our history in the making".
- Use children's drawings or pictures of a past charitable event to make a bookmark. Laminate it and include a message on the back.
- Personal notes sent out periodically to remind volunteers of how important his/her efforts are to the organization.
- Send a "thought-you'd-like-to-know" letter to the volunteer's employer, acknowledging his/her positive contribution to your organization.
- Bring volunteers together for a recognition brunch/lunch/tea/dinner in their honor.
- Send an anniversary card to volunteers highlighting their year(s) of service. Note how they made a difference in your organization over the past year(s).
- Take photographs of volunteers while they are "on the job" and later give each volunteer a photo of him/herself in a frame with a 'thank you' message.
- Highlight a "Volunteers of the Month" in your newsletter and/or on your office bulletin board.
- Fill a wine glass with candy and attach a note saying, "A toast to a job well done!"

Here are some funny and inexpensive volunteer recognition ideas .

- Seeds - ‘thanks for all the great ideas that you have planted’ ‘may all your ideas bloom and grow’
- Heart - ‘thanks for caring and giving more than you receive’ ‘thanks for having a heart’
- Smiley Face - ‘smile at people when they aren’t so nice to you’
- Warm Fuzzy - ‘represents all the people you have touched and all the people who have touched you’
- Rubber band - ‘thanks for stretching your limits, patience, flexibility and endurance’
- Cotton Swab - ‘for clearing your ears and listening well to those who are important to you’
- Kite String - ‘you can soar to whatever heights you choose’
- Lollipop - ‘thanks for your help in licking challenges’
- Paperclip - ‘thanks for holding our programs together’
- Cake or cupcakes - ‘you take the cake as an outstanding volunteer’
- Ice Cream Scoop - ‘here’s the scoop you’re doing a wonderful job’
- Sunglasses - ‘thanks for helping us see this project through to a successful end’
- Box of juice - ‘your creative juices have really made a big difference’
- Post it Notes - ‘thank for sticking with us and making such a difference in the lives of people’
- Fortune Cookie - ‘we are so fortunate to have you as a volunteer’

The Climate for Recognition

Volunteer and employee recognition really is built into the atmosphere or the way in which an organization functions over time. The strength of such an integration is that people feel rewarded, valued, and good about the agency as a whole. She goes on to suggest that the culture of the organization must also be evaluated in terms of its norms. In other words, how are “rewards” or “punishments” *already* distributed among the members of the organization? Four dimensions of climate are examined:

1. What **energy** is available to the organization? In other words,

- Is your clinic atmosphere more likely to be fast-paced and upbeat, or quieter and laid back?
- Do volunteers and paid staff arrive on time? Is this behavior applauded or ignored?
- Are people encouraged to “go the extra mile” for patients or other staff? Is “pitching in” with other staff rewarded or frowned upon?

2. How is that **energy distributed**? Everyone makes choices about where and how they will use their abilities.

With volunteers, this is particularly true. In your clinic,

- Is there recognition for creativity and innovation?
- Is there quality supervision and appropriate clinical procedures?
- Are creativity and innovation welcomed or discouraged? How?

3. How do people **feel as they work** in the organization?

- Is there a good feeling as people work in the clinic?
- Do your volunteers appear comfortable and willing to return?

This area reflects the intangibles of the workplace. Issues such as a sense of trust, open discussion, socialization, familiarity, ability to ask and receive questions, and the ability to participate in decision making are often part of a subtle system of rewards (or punishments).

4. Do the volunteers and staff **perceive a sense of personal development**?

- Are new skills celebrated or ignored?
- Are people rewarded with new responsibilities when a goal is reached? Or are people recycled and told to “do-it-again?”
- Are the jobs satisfying? Are there clear goals, specific job descriptions, appropriate placement? Is there training, supervision, and honest assessment?

When evaluating and designing any recognition system, one additional consideration is vital. ***People change over time. Motivation for volunteer work changes, too. We know that in terms of recognition, “One size does not fit all” and certainly, “One size does not fit for all time.”***

Low Cost, High Impact Recognition Ideas

Quality treats!

- Name the coffee pot each month after a volunteer who has “served well”
- Leave candy kisses at work stations
- Notes or postcards... thank you, birthday, sorry-I-goofed, etc.
- Organize a potluck celebration
- Say thank-you
- Smile

People Care 101

- Greet volunteers by name
- Stop by while volunteers are working and recognize what they are doing
- Know who does what
- Include volunteers in paid staff meetings
- Refer to the team as a whole (rather than paid, non-paid or volunteer)
- Chart to show accumulated hours for individuals and team
- Chart to show actual dollar value of contributed volunteer time
- Profile volunteers for newsletter
- Job opportunity board
- Post training opportunities
- Work with paid staff to understand and appreciate the job descriptions of the volunteers
- Have a coffee/break area with places to sit down
- Job rotation opportunities
- Flexibility within job assignment
- Good supervision and evaluation
- Keep accurate records on each volunteer -- time, skills, etc.
- Recognize milestones (years served, etc.) ACCURATELY
- Share the positive comments you hear about volunteers and their work with them
- Create a “behind the scenes” award for those whose actions are not typically in the limelight

For Youth:

- Documentation of skills, training, experience
- Job-readiness coaching
- Resume review
- Mentoring and networking
- Letters of reference for college, training programs
- Letter to school newspaper
- Letter of appreciation to parents

For Working Volunteers:

- Flexible work opportunities
- Work to do at home
- Shorter project-oriented jobs
- Re-negotiate assignments; adapt work load

For Retired Volunteers:

- Reimburse out-of-pocket costs
- Respect for years of experience

- Opportunities to give and receive new information
- Access professional networking
- Continuing education tuition or scholarships
- Meals
- Listening
- Opportunities to serve
- Lending library of books and professional journals

For Lower-Income Volunteers:

- Transportation allowance or arrangement
- Meals
- Uniforms
- Any paying or stipend opportunities
- Networking opportunities
- Discounts for goods, services
- Work opportunities
- Child or aged parent care
- Provide scholarships and expense money for training and continuing education opportunities
- Letters of reference
- Documentation of skills, abilities, interests

Recognition Ideas Based on Motivation Type

Affiliation Motivated People:

- Publish information concerning recognition that your agency volunteers have received for the volunteer work in other groups, agencies, or organizations
- Public recognition (with peers, family)
- Feature in agency newsletter or professional journal
- Local news articles
- Personal notes from supervisor
- Name/photo recognition at the agency
- Supervisor/director knows the volunteer by name and some personal information
- Assignments and opportunities for socialization
- Assignment to a team that can work together for a period of time
- Evaluations that measure success in “people terms”

Achievement Motivated People:

- Job assignments with clearly stated goals
- Careful use of their time
- Involvement in decisions that affect them
- Evaluations that measure success in concrete, tangible ways (i.e. goals met, patients served, etc.)
- Tangible awards, plaques, pins
- Provide opportunities for volunteers to assess their satisfactions, needs, and goals
- Know and honor their personal goals
- Opportunities to participate in goal related decisions
- Opportunity to see where they fit in the whole picture
- Opportunity to advance within the organization

Power/Influence Motivated People:

- Invite key volunteers into training or mentoring roles
- Recognition that is broad-based (i.e. media)
- Job assignments that allow them to persuade or teach others
- Job assignments that allow them to interact with organizational leadership
- Evaluations that acknowledge their impact within and on behalf of the organization
- Ask for suggestions on how the clinic can achieve wider recognition and impact in the community
- Engage help as a negotiator on behalf of the clinic
- If appropriate, invite to Board of Directors
- Job assignments with increased responsibility and authority
- Use as a consultant
- On-going program, site, or award named for them

Parting Thoughts

- ***Tie recognition to needs.*** Each volunteer has different needs, so make sure your system is flexible.
- ***Be fair.*** Some volunteers are more visible than others, some volunteers make stronger personal impressions. Look out for your own bias in determining appropriate recognition.
- ***Be timely.*** Once a year just doesn't work if the person or achievement to be recognized happens the day after last year's event.
- ***Be enthusiastic.*** Is the process of recognition something you (or your board) value?
- ***Be public in your presentation.*** Make a party if you need to in the coffee room. Good moments deserved to be shared.
- ***Promote recognition but don't oversell the concept.*** Constant talk **about** recognition can render the process ridiculous. Get on with the **doing**.

Volunteer Recognition Ideas from Volunteer Managers at www.energizeinc.org

- [Banquets and Parties with a Twist](#)

Volunteer Recognition Banquets and Parties with a Twist [Recognition](#)

Magical Moment

"Celebrate the Magic of Volunteering" was the theme to our 2007 Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon. I'm sure it wasn't my original idea, so THANK YOU to whomever shared it! Our colors were red, silver and black with stars as accents, we made centerpieces out of top hats with curling ribbon, onion grass and crumpled foil picks (they looked great!), had star-shaped memo holders as favors, and our entertainment was a magician! It was a hit!

Submitted on 15 January 2008 by Traci Lato

Books Make Themes Memorable

Our volunteer rescue squad was established in 1940, but just last year we began using a "theme" to spice up our annual Banquet & Installation of Officers. The theme that year was "Volunteering." I ordered 200 copies of "Chicken Soup for the Volunteer's Soul" at the non-profit cost directly from the publisher, and a local business was kind enough to fund this purchase. Each squad member and guest received a book, and the keynote speech was geared around volunteering. This was a hit!

This year our theme was "Mentoring to Make a Difference," and this year's book was "Mentor: The Kid & the CEO" (the purchase funded once again by a local business.) Tables were decorated with candle-lit hurricane lamps, surrounded by rings of live greenery and fresh mint sprigs for the centerpiece--the "Mentor" theme smelled wonderful! We also spread Andes' mints around the centerpieces. Our speakers both gave outstanding speeches about their personal mentoring experiences and encouraged everyone to become a mentor, whether in a volunteer agency, in a school, at home, etc.

The gift of a book as a memento makes our event's message/theme more personal and remembered. Plus we encourage our members and guests to "pay it forward" by giving their book to someone else after they've read it.

Submitted on 15 October 2007 by Barbara Branham

Good Fortune

At our annual dinner this year we went with the theme "Volunteers: Our Good Fortune Since 1972!" I was able to order fortune cookies with personalized messages, and 1/2 pint takeout boxes from [Fancy Fortune Cookies](#). Each volunteer received a box with two cookies (two different messages), a sticker with our logo and theme, and some ribbon to add a little color. I would definitely recommend Fancy Fortunes -- they have reasonable prices, allow you to create five free messages per order, and are very easy to work with! Plus, being able to track my order on-line was a great stress reliever.

Submitted on 27 April 2007 by Eva Treuer

Special Themes, Donated Desserts

Our nature center is occasionally rented out for special events. For our volunteer party, I have one of the caterers donate an hors d'oeuvre party with desserts for 150 guests. This year our theme is ponds, and the round tables will look like giant lily pads. Our preschool will make giant bugs to put on the pillars. Because I freed up the budget for food, I now can give a better gift to the volunteers. I always look for something useful, so this year we have a local artist/member make pottery plates with a turtle on them.

Submitted on 17 April 2007 by Laurie Haig

"Oui" appreciate you!

A way for managers to show appreciation for support staff! Set up the breakroom or lunchroom with tables and chairs, using real tablecloths and real dishes. Use stemware for juice, etc. Serve quiche, fresh fruit and croissants, and have the managers serve these items wearing berets. Borrow a cd of French music from the local library and play that during the breakfast. This is a personal touch to let staff know how much you appreciate them! And if everyone chips in (all the managers), it should be inexpensive to do as well!

Submitted on 10 April 2007 by Crystal Brown

Laissez les bons temps rouler!

In Louisiana, food is everything to my volunteers. Each year I throw a crawfish boil for my annual volunteer recognition party. I'm afraid if I decided to serve something different, there would be a riot because everybody looks forward to the traditional fare. This year additional foods have been added to recognize our culture -- jambalaya and fried catfish. We don't have a special theme other than *Laissez les bons temps rouler!* (Let the good times roll!). I usually have around 150 volunteers show up, which includes our volunteer Board members. It gives everyone the opportunity to socialize in a relaxed environment.

Submitted on 3 April 2007 by Bonnie Bordelon

Where Were You In '72

This was the theme of our annual volunteer banquet. Our organization is 35 years old this year. We dressed up in the 70's. The programs were just like a 1972 yearbook. Our place mats were a collage of volunteer pictures with the other side written notes from the staff just like we did in our yearbooks. We had a "pet rock" for a favor. I was able to download a box from the internet and put our logo on it. We put them together and put in rocks and instructions. We also made a set of the "Price is Right" and gave away a door prize for the winner.

Submitted on 13 March 2007 by Mindy Sakmar

A Feather in Your Cap

Last year for our Annual Meeting and Recognitions Dinner we used the theme "put a feather in your caps ". On each table we made top hats out of construction paper with fabric bows, and under the hats there was a fabric square to match the bow on that particular hat. We had feathers in each hat. The following items were weaved into our presentation throughout the evening. 1) "The Recognition Committee would also like to let everyone one to know that we are presenting pins for Membership Milestones for 25 years and up. It has been a custom of many different groups of people all over the world, including Native Americans, to put a feather in the headgear of the warrior for each enemy defeated in battle. So we honor our volunteers for their victories large and small in service to the girls of Montachusett Council." 2) We have over ___ volunteers who need to put a "feather in their cap" for helping girls reach their dreams.

Submitted on 6 March 2007 by Laura Dilts, Manager of Adult Development Girl Scouts of Montachusett, Council, Inc.

Volunteer Carnival

This year, after thinking about what I could do special for our volunteers, I decided to do a Carnival Theme. I'm going to have Carnival games with lots of prizes. The volunteers earned the tickets for the games by their volunteer hours last year: beginning with five tickets just for being a volunteer, and then one ticket for every 50 hours of volunteer time. I made little ticket books for each volunteer with their names on them and the appropriate number of tickets in each book. I then coordinated with our Nutrition Services to provide carnival type food at the party. I'm hoping to find a resident clown in our midst to show up unannounced to have more fun with our volunteers. After the food and games, we will present the year awards.

Submitted on 2 February 2007 by Melissa Maxon

Themed Power Point Presentations to Highlight Honorees

Every year at my recognition luncheon, I make two powerpoint presentations. The first is a slideshow of pictures that relate to the luncheon theme. For instance at our luau, pictures of the Hawaiian islands were shown on a screen as guests were arriving. The next slide show highlights the individuals receiving Years of Service Awards. This slide show is playing while that person is being honored. On this show, I feature a picture of the volunteer, where they work, and I also have the volunteer submit some individual quotes about volunteering that is included on their slide. The guests love the tidbits about the volunteer, and it also allows me to highlight all the honorees, even if they cannot make the event.

Submitted on 25 October 2006 by Amy Wade

"Treasuring" Volunteers

Our Volunteer Appreciation was super successful again this year. I chose a theme which was "You are a Treasure." The tables were decorated with small treasure chests filled with gold coin candies and Mardi Gras beads (bought at 75% off). The invitations were made on a scroll with a treasure chest on the bottom corner. Best of all, our event was held at the Treasure Ship Restaurant, which is really a large replica of an old pirate ship sitting on the lagoon! I had a large treasure chest filled with gift certificates for each volunteer -- nice gifts such as dinners, movies, car washes, haircuts, manicures, etc. Several volunteers were honored with certificates and plaques for longevity also. Now to top that for next year!

Submitted on 4 August 2006 by Susan Champion, Coordinator of Volunteer Services, Emerald Coast Hospice, Panama City, Florida

Hats Off To You

The Volunteer Services Department paid tribute to our valuable volunteers by honoring them at our Annual Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast -- "Hats Off To You" -- April 4, 2006. Crazy hats decorated by the West Palm Beach Specialized Adult Day Center were suspended from the ceiling, while beautiful orchids in black top hats complemented the theme. Our volunteers were arrayed in decorated hats to add to the festivities, and a gift certificate was awarded for the best decorated hat. We feasted on strawberry crepes topped with cream, and lox and bagels while viewing highlights of volunteers over the past year.

Submitted on 21 July 2006 by Beverley Penver

The Essential Piece

This was the title of our volunteer recognition dinner this year to celebrate the connection our volunteers have to our organization and the contribution they make to our business. Banquet tables were decorated with white table cloths and black napkins. Scattered in the center of the table were pieces of jigsaw puzzles that I had gotten at a local thrift store. Favors were gold puzzle piece pins along with ink pens from our business that were used to fill out the crossword puzzles at each place setting. I had created the puzzle using trivia clues about our business and its founder. The puzzles were easy to create using the help of a free website for making personalized

puzzles. During the recognition I had asked department leaders to briefly talk about the support their departments receive from our volunteer staff.

Our volunteer of the year (the one who donates the most hours during the year) received a jigsaw puzzle made from a picture of our facility.

Submitted on 19 July 2006 by Jayne Rice, Honeywell Center

May 2005 Hot Topic provides ideas

The topic of banquets was addressed in our May 2005 hot topic, [visit the responses](#) to receive additional ideas.

"Mmmm, Mmmm, Good"

Our theme was based around the Campbell's soup theme. We purchased red and white coffee mugs printed to look like a soup can, with the title of our agency at top, and "Cream of Volunteer Soup" printed on the front, with special directions for volunteer use on the side. We served two different types of soup with our dinner, placed soup cans on the tables with red and white carnations, had red napkins and white table cloths, and one of our staff made a life size soup can for the stage. We photocopied pictures from the Campbell's Soup web page, our participants colored them and decorated our walls. Our volunteers receiving special recognition received a copy of the book, *Chicken Soup for the Volunteer Soul*.

Submitted on 13 March 2006 by Cindy Blackstone, The Janet Pomeroy Center, San Francisco

Restaurant Samplings

For the past two years we have had a very successful dinner called a "Taste of the Town". I contact many local restaurants explaining the wonderful event and who the event is for, and fortunately many have agreed to participate, for free!!! The first year we had as many as 16 restaurants including everything from gourmet lamb chops and seasoned shrimp, to different ethnic foods such as vegetarian lo mein, to meatball sandwiches, to the most delicious bread pudding.

The restaurants are asked to donate any item from their menu and are welcome to participate and serve in the event. The guests are served a small portion from any restaurant station. There are small plates provided at each station, staff and/or restaurant employees serve the volunteers. Volunteers can return to any station as many times as they want.

As for decorating, we have used red and white checkered tablecloths and asked the staff to wear white aprons with a chef hat. We have also had a French theme with pastel colors and each server wears a scarf with their apron. All in all, everyone leaves very satisfied, including staff and the restaurant employees. After the event I always send a certificate of appreciation to the participating restaurants. The event does take some work, but has been well worth the effort.

Good Luck!

Submitted by Rose Lynch

Mardi-Gras

Any state bordering Louisiana seems to celebrate Mardi Gras--so for my volunteer recognition lunch we did a Mardi Gras theme. This is fabulously inexpensive--beads, coins and masks are really cheap decorations that can be bought in bulk on-line. I made centerpieces by planting pansys (which are conveniently Mardi Gras colored) in hand-painted green and purple terra cotta pots (which took me only one afternoon to do) and then displaying coins and masks on the tables. Each volunteer got beads as they walked in the door and we had zydeco music playing in the background. The volunteers loved it!

We "raffled" off the centerpieces to a person at each table by asking an organization-related trivia question to each group. The person with the closest answer took home the planter. This helped the volunteers learn about our nation-wide program as well as how important their service is to our organization.

For gifts, I took iron-on transfers and placed a volunteer related design on tote bags bought in bulk inexpensively. We filled these bags with donated goodies from area merchants (e.g. note pads from a printing company, pens and keychains from an insurance company and sweets donated by a distributor). Hand-making things really doesn't take that much time and can save you tons of money. I also think the volunteers were touched by the hard work put in to recognizing them.

Submitted by Susan, Director, RSVP, Arkansas

My Volunteer Valentine

We host several recognition events each year, but one of the favorites is our annual "My Volunteer Valentine" Tea Party which began last year. This year, I started out by sending nomination forms to all staff in the medical center asking them to submit the name of a volunteer who exemplifies extraordinary caring and commitment, along with a brief explanation of why this person is deserving of this "Volunteer Valentine" honor.

I designed the invitation on Microsoft Publisher, and sent it to all our volunteers, as well as to our Hospital Executive Team, and everyone who nominated a volunteer. We hosted the event in our main auditorium, complete with assorted finger sandwiches and mini desserts, as well as several types of hot and cold teas. At each table we placed a special gift: we purchased sets of demitasse cups with saucers at our local 99 cent store and filled each cup with three different flavored tea bags, and valentine candy. We wrapped them

in pink cellophane tied with ribbon. We covered our tables with white table cloths and used pink and red runners. Red and pink Valentine stuffed Teddy Bears (purchased at our local Big Lots store) were our centerpieces, and pink and red paper hearts of all sizes filled the room.

When the guests arrived, they were given a "Volunteer Word Search" game to play just for fun. The completed games were collected by one of our staff members, and served as their entry into the prize drawing which took place later in the event. We had music playing overhead (including Frank Sinatra's "My Funny Valentine") and topped it off with entertainment by a harpist who was an employee. After all the food and socializing, we awarded the "My Volunteer Valentine" honorees with certificates and a gift, by reading the words that had been submitted by employees during the nomination process. We also drew names for the several prizes that we had, and the stuffed Valentine Bears at each table were won by those at each table who's birthday was closest to Valentine's Day. It was a great event!

Submitted on 27 February 2004 by Liz Mirzaian, Director, Volunteer and Senior Resources, Glendale Adventist Medical Center, California

"Our Volunteers Rock"

Our theme was the 1950's. From decorations of black and white checkered tablecloth, fold out ice cream floats, and pink place mats and plates. We traditionally have a breakfast. Staff that helped were encouraged to wear their poodle skirts and 50's garb. We also invited volunteers to do the same. We had a guitarist and vocalist play and sing music of the era. Our certificates kept the theme with "You Rock".

Submitted on 20 January 2004 by Betty Coyle, Hiawatha Care Center, Iowa, USA

Shining Stars

Deciding on a theme can be a treat for a Volunteer Coordinator. One year we decided to recognize our volunteers with a late luncheon titled, "Our Volunteers are Shining Stars". The theme took on a Hollywood/Academy Awards motif. The colors chosen were black, gold and white. A long red carpet (a remnant) was laid out for our stars to walk on as they entered the event. We even had a "paparazzi" there taking pictures (staff simply taking pictures to record the event). Bouquets of black, white, and gold latex balloons were placed everywhere. Black tablecloths with gold overlays (gold lame cloth purchased from a remnant store) decorated each table. For the backdrop, a "hill" was cut-out of donated ply-wood and painted black, white letters cutout of foam board were placed on the hill spelling out "HOLLYWOOD". Our Christmas lights were strung out to resemble twinkling stars. Each of our volunteers was given a T-shirt with a star shooting across the front stating "I am a Shining Star Volunteer of the Costa Mesa Senior Center". They all seemed to enjoy the shirt. We chose a shirt as that year's gift so that they could be recognized in an everyday setting. Those being specially honored for their services were given a certificate and an "Oscar" statuette, inexpensively purchased from a local party store. All in all the was a gala affair that has yet to be forgotten.

Submitted on 16 November 2003 by Karyn Canett, Senior Center/Volunteer Coordinator, Costa Mesa Senior Center, CA/USA

Volunteers are Gems

For our Volunteer Recognition Dinner last spring, we used the theme, "Our Volunteers are Gems!" We used jewel tone colors to decorate. The centerpieces were jeweltoned candle holders with the battery operated candle lights inside. At each place setting, we decorated with a bookmark that had plastic jewels glued to it and read: "Our Volunteers are Like Gems!"

Amethyst-Volunteers are like amethyst because they are vivid and sincere. They create stability, calmness and tranquility, even in the midst of a rowdy group of children.

Diamond-Volunteers are like diamonds because they are brilliant, courageous and tough. Volunteers are highly prized and loved.

Emerald-Volunteers are like emeralds because they are intense and soothing. They reflect growth, remove weariness and soothe the soul-they are highly valued.

Ruby-Volunteers are like rubies because they are glowing and intense. They are wise, creative and peaceful.

Sapphire-Volunteers are like sapphires because they are clear and precious. They are brilliant, precise, happy and bring blessings.

Above all, our volunteers are valuable, beautiful, tough, priceless and truly treasured. It was a huge success as the volunteers truly felt valued and appreciated.

Submitted on 14 October 2003 by Bethany Swickrath, Membership and Community Education Manager, Girl Scouts of Appleseed Ridge, Inc., OH, USA

Beach Party

We used a beach party theme for our annual meeting and decorated beach pails with the names of each out-going board member, along with the agency's name. The we filled them with bright, inexpensive sunglasses, candy bars, bottles of bubbles, and a water gun with a note that said "Thanks for all your hard work! Now it's time to play!"

Submitted on 20 June 2003 by Katherine Scoggins, Executive Director, Shepherd Center of Kingsport TN, USA

Treasures in the Sand

Our theme this year was "Treasures in the Sand." We handmade the invitations which are always a hit. Volunteers appreciate a personal invitation. The tables were decorated with blue paper, as the ocean. In the middle, brown sugar spread out with all the treasures (peanuts, gummy worms, frog candy, hard rock candy--for the gems,) We made treasure boxes out of cakes..spilling out were candy necklaces and gold coins. This was also on the tables. We made personalized placemats (tan color with a sea shell and waves on, scalloped edging) and we wrote the theme on the mat. Staff and students wrote their thanks on them and we laminated the mats.

We also made little bottles of bath salts to go by their place settings. The school staff donated a dish for the luncheon. Every year I give out a "life saver award." The principal buys a plant for each one of the volunteers. We have a couple kids come in and read a poem, choir comes in and sings a few songs. We invite the Volunteer Coordinators from the District Administration, as well as a School Board Member.

Submitted on 27 May 2003 by D Nevala, Volunteer Coordinator, Roosevelt Elementary, Washington, USA

Magic of Volunteering

A few years ago you may remember that a popular theme for volunteer recognition was "The Magic of Volunteers". To use the theme in decorating we bought black plastic top hats and fanned red, black and white paper out of them. We always need to name the groups of children and the volunteers to be seated at a particular table. The table markers were in the shape of a white-gloved hand where the name was written and from the hand came a magic wand. Red table clothes and black placemats set off the room. This was one of my favorites.

Submitted by Lynn Guerra, Volunteer Coordinator, Holy Family Institute, Pennsylvania

Picturing Volunteers

This past year at our Volunteer Banquet, I created a PowerPoint program (which is similar to a slide show except you use a computer) with pictures of our volunteers. I began by searching and locating many old photos of our volunteers and ran around the hospital taking new ones. I also took pictures of staff members holding signs up that said "Thank You Volunteers". We had enough pictures to go along with three songs. The songs used were POINTS OF LIGHT by Randy Travis, HEAL THE WORLD by Michael Jackson and YOUR SIMPLY THE BEST by Tina Turner. The presentation basically three parts. The first part had pictures then a slide came up that said, We couldn't do it without you. Then we had several pictures that we had created as if we didn't have volunteers. We had the gift shop closed with a person peering in. We had the adult day center closed. We piled up mail. Showed empty escort seats. Things like that. Next slide was We Couldn't do it without REALLY! Then we went on to more pictures. The last section of pictures was for the song "Your simply the best". While this song played, pictures of employees ran with them holding up the sign "thank you volunteers". The last said, Thank you Volunteers for all you do. And then this was the end.

Submitted by Susan Senglaub, Manager of Volunteer Services, Holy Family Memorial

Four Goals

When I plan my yearly Volunteer Recognition Breakfast I keep four points in mind that must happen: 1. Educate 2. Inspire 3. Recognize 4. Have fun. Each year this event is the most successful!

Submitted by Dee Martin, Director of Volunteer Services, Bedford, NH

A Royal Thank You

Each year, we honor our dedicated volunteers with a dinner, hence the "Volunteer Recognition Dinner." This year I really struggled for a theme. I came up with "A Royal Thank You." A bit hokey, I know, but it really turned out great. I stuck with royal colors, red, blue, purple, gold, & green. Centerpieces were crowns, beads, tiaras, and large cracked glass vases with royal colored Betta Fish and gemstones. I would have liked to find a "Court Jester" as entertainment but settled for Period music. Lovely royal beads also added a rich touch. In addition I recognized volunteers that were exceptional "Knights in Shining Armor!"

Submitted by Crystal Lybarger, Youth & Volunteer Director, American Red Cross

Volunteer Tea

This year, for the first time ever, our school district held a volunteer tea. All district volunteers were invited, and we had enough special mugs and book bags on hand for everyone. We assumed a maximum attendance of 100, but only really expected about 30 people or so. Each elementary, junior high and administrative department selected two "extra special" volunteers to receive additional recognition at the tea. The high school was allowed to select four people due to their much larger volunteer population. We called the additional recognition the "Starfish Award", presenting each of those volunteers with a personalized certificate (featuring the "Starfish Story") and a starfish pin. The event was held in our school district's board room and we decorated using a beach theme, playing Jimmy Buffet music in the background. As each person was called up to receive their award, I read a brief bio about them, submitted by the school or department that nominated that person. Our superintendent gave them their certificate and pin, and another person took a picture of them. We had a very good turnout (over 60 people), everyone enjoyed the "heavy hors d'oeuvres," and people were thrilled to be recognized.

Submitted by Therese Caldwell, Volunteer Services Liaison, North Kitsap School District, Poulsbo, WA

Video

As part of the annual luncheon, we developed a video showing pictures of all the volunteers. We included short interviews with new, working, senior and youth volunteers. The video opened with wonderful music showing areas of the hospital affected by volunteers. We closed with pictures of our volunteers in the chapel. It was very moving. The volunteers loved the new idea.

Submitted by Patricia A. Chambers, Director of Volunteer Services, St. Mary's Hospital, Huntington, WV

Goals for Successful Recognition Event

This isn't a success story but rather a way to look at "success." I think there ought to be SEVERAL goals for a "successful" recognition event, especially since we are busy people and can't afford for our time to be spent on an activity that accomplishes only one thing! So, how about these for a start? A successful recognition event needs to:

1. Say thank you for anything and everything volunteered to the organization during the past year (the organization's obligation).
2. Have everyone volunteering the above feel appreciated (the volunteers' perspective).
3. Recommit (re-enthuse) volunteers to the coming year of work and, potentially, to recruit new volunteers for vacant positions.
4. Educate everyone attending--frontline volunteers, paid staff, executives, board-level volunteers--about the scope, meaning and value of volunteer services to the organization, and about the diversity and skills of who volunteers.
5. Acknowledge the contributions of (some) paid staff supervisors to the success of volunteers.
6. Report the outcomes of volunteer effort (not just to proclaim the hours spent in effort).
7. Challenge all volunteers through recognition of the special accomplishments of a selected few.
8. Gain publicity for the organization and for the volunteer program.
9. Allow volunteers a chance to have fun and meet one another (something they do otherwise only with people on their shift).
10. Gain respect for the volunteer program and the director of it.

Submitted by Susan J. Ellis, President, Energize, Inc.

Court Capers

One of the most unique volunteer recognition events I attended was "Court Capers". Volunteers were arrested for "giving freely of their time, talents, and treasures." The invitation was a warrant for their arrest, the event took place in a court room. There was a judge, a jury (of staff), a police officer (with a wonderful voice who sang a personalized song to the tune of "Thanks for the memories") and a baliff who sang "Here come the judge - Here come the judge". There were a few outstanding volunteers who were asked to stand and the volunteer coordinator (in the witness stand) would state how they were guilty of the crime. The jury then voted "guilty" and the judge sentenced them to a free dinner with door prizes. (The banquet room was right next door decorated with police hats, badges, etc. on the tables.) It was very different but very comical and enjoyable.

Submitted by Debra Cheek, Volunteer Coordinator, Moffitt Cancer Center

Potluck

For the past several years, we have conducted a volunteer potluck supper for our volunteers. The theatre provides beverages and paper utensils and each volunteer contributes a dish. It's a "stand-up" meal so everybody mingles and tries lots of new things. We publish the favorite recipes in the theatre's newsletter.

Submitted by Jill Rafferty, Education & Volunteer Coordinator, Capital Repertory Theatre

The ABC's of Volunteerism

The first volunteer recognition dinner I planned had the theme of 'The ABC's of Volunteerism' (Appreciation, Benevolence, Chocolate!) I had a chalkboard in the room with the ABC's written on it and an apple drawn on with chalk. Used as centerpieces on the tables were small school slates, a wooden ruler, pencils, and bottles of glue and crayons. At each place setting were two pieces of chocolate candy--a Hershey Kiss and a Hershey Hug. I told the volunteers that 'A' stood for the Appreciation we felt for their wonderful service; 'B' represented Benevolence (an inclination to do charitable or kind acts--what they gave with their donation of time); and 'C' represented Chocolate, the sweetness of their contributions and we were giving them a hug and a kiss.

With a theme of ABC's and school, I told the volunteers their assignment for the evening was a quiz entitled 'Getting To Know You'. I gave them 10 minutes of Mix and Mingle time to gather signatures from fellow volunteers to fill in the spaces on their quizzes. The quiz had 20 items listed and each person had to find someone who...is an only child, had a fried egg for breakfast this morning, is allergic to penicillin, volunteers for more than three organizations, was born in the same month as you, uses the same brand of deodorant as you, has been a volunteer for more than 10 years, likes grits and fried okra, has had their picture on the front page of a newspaper, always twists an Oreo apart and eats the icing first, etc, etc, etc.

It was a bit zany, but was a good ice breaker and many didn't want to stop when I said time was up. I gave a shiny red apple to the volunteer who had the most lines filled in. Volunteers were then recognized and thanked for their valued gift of time in serving others. One volunteer's name was drawn to receive our grand prize of the evening--a brand new washer and dryer' (washcloth and towel!). The evening was lighthearted and fun for the group.

Submitted by Jayne Rice, Director of Community Programming and Volunteers, Honeywell Center

Photo from "Younger Years"

I asked volunteers to provide a photo of themselves in "younger years" and had photos made into slides. I wrote a little "hint poem" about each slide, relating the hint to the volunteer's service position, and we played a guessing game at the National Volunteer Week Recognition Luncheon. Big-band music played in the background as each slide was shown and the "hint poem" read. Prizes were given for the most correct guesses. Our volunteers had such fun seeing themselves and others in the slides and enjoyed guessing "who's who". The photos were returned.

Submitted by Kelley Perkins, CDVS, Volunteer Coordinator, Seven Rivers Community Hospital, Crystal River, Florida

Theme for Recognition Dinner

We select a theme for our annual volunteer recognition banquet for our Senior Center and Mealsite volunteers. This year our theme is "Volunteers are worth a million." In keeping with the "so you want to be a Millionaire" craze we are going to have our own version of the

game show, with the questions relating to volunteerism, nutrition or aging. Our placemats, nutcups, table decorations, program covers and volunteer certificates will all have a " money" motif. And of course we'll decorate with the color of money--green!

Submitted by K. Schutte, Mealsite Manager, Marinette County Elderly Services, (Wisconsin)

Invitations Colored by Kindergarten Students

We were looking for a way to invite our volunteers to our annual Volunteer Recognition. We wanted something special but not expensive. We enlarged some graphics with simple designs from our computer. We used the computer and copy machine to put the text on the invitation with "colored by...in Mrs.....'s kindergarten class" at the bottom. They were then sent to the schools to be colored by the children and then they were mailed to the volunteers. They were a huge hit and now our volunteers look forward to receiving one each year. *Submitted by Ruth Anne Bleakney, Senior Center Director, Milford Senior Center*

Ice Cream Sundaes Show How Volunteers Help a Program

I work for a Community Action Agency and we rely on volunteers for everything from filing to riding school buses. We celebrated an event two weeks ago, where each of the program directors discussed how volunteers helped to run the programs. While each director talked, their staff helped to build brownie sundaes. One program started with the foundation (plates), the next put on the brownies, then the whipped topping, cherries and nuts until we had 150 sundaes. It symbolized visually how our volunteers affect each part of our organization and by working together we can accomplish great things! It was very well received and the brownies even tasted great!

Submitted by Teresa Miller Keck

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- [Out-of-the-Ordinary Gifts](#)

Out-of-the-Ordinary Gifts for Volunteers [Recognition](#)

Customized Cookbooks

One of my most popular gifts was a cookbook. I collected recipes from each volunteer, some included a personal story about the recipe which made it even better. I put them together into a booklet. One year, I used postcards from our institution for the covers, the next I bought paper doily valentine hearts & stickers on the cover. It was a very inexpensive project. And the volunteers loved it!

Submitted on 5 September 2007 by Deborah Jones-Miller

Unique "Roots" Vase

An inexpensive and personal gift that we give to our priceless volunteers come from the local dollar store and our home. The gift consist of presenting a large vase full of water with colorful rocks at the bottom and a live plant at the top. There is an plastic piece holding the plant from falling down into the water (i.e the bottom of a clear plastic cup). In appreciation we say to the person thank you for helping us establish our roots.

Submitted on 28 February 2007 by Kijafa Johnson

Lifesavers

For the last volunteer recognition event, we handed out rolls of Lifesavers candy with a mailing label stuck to it that read "Thanks for being a lifesaver! This was a simple project that really didn't take much time. We just had to create and print the labels at our office and they fit perfectly on the roll of candy.

Submitted on 24 April 2006 by Sarah Pinder

Dollar Store

I go to the dollar store and find cute cheap things that I can write nice sayings with for my student staff. For example, I buy Pop Rocks candy and attach a note telling them "you rock for..."

Submitted on 1 April 2005 by Rachelle

Gift Ideas

Here are a few ideas that I've used to thank volunteers who work with the Army's Family Readiness Groups.

- *Candle* - Present a candle with a card saying "You light the way" or "No one can hold a candle to you"
- *Light bulbs* - "You light the way -- thanks for your glowing enthusiasm."
- *Permanent marker* - "You've made a lasting and permanent contribution to your group."
- *Lucky Charm cereal* - "We're so LUCKY to have you!"
- *100 Grand candy bars* - "Volunteers are priceless."
- *Payday candy bar* - "Volunteers don't receive a salary because they're worthless... it's because they're priceless!"
- *Gold chocolate coins* - "Volunteers are worth their weight in gold."
- *Andes mints/ peppermint patties* - "Your service is worth a mint to us!"
- *Ruler/Tape measure* - "It's easy to measure the difference you've made in our group -- you're amazing!"

- *Clock* - "Thanks for the time you've given to our group!"
- *Group's logo Hat* - "Our hats are off to you! Thanks for all you do!"
- *Shirt* - "We know you'd give the shirt off your back... so here's an extra one for the next time you give your all."
- *Toaster* - "A Toast to a super volunteer! Whenever you use this toaster, remember to toast yourself, too!"
- *Plant* - "We grow luckier every day you're with us."

Submitted on 18 March 2005 by Danielle Hamilton

Volunteers Make a World of Difference

This year, we are using the theme "Volunteers make a world of Difference". We bought inexpensive globes, with small paper banners with this message printed on it. We plan to pass out maps given to us free by the local tourist information centre (to encourage travelling around the world!) and have asked volunteers to come to the event dressed in outfits that represent their cultural heritage in order to illustrate volunteering across the world. We also plan to serve foods from around the world too.

Submitted on 14 February 2005 by Nancy Hughes

Volunteer Christmas Tree

This year we made a volunteer Christmas tree. We took a picture of each one of our 200 volunteers and scrapbooked the pictures onto a 3" x 6" strip of stiff paper. We punched holes at the top for string and hung them on the tree. The tree was present for our Christmas recognition event and then transferred to the main lobby of our facility for the rest of the Christmas season. It drew a LOT of attention and was quite the conversation piece. It was a beautiful tree and quite awe-inspiring. We will make this an annual project, so kept the pictures on file to be used again. Taking the pictures was a huge project and that is why we will go through the photos every year to update as needed.

Submitted on 20 January 2005 by Nita Dueck

Calculators with Special Message

We do an annual recognition event for our board and commission members. One year we provided calculators with the City's logo and the saying "We count on you" printed on it.

Submitted on 4 January 2005 by Karla Stovall

Unique "Thank You" Chocolate Bars

I obtain flat chocolate bars and design individual candy bar covers with our logo and/or a design with a "thank you" for your contributions...etc. These can be given out as individual recognitions, or at group events. The designs can be easily changed so they are always unique. A variety of software packages can be used. I then just cut them to size on a paper cutter and tape them around the candy bars. Flat bars are easiest to use. When they are distributed, they generate smiles.

Another idea: we ordered an embosser with our logo and a "thank you" message on it that can be embossed on seals or used on envelopes and paper directly. It's an investment that's worth it, and adds class to recognition efforts.

Submitted on 2 December 2004 by Laurie Eytel, CVA, Volunteer Manager, Children, Youth and Family, Fairfax County Dept. of Family Services, Virginia, USA

Totally Chocolate

For a few years I've ordered recognition items from Totally Chocolate - a company in Washington state. Volunteers are very pleased to receive an item that is consumable (rather than an item to collect dust) and is of very high quality. The company has superb 100% Premium Belgian chocolate items....the "You're A Star" (dark chocolate star individually wrapped in bright blue mylar with a big star on the front) is my favorite as it is just two bites. (*Webmaster Note: This company is listed along with other volunteer recognition companies in our [Compare and Buy](#) area.*)

Submitted on 25 May 2004 by Kristine Poelzer, Manager, Volunteer/Community Partnership, Hennepin County Human Services Department, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Goblets

I have VERY little budget to do an annual volunteer recognition event. (I like to do a classy event!) This year I did A Night On The Town! I like to give each volunteer a special gift to take home with them. For one whole year I collected crystal goblets. I went to yard sales, thrift stores, called all my friends and had them looking. Most people donated the goblets. I had 136 by the time I was finished. I bought charms at the dollar store..six for a dollar. I washed each goblet and put a charm on it. Some of the crystal I had collected was just beautiful.

When I gave my talk at the party, I had a goblet on the podium. I explained that each guest that evening would go home with a special goblet. It wouldn't match anything else they had in the house. It was special. Each goblet was different than the others. Some were elegant and made beautiful music, some were more durable, but still beautiful. Each goblet brings its own uniqueness to the table. We had all sizes and colors of goblets. I told the volunteers, "when you sit and relax with your goblet filled with wine, tea, or special beverage, think of just how important you are to us. You too bring a special uniqueness and beauty to us. And when you look at the charm on your goblet, remember how we feel about the "charm" you have brought to our organization".

I had all the goblets filled with champagne colored punch and there wasn't a single goblet left! They all looked so beautiful filled and they were a huge hit! I've had several comments since the event regarding their special gift...and it cost practically nothing but the time to wash and fill them!

Submitted on 20 May 2004 by Diane L. Hennessy, Director of Volunteers, South Florida Science Museum, Florida - USA

Digital Photo of Volunteer

Whenever we have a function where we give out certificates and awards, we always take a digital photo of the volunteer with their award. Invariably, the volunteers then follow up asking for a copy of the photo, so what we now do is create a simple card using publisher. An A4 piece of paper is folded into 4, and on the front cover we print our logo and the words 'thank you'. We then print the digital photo of the volunteer inside the card and write a hand written personal note and send it off to each volunteer as a follow up to the more formal celebration. The feedback has been amazing - the volunteers get their photo, and we gain an extra chance to say thanks in a very personal way!

Submitted on 17 May 2004 by Andy Fryar, Executive Officer, Lyell McEwin Regional Volunteers Inc. Adelaide, South Australia

Seeds of Kindness

Our theme to recognize our senior volunteers is "Volunteers Plant Seeds of Kindness" and we are giving each volunteer a packet of flower seeds at the recognition banquet....where they are to wear their favorite garden hat. *Submitted on 15Apr03 by Patty Dreiman, Director, Knox County RSVP, Indiana, USA*

Framed Quotes

We had a very simple but meaningful volunteer recognition gift. Each volunteer received a quote relating to volunteerism that was framed so they can put it on their desk or hang on the wall. Many volunteers have expressed thanks for the gift because every time they look at it they can reflect on the service they have been providing. *Submitted by Renee Richie, Volunteer Director, Simpson Housing Services*

Angels

Several years ago at Mercy Hospital we decided to use Angels as our theme for Volunteer Recognition. We worked with our Gift Shop to order musical angel figurines and had a different large angel as the centerpiece for each table. We based our recognition on "Angels of Mercy". Each volunteer took home a small musical angel (cost about \$5 each) and each table had a raffle for the centerpiece (cost about \$25 each). We covered the tables with white linen and used silver or gold accents to compliment the centerpiece. This was the most popular banquet we had. *Submitted by Diana Case, Regional Director, Volunteer Services, Mercy Health Partners*

Placemats

Since 2001 was International Year of the Volunteer, we decided in 2000 to take random photos of our volunteers while doing their various volunteer work. We then downloaded 6 pictures on legal size paper to make "placemats". We were able to make 4 different placements, which we laminated and will use at each place setting. These and the other photos not used we made into a powerpoint presentation which we will show at the ceremony. *Submitted by Judy Gaby, Secretary, Logansport State Hospital*

A Penny Saved... We have a volunteer who has been with us for quite a while. Looking back over her hours, I noticed she had worked over 1000 hours. My coworker, Betty Baker, thought it would be a neat idea to collect pennies -- one to represent each hour she had worked. We presented them to our volunteer in a clear flower vase that we had around the office and tied a red ribbon around it (our organization color). It was a very inexpensive way to show how much we appreciate what she has done. It also helped present the number of hours she has dedicated in a tangible way. It's amazing how much longer 1000 hours seems when you look at it this way. If the volunteer doesn't want to keep the pennies, it might be a nice gesture to donate that amount of money to a charity of the volunteer's choosing in his or her name. *Submitted by Jessica Brown, Tourism Sales Manager, Austin Convention & Visitors Bureau*

Framed Photographs

Our agency got a large donation of flat lucite frames that we have had on hand for ages, without knowing what to use them for. I found large, inexpensive letters at a party store that we strung together saying "BBI Loves Volunteers," and our entire staff assembled, holding this banner, for a photograph. We had several copies made, which I labeled on the back with each staff member's name and title. We framed them in the donated frames and made them into magnets (you can purchase an inexpensive roll of stick-on magnetic material at craft stores, which can be cut into strips of any size). We gave them to our volunteers during national volunteer recognition week. People loved them and thought it was really great to have a picture of their friends on the staff. They really appreciated the gesture, and it was very inexpensive. *Submitted by Cathy Theodore, Volunteer Program Supervisor, Brother to Brother International*

Discount Card

This past year, we wrote a letter to all the merchants at a near-by shopping center, asking them to join with us and offer a one-time special discount on some part of their services or products. This included restaurants, a lingerie store, greeting card/gift shops, and a gas station. Some offered a discount on products - others, a free item when another item was purchased. We designed a "Volunteer Appreciation Card", which listed the merchants on the back, and specified the benefit. After the retailers approved the card, we distributed them at our annual volunteer recognition event. We hope that response from the merchants will be even stronger next year, as we intend to do this again. It is a "win-win" for our community, and a good marketing tool for the shop owners. Our volunteers loved it, and appreciated the effort that went into its creation! *Submitted by LouAnne Smith, Volunteer Coordinator, Doctors Hospital of Dallas*

Donation

I have frequently done volunteer work at churches. I still remember the time I was called to the front of the service and presented a small inexpensive lapel pin ... coupled with an announcement that a donation was made on my behalf for mission work. I was delighted about the donation. When I look at the pin in my jewelry box, I think of that donation. It's about the only recognition pins that I have kept over the years. *Submitted by Michele D. Newhouse, Owner, COVENANT Professional Services*

Student Art

I am a Volunteer Coordinator with a long-term, tutoring/mentoring program that works with inner-city youth called A.C.E.S. The majority of our volunteer tutor/mentors are undergraduate students and even a few medical/graduate students. We adore the students in our agency, and we also love their art or "kid art." As part of our volunteer recognition workplan, we make sure each volunteer receives a work of student art at least once a year - sometimes twice. This ranges from really cool thank you cards (not just marker and paper) and we also discovered that kids love to make buttons. We had our students make buttons for tutors this year and actually had the button maker at an event. One can either rent a maker or just cut out the appropriate size circles on white paper and have a button maker do the rest of the work. The volunteers loved these. It is meaningful, creative, customer-generated and inexpensive. *Submitted by Stacy Gustafson, Volunteer Coordinator, A.C.E.S. (Athletes Committed to Educating Students)*

Hand-made Cards

One of the best ways to give a volunteer recognition is through hand-made cards. Cut a plain piece of colored paper with pinking shears or decorative scissors. With a colored stamp pad and stamps, send a message (i.e., "Keep smiling" or "Keep up the good work") Volunteers love the personalized touch and it really means a great deal to them when they know you have spent some time on them! *Submitted by Cindy Fairs, Consultant , Okanagan Volunteer Management Services*

Thanks Booklet

We asked the patients (& staff) in our mental health facility to write a brief note of thanks to the individual & groups that come in to provide parties/entertainment, etc. for them ; then we typed them all up to be put in a booklet with the center fold pages signatures of many patients expressing in their own handwriting, their own thanks. These were placed at the place settings of each volunteer at our recognition luncheon/reception. They all loved them. Entertainment during this was provided by the patient choir. *Submitted by Judy Gaby, Secretary, Logansport State Hospital*

Recognizing our Volunteer Bookkeepers

A few years ago while working for a community organization, it wasn't long before I realized we needed a great deal of help with book keeping. I recruited volunteers, with those skills, from the local accounting school. They did an excellent job. As a way of saying "Thanks" I bought a bunch of fat pencils for each person, tied them with raffia and placed a "thank you" note on them. They loved them and many still have them sitting on their desks today. *Submitted by Marian Wilkins, Regional Coordinator Volunteer Resources, BC Cancer Agency*

Photo Scrapbook

While managing a volunteer program for a social service agency, I worked with many corporate volunteer groups. Our agency had a set of standards that all of our children memorized. I created a thank you certificate with the standards written as an outside border. Thank you and the event name was in the center along with our logo. I left a big space in the middle. Throughout the event we'd capture Polaroid pictures of the volunteers doing their job. Afterwards, I'd use my circle cutter to make a hole in the center where I taped the Polaroid of the volunteer. These thank you certificates were always gratefully accepted as a special token of the event. For one particularly large event where we had the help of a very dedicated corporate team I created a photo scrapbook of their time with us. I'm an avid scrapbooker so I used fun papers, die cuts, and special lettering to tell the story of this group's involvement. It takes a little bit of time, but when you stack it up against the huge contribution of these volunteers, it's well worth it! *Submitted by Marcia Hale, Manager, Volunteer Services, Chabot Observatory and Science Center*

For Volunteers in the Arts

At Women & Their Work years ago, we ordered paper fans (the type that were used in un-air-conditioned churches and funeral homes in the South) and one of our artists silk-screened a design that said "Art Fan"... it was a huge hit. She is now famous, and everyone who got one has kept it! Mine hangs on the wall in my den... I could never afford another piece by this woman! I don't know where you can get the fans, but you could get door hangers from Papers Direct and have an artist design something that said "Do not disturb... visiting with the muses." or something like that. I think having an artist involved would be more meaningful than anything you could buy for these volunteers. If your program works with kids, why not have the kids design refrigerator magnets? *Submitted by Ann Stafford, Austin (TX) Public Library*

Totebags Designed by the Students

Thank you gifts for our volunteer tutors last year were natural colored totebags with logo and school name on one side. The other side was decorated by individual students saying "thank you" and drawings with permanent markers in red, green, blue, and black. Great advertising and conversation starter! *Submitted by Trudy Bouligny, Coordinator of Volunteer Tutors, Project Makes Sense, Calistoga JUSD CA,*

Mousepads

We're a women and technology, all-volunteer-based organization and we wanted to give volunteers something technology related. So

we gave all the volunteers mouse pads which had our logo screened on it. *Submitted by Mona, Director of Volunteer Services, Wired Woman Society*

Teen Readers Recognition The Library world held its first Teen Read Week from October 19-25. In conjunction with this we decided to have a special recognition for our young adult volunteers. This was the idea of one of our branch managers, Lisa Costich. (Her branch utilizes the skills of many YA volunteers.) In September, two authors who write books that are read primarily by young adult women, Beatrice Sparks and Lurlene McDaniel were at an Indiana Library Federation conference. We purchased a number of their books. We asked them to autograph the books with, "To a Great ACPL Volunteer". They were delighted to do so. We gave these to our YA women volunteers along with a letter of recognition to celebrate them and the week. For the YA men volunteers, we bought Pizza Hut gift certificates and sent a letter celebrating Teen Read Week and them by saying "devour a pizza and a good book". Our Friends of the Library group covered the cost. The staff working with our YA volunteers were very excited about this special recognition. It was a neat tie-in to Teen Read Week! We mailed the books and certificates to our YA volunteers during that week. In all, about 75 YA volunteers received this special recognition. We have heard very positive feedback. One YA women read "Go Ask Alice" in one sitting and loved it! *Submitted by Georgan C. Johnson-Coffey, Volunteer Services Manager, Allen County Public Library,*

Thank You for Helping Us Grow!

For our annual volunteer recognition gift, we had the children in our after-school tutoring program, in which a majority of our volunteers work, paint terra-cotta pots. On the rim we wrote in gold paint "Thank you for helping us grow!" Inside we put a packet of flower seeds and a certificate. At the recognition (held as a part of our annual meeting) we had the children present the pots to the volunteers. The children put such care into painting the pots. They were so colorful and expressive. The volunteers said it was the best recognition gift they had ever received. *Submitted by Natalie Elwell, Volunteer Coordinator, El Barrio, Inc.,*

Saying Goodbye to Volunteers with a Care Package

Our volunteers are youth 15-29 years old. Many of our volunteers resign their positions to go onto school or full time work. In order to recognize these volunteers and to say "thank you" for their work during their time with us, we send them off with a care package. The items are "wrapped" in a reusable plastic container. The items within are tailored to the journey the volunteer will be pursuing. For example, one volunteer was leaving us to go to the West Coast. In her container, we included a small clay pot and forget-me-not seeds to plant in her new home, a wooden spoon to help her make nutritious meals, a scented candle to light her way in her new path, and the container itself to carry valuables in from one home to another. Writing small notes on each gift explained the meaning behind each one. All this for under \$10; and her smile and appreciation was priceless. *Submitted by Louise Elliott, Community Program Coordinator, YMCA-YWCA Career Contact Centre For Youth*

Thanks for "Raisin" All Those Funds

I took a small box of raisins, attached a strip of magnetic tape to the back and attached a small note saying "Thanks for raisin all those funds" This was given out to our MS Super Cities Walk committee to put on their refrigerators or filing cabinets at work. *Submitted by Patricia Salberg, Volunteer Resources Coordinator, Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada, Ottawa/Carleton Chapter*

Here are a few other versions of this idea:

- We gave our county board officials bags of mixed nuts. A note was attached stating, "We would go 'nuts' without your support!" This was a great, but simple, recognition for volunteers.
- We used "Yankee" votive candles for National Volunteer Week. We wrapped them in cellophane and tied them with a note stating, "You light up the lives of so many!" We also used notes stating, "You lighten our load by volunteering." Our 4-H Leaders loved the candles! *Submitted by Debra Hoyer-Denson, 4-H Extension Assistant, University of Illinois,*

Unique Bookmarks

Use children's drawings to make a bookmark. Laminate it and include a message on the back. It's a wonderful token and also inexpensive! *Submitted by Cathy Dennen, Volunteer Coordinator, Lutheran Family Services*

Thank You Posters by Children Our United Way does the usual recognition dinner, certificates, plaques, personally signed letters, etc. However, our most popular recognition program are "Thank You Posters" created by children from our local agencies. These hand-drawn posters are so popular-- they hang in the main lobby of several large companies. They don't cost much to produce just some posterboard and crayons/markers. Plus, the children enjoy creating them and often create more than one. We have been doing this for five years now and it gets more popular each year. If we fall behind schedule in getting them out I often get phone calls from loyal volunteers wondering when they can expect their new poster to hang in the lobby. *Submitted by Joe Delmar, Director of Marketing & Communication, United Way of Gloucester County (Southern New Jersey)*

Volunteer Caring Kit

I work with a large number of volunteers on a yearly basis to help manage a 4-H Youth Development program within the county. A few years ago, I came across this volunteer caring kit and thought it was a neat recognition idea. Hope you can use it for your organizations!

- **Paper Clips:** Paper clips have many uses, just like each volunteer has many talents. Paper clips are also used to hold the 4-H program together and provide guidance to youth.

- Rubber Bands: Rubber bands represent the flexibility that all volunteers need to have. You can adapt to any different situation. As volunteers, you can also stretch your own abilities to have new opportunities.
- Band Aids: Band aids help others and are sensitive to others feelings, just as volunteers have to be keyed-in to the feelings of those they work with.
- Coin: This coin represents a quarter to call and ask for help and to remind you that you are not alone.
- Paper Bill: This money calculates the contribution that volunteers make to the 4-H program through their donation of time.
- Balloon: This balloon expands and grows as you learn from others.
- Heart Sticker: This heart represents the ability to reach out to youth. You care about our youth and what they are doing.
- Mint: This mint represents the fact that each of you is worth a mint. You are very special and really make a difference.
- Lifesavers: Lifesavers represent the special contribution to the 4-H program that each of you makes and emphasized that each of us are unique and different just like the rainbow color of lifesavers and that there is a place in 4-H for everyone.
- Hershey Kiss: This kiss represents a big thank-you from the many kids whose lives you have touched over the years. I compiled all of these items in ziploc bags and photocopied the "instructions of the caring kit" and each volunteer received a small token. *Submitted by Tina Veal, Extension Assistant, Youth Development/4-H, University of Illinois McLean County Extension Unit*

A Spirit Kit

This idea is similar to the 4-H Caring Kit above, but I liked it so much it is worth repeating. Our Board President just gave me this "Spirit Kit" In a Zip-Lock Bag I found a cotton ball, 5 pennies, a rubber band, a band-aid, 2 tissues, a safety pin, a balloon, and a Hershey's Hug and a Hershey's Kiss, along with this note: There may be times when we might find ourselves feeling a little "dis-spirited". This SPIRIT KIT is designed to help us all keep a focus on the small-but-so-very-important things. In your SPRIT KIT you will find:

1. A soft fuzzy cotton ball to rub when you need to remember the gentleness of the human heart.
2. A rubber band to remind you that you are flexible and can stretch to fit just about any demand or challenge.
3. A band-aid to remind you that, even though there may be times when you feel hurt for what you are trying to do, you will heal and be even stronger.
4. Two tissues, one for you and one for a colleague when you have faced a tough time together and need some mutual support.
5. A safety pin to remind you that you are bright and sharp and utterly indispensable.
6. Five pennies to remind you of the song by Danny Kaye called "Five Little Pennies". If you know the song, you will remember that one penny was to dream on, one was to wish on, one was for dancing, one was to love on. The song ends with these words, "There's just five little pennies, but with these five pennies you'll be a millionaire". How very true!
7. A balloon to celebrate your accomplishments!
8. And last but not least, Hershey's Hugs and Kisses - for when you need them! *Submitted by Elliott Pitts, Coordinator of Wish Granting and Volunteers, Make-A-Wish Foundation of Maine*

Personal Notes from Recipients

The best one I ever heard was for an agency that serves the deaf as readers and interpreters. The volunteers didn't usually interact with the clients, since the reading was done over the radio. At the recognition event, each volunteer had a letter at his/her plate that was dictated by a listener of the show for which the volunteer read. The letter spoke about the reader and how his/her tone of voice made the listener feel and how it helped the listener to hear the piece of the newspaper that was read (or whatever). The letters were typed on special paper and framed nicely. The coordination of it was work, of course, but the recognition didn't take any time away from the event, which already had a full agenda. The volunteers reported it was the most impactful recognition they had ever received. They heard directly from their listeners and learned how important they were - personally. *Submitted by Sarah Elliston, Professional Development Associate, United Way Volunteer Resource Center*

Hershey Kisses--An Old Time Favorite

Because we have so many wonderful volunteers who do so much for the Center's clients, I try to have "hugs" and "kisses" to show my appreciation. These are, of course, the Hershey variety, put in a cellophane bag (or one that is decorated with "Thank You" messages), and tied with a variety of bright curling ribbons. They aren't expensive, look very festive, and, although they're not the real thing, these hugs and kisses are enjoyed a lot! Submitted by Katherine Scoggins, Executive Director, Shepherd Center of Kingsport
Another Hershey Kisses Idea A champagne glass filled with Hershey's kisses -- write on the glass "A toast to a job well done!" It looks elegant. I have used it successfully several times. *Submitted by Mari Levitt Boltz, Adult Education Coordinator/AmeriCorps*VISTA member, Delaware Technical & Community College*

These ideas prompted the following response from England: "Maybe it's because we're so reserved on this side of the water, but I don't think we have Hershey kisses here. Since they are, apparently, so essential a part of Volunteer Recognition, could you tell me what they are" Hershey Kisses are single pieces of chocolate drops wrapped in silver paper -- not essential but a fun touch!

On-the-Job Photos

For two months before the annual recognition event, the director of volunteers of a mental health center began to take photographs of volunteers while they were "on the job." They thought this was for p.r. purposes. At the event, each volunteer received a photo of him/herself in a matte frame imprinted with a thank you message. It certainly showed "we see you" as a volunteer! *Submitted by Susan J. Ellis, Energize, Inc.*

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- [Awards/Special Acknowledgment to Volunteers \](#)

Awards and Special Acknowledgment to Volunteers

[Recognition](#)

Photo Banner

Last year I took pictures of all my volunteers. I scanned them onto my computer and printed them onto iron-on transfer sheets. I then pressed them onto a cloth patch and we sewed all the patches together to make a banner which is now hanging in our store.

Submitted June 15, 2007 by Sheila Friesen

"Post-It" Recognition

One year our church held a volunteer recognition service. After the appropriately themed sermon we played "The Way You Do the Things You Do" while members of the congregation listed volunteer tasks on post-it notes and then posted the notes on the volunteers who had done the tasks. After a few minutes no one was free of post-it notes (except for one lady whose dress material would not hold anything!) and some people were completely plastered with them. The event became fairly raucous and the response was generally favorable. There were numerous comments about this being the only non-boring volunteer Sunday service we'd ever had.

Submitted April 9, 2007 by Molly Anderson

"The Golden Plunger" Award

We wanted to create a humorous but honorable award for "that individual" who is kind of a jack of all trades...or the one you find does all the hard work that others don't line up to do. It is "The Golden Plunger" award. You just get a new toilet plunger at the store, spray paint it gold, and then write something on it...like..."Someone's gotta do it" (or something like that), along with the person's name.

Submitted February 2, 2007 by PC Walker, powerhouse-ministries.org

"The Super Supervisor"

In the past, I began a recognition program with supervisors at team meetings called "The Super Supervisor" award. It involved a silly cape with a Superman-like S in the centre and a trophy. It was a non-confrontational way to encourage staff to set a good example for others in working with volunteers, and became something staff looked for.

Submitted October 4, 2006 by Erin Spink, Volunteer Development Coordinator, Canadian Cancer Society

"Priceless" Volunteers

I recently did our annual volunteer banquet which the theme was "You're worth your weight in Gold." Everything was centered around money. We had a 1" dowel rod cut in thin pieces, spray painted them gold and scattered them on the table to represent coins. Had paper cut in the size of dollar bills, the top piece of paper was printed as a dollar bill with different volunteers pictures in replace of George Washington. (The pieces of paper underneath were left blank.) We then cut strips of paper around them to band them together. We spray painted bricks gold to represent gold bars. We set them on the table and there were stacks of them on the backdrop. We had bags made out of cream color burlap type material, filled with shredded paper, tied with gold cord from the fabric dept. and painted a gold dollar sign on the side. These were in the center of each table as our money bags.

Submitted June 29, 2006 by Teresa Severs

Hawaiian Lei Rotating Award

As a not-for-profit volunteer agency, we have limited funding available for recognition, although we have so many volunteers who are deserving. I have a group who works together on a regular basis and meets monthly. At each meeting we pass around an award that is an inexpensive hawaiian lei. It is an inexpensive way for individuals who work as a group to recognize each other. For example, one month it is the "Jane Doe Award," where Jane Doe decides whom she would like to recognize. The following month it becomes the award granted by the last recipient. It is a fun way to build a team and let others help recognize each other. Our group greatly enjoys it!

Submitted May 23, 2006 by Melissa Axley

Oscar Night

Last year for my Girl Scout leaders we had an "Oscar Night" and each leader was awarded an "Oscar" for her hard work. The "Oscar" was a votive candle turned upside down with a pom pom for the head and googly eyes. I then used pipecleaners for arms. My leaders loved them!

Submitted May 3, 2006 by Valerie Hamilton

Above and Beyond

Every year The Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 233 District 23 pays tribute to someone in the community who goes beyond volunteering. Last year we honored the Banning & Beaumont Chamber of Commerce Ambassadors. This year we pay tribute to two members who volunteer a lot at the Jerry L. Pettis Hospital in Loma Linda. They are at the VA hospital just about every day.

Submitted February 9, 2006 by Pam Maguire

Awards from Other Organizations

Some communities give out service awards to volunteers. I recently became aware that in Pierce County, WA, the United Way gives out "Green Feather Awards" to individuals who volunteer over 100 hours a year. Several of our regular volunteers received a certificate (complete with the number of hours they volunteered) and a nice lapel pin. I thought this was a great idea for regular volunteers! Try the United Way, the local parks administration, the city offices, established service clubs (Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis), etc. to find out if such an award is available in your community. It's really suitable for volunteer interns (who often rack up hundreds of hours over several months) and for college students, who can list the community award on their resumes!

Submitted May 7, 2004 by Shaundar Bradbury, Visitation Specialist, Methamphetamine Family Services, Pierce County Alliance WA

Snowflakes

This works well for organizations where large numbers of volunteers come to a single location. Using 4 inch white paper doilies, we put the name of every volunteer on their own "Snowflake" and hung them from the ceiling of the volunteer lounge. We added a poster that said "Just as every snowflake can add up to a blizzard, so every volunteer's contribution adds up to a storm of activity here. Thank you for your dedication". This created a lot of fun as each volunteer looked for their snowflake and also impressed staff and visitors with the extent of volunteer involvement here. This could be adapted for other seasons.

Submitted April 2, 2004 by Shelley Malyk, Volunteer Services Coordinator, St. Amant Centre, Manitoba

We Mint to say Thanks!

I bought a package of Lifesaver Mints and put them in a bowl on the table where most of the volunteers eat lunch. On the bowl I put the sign: "We Mint to Say Thanks!" It was well received and was an easy way to show appreciation for our volunteers.

Submitted February 13, 2004 by Rosie Van Cleave, Volunteer Coordinator, La Plata County Humane Society CO USA

Volunteer Tree

We created a Volunteer Tree. Every year we hold a Festival of Trees, that takes an incredible amount of volunteers to put on. So before we kick off the Festival, we hold a Volunteer Appreciation night. To recognize our volunteers, we took a picture of each one of them with a digital camera. We then printed them out with a color printed and cut them out into different shapes for the Christmas tree. We put a little glitter around the edges and then hung the pictures on a 9' Christmas tree for all visitors to see at the Festival to see. We called it our Volunteer Tree. It was a big hit with the volunteers and you would catch them looking for their pictures and sometimes even moving them to a more prominent spot on the tree.

Submitted January 24, 2004 by Janice Sander, Executive Director, Battlefords Union Hospital Foundation, North Battleford, Saskatchewan, Canada

Volunteer Hall of Fame

Honorees include founders of local nonprofit organizations in 12 distinct categories of voluntary activity. The L.I. Volunteer Hall of Fame was created by a coalition of local agencies and grew out of local efforts to celebrate IYV2001.

Submitted October 14, 2003 by Frank Pomata. Contact: Diana O'Neill at Long Island Volunteer Center, NY 516-564-5482

Volunteer of the Month

We have a "Volunteer of the Month" as a way to recognize our volunteers all year versus at the end of the year. We ask the school families to send in nominations of volunteers that are going above and beyond or a person that is a behind the scenes person for that month. They get recognized in the area that they volunteer in be it a classroom etc. They are honored in front of the people that they volunteer for. We take their picture and it goes into a frame on the wall and then they are recognized in the school weekly newsletter. We find we can recognize more people this way and in a more timely matter. Next year we are thinking of having grade level recognitions as well to include more volunteers.

Submitted April 22, 2003 by B Schick, PTA Pres., Hollywood Hill Elem., Washington USA

Celebrating Volunteers Down Under

The Royal Australian Mint has released a series of 2003 commemorative coins to celebrate the work of Australia's volunteers. They can be viewed at the Mint's web site at <http://mintissue.ramint.gov.au/mintissue/product.asp?code=800180>. As the Mint says: "Brimming with the spirit of mateship and goodwill, this wonderful memento is a fitting tribute to the many unsung Australians who do credit to us all."

Get Caught Smiling

During the month of November, every time a staff member catches a volunteer smiling and enjoying what they are doing, they congratulate them, and give them a "Happy Face Sticker," for their nametag. As an added bonus, the volunteer is entered into a drawing for a dinner for four donated by a local restaurant. The volunteer with the winning ticket will be drawn at our annual Holiday Appreciation Dessert Buffet in early December.

Submitted November 14, 2002 by Brian Probst, Manager of Volunteer Services, Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA, California, USA

Asking Their Pastor to Present Award

For a recent volunteer planning council (for a regional church's youth event), I sent the volunteer's Certificate of Appreciation to their senior pastor asking the pastor to publicly present the certificate during a worship service or board meeting. That way, the volunteer is recognized in their home community AND their church then know about their involvement AND the event receives a "good-will" announcement to be remembered the next time volunteers are needed!

Submitted by Kirsten D. Nelson, Director of Leadership Development, Central Conference of the Evangelical Covenant Church, Illinois

Row of Honor

Originally our "Service in Excellence" award which is given to an individual who contributed above and beyond regular service duties was recognized at our annual celebration with a special pin and notice in the local media. But an even greater recognition was offered by one of our local banks. They offered to plant a tree on the hospital grounds for each of the awardees. The first year eight trees were planted for the first recipients. Now, each year another tree is planted in the "Row of Honor" which is becoming a lovely garden next to the hospital. Each tree has a plaque with the volunteer's name and year of recognition. This business recognition of our volunteers now highlights our program to the community on an ongoing basis.

Submitted by Wanda Llewellyn, Director of Volunteer Resources and Patient Relations, O'Bleness Memorial Hospital

Kudos Korner

Our Kudos Korner is one of the most prominent and inexpensive ways for which we recognize staff and volunteers. These forms are available at each event and are filled out by someone who notices another's outstanding achievement. Some include: "Making Festival a joy to volunteer for," "Consistently being available for any type of work," "Smiling on the phone on the busiest day of Auction." Kudos are displayed at the event and are listed in our quarterly volunteer newsletter. *Submitted by Victoria Evangelista, Volunteer Coordinator, Rocky Mountain PBS*

Outstanding Service Award

This award was the idea of one of our volunteers who chooses not take sole credit. Each year around January, volunteers and staff are asked to submit nominations for this award, which is presented on or near Valentine's Day. The award, now in its fifth year, is given to a staff member and volunteer who give outstanding service to Rocky Mountain PBS, give unselfishly of time and energy and are always there to help; those who give "from the Heart." These are people who are not highly visible, such as Committee Chairs, etc. Flowers, heart-shaped cookies, red and white balloons and a card (embedded in a plaque--new this year) are presented. A photo and brief history of each person is read to the group and is front-page news in the March issue of Volunteer Vision (our quarterly volunteer newsletter) and is included in Promo (our member program guide). In 2001 the ceremony was videotaped to produce an on-air spot. Nominations are open to all Rocky Mountain PBS staff and volunteers. As Jane Owen put it last year, it is a very short, sweet and touching ceremony and it will be must do on James' calendar. It truly is a very wonderful honor for all involved!

Submitted by Victoria Evangelista, Volunteer Coordinator, Rocky Mountain PBS

Namesake Awards

In our all-volunteer organization, one of our more special methods of recognition is to name awards after long-standing, stellar volunteer role models. Additionally, we have a 'batch' of volunteers that enter our organization together, during specific times in the year. These groups are usually 'named' after an extraordinary volunteer; a namesake, if you will. Part of this groups orientation then includes information about this individual, and if possible, the honoree also addresses the group.

Submitted by Tanya K. Refshauge, Region IX Director, Alpha Phi Omega, National Service Fraternity (collegiate, co-educational, community service organization)

Honoring Those Very Special Volunteers

We tried to send a response to this e-mail but received an "address unknown." So it occurred to us, why not post it! I really appreciated your recognition ideas, and am hoping you can help me a little further. I work in the Minnesota Zoo's volunteer department and several of our volunteers are about to pass the 20 year milestone. We're looking for a great gift item for them for under \$40. Do you have any ideas? What do other agencies do? Any ideas would be helpful. Here are some responses: Can you dedicate an exhibit that started when they did? Or make a "Walk of Fame" and put their names on bricks? How about choosing 20 long-lived animals and naming them for the volunteers? Plant a tree in an exhibit and create a "Grove of Volunteering". Dedicate part of your re-education area in their honor and put up a plaque with their names listed. It's SO EASY when you start looking inside the organization - after all, they've spent 20 years working for the zoo, what better way to reward them than to make them truly a "part of it" by dedicating something in their honor? (P.S. Also cheaper than finding a gift that's appropriate, cheap, and suits the organization's mission too!) It's always easier thinking up ideas for someone else's programs!

Submitted by Loretta Bacon, Volunteer Coordinator, City of Phoenix - Human Services Dept.

- [Trips and Outings](#)

Trips and Outings for Volunteer Recognition

Movies

During National Volunteer Week we recognized our volunteers by taking them to the movies. We rented out the local movie theatre for an afternoon. We had our recognition awards program before the movie started down front of the theatre. After all the awards were

given out we had a 15 minute intermission break. The volunteers were instructed to go to the refreshment counter and they had a bag of popcorn and a drink waiting for them. I also had small bags of chocolate treats for them. The cost for each volunteer was \$9.00; much less than providing a banquet for them. They also had their choice of 2 movies. I chose ahead of time a PG and a PG-13. It was very well received and we will do it again next year.

Submitted on 26 Sept 2004 by Linda Bacon, CAVS, Volunteer Coordinator, Major Hospital IN

Bus Trips

A large component of our volunteer program is the social aspect; many of our volunteers, young and old, love to get together in a social setting, ideally when there's an opportunity for more learning.

Twice a year, we offer recognition in the form of bus trips to other museums, art galleries and cultural and science-based organizations throughout Alberta. When space permits, we invite our volunteers to bring along a guest.

It's always a special time when volunteers can introduce family and friends to staff and other volunteers. They share stories of their volunteer roles, the tasks they complete, and the good times they have.

As a bonus, we often arrange a "behind the scenes" tour with our peers in volunteer management, so family and friends get to see and learn about cultural and collection management that very few experience.

After a full day of laughing and learning, our volunteer family is usually expanded, as we often have family and friends clamoring to sign up and volunteer with us!

Submitted on 10Jan2004 by Lynn McShane, Manager, Volunteer Programs, Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Seeds of Success

Last June, we had a wonderfully successful volunteer appreciation night. A local theater group donated a free performance for our organization to share with volunteers. The night at the Center, with food (all donated) and drinks to start. Next, there were two buses (donated) that transported all of the volunteers over to the show. During intermission, we had two of our participants who use our services talk about their experience with the Center (Cancer Support Center) and how much they personally appreciate individuals who so kindly give of their time. Following the show, as the volunteers were getting off the bus, staff members handed terra cotta pots with a packet of seeds that read "volunteers plant the seeds of success" to each volunteer. The pots were decorated by staff in a very simple manner, with ribbon, and dirt was also included so everything was ready to go! The event received RAVE reviews!

Submitted by Jeanne Jablonski, Special Events & Volunteer Coordinator, Cancer Support Center, Volunteer Recognition

Ice Cream Social

A new Gazebo was built right behind our library as part of our Rail-To-Trails park, so it seemed perfect to hold an ice cream social for our recognition event in August. We used red, white, and blue colors to make it old fashioned and all American. It was really fun to get some of the staff involved doing a skit and singing songs that we adapted for the event. Serving sundaes and having the program in the middle made it move along and 2 hours was just about right. For favors, we contacted a few local merchants for little premiums, like a piece of fudge or a flower, and listed them on a "Thank You" bookmark. We also honored our "Golden Volunteers" who've given 50 hours or more this past year with a special bookplate to put into a book of their choice that will go into the library's permanent collection.

Submitted by Heidi Walker, Natrona County Library, Wyoming

- [Learning Opportunities as Thanks](#)

Learning Opportunities as Thanks for Volunteers [Recognition](#)

Gardening Theme

This year we used a gardening theme for our volunteer appreciation event. We invited Master Gardeners to do a demonstration and called it "All the Dirt on Container Gardening". It was an evening event with refreshments and desserts (also cheese, crackers and fruit for those with dietary limitations). At the end of the demonstration we raffled the 3 containers as door prizes. We also had small gifts for each volunteer - Herb starter kits. They were small plant containers with herb seeds, fertilizer sticks, soil and growing instructions. They had an small ornamental bird in the pot and a sign that said: "Volunteers love to share their Thyme". *Submitted by Jerrie McLean, Administrative Assistant, Woolwich Community Health Centre, Ontario, Canada*

Taking Volunteers to Court

Every year we plan a tour of our county courthouse and a luncheon with our county commissioners. Many of our volunteers love the tour, we visit places like the 911 center, the sheriff's office and recorder of deeds. When these volunteers see how the court house is

run they are so amazed. Their favorite department is security. The chief of security always shows them weapons that people have brought into the court house. *Submitted by Edward Callahan, Coordinator Volunteer Services, Children's Cultural Center*

Chips and Chat

Each year before our busy season starts we host a feedback session where we invite all our volunteers to our office for dinner and discussion. In the past we have called these sessions "chips and chat" and "pizza and parley". This evenings are a chance for our volunteers to share what they think about how we are doing as an organization and where we should be moving to in the future. It gives them a sense of ownership and stake in the organization. It also lets them know that we as managers are interested and listening to what they have to say and that we care about their opinions. *Submitted by Drew Gulyas, Assistant Camp Director, Camp Oochigeas*

Gifts Galore

We have a speaker that gives a mini-seminar about the ten gifts that each of us have. Our tables are decorated with gifts (wrapped empty packages). We ask that each volunteer bring a non-perishable food item to donate to the local food pantry and a gift to pass on to another. *Submitted by Desiree Larson, Volunteer Coordinator, Women's Way, North Dakota*

Ask Your Volunteers

This year, we asked our 25 volunteers what they would like to do for a recognition event. The general consensus was we do something fun (go to a museum or gallery) or have the opportunity to learn something new. The Volunteer Connection is hosting a staff prepared lunch. One of our staff is an art gallery director and photographer. She will teach us the art of creating Polaroid transfers from a picture we take or a colored slide we bring. We are also having a guest poet teach us the art of writing poetry which we will share with each other. The entire event is scheduled over a four hour period. *Submitted by Charlotte Smith Neyland, Director of Services, Volunteer Connection East of Longmont*

Giving Back to Yourself

I had done a survey on what volunteers thought about our volunteer program and many of the surveys indicated that park volunteers really enjoyed what they do but they would like more training. I was determined to use volunteer recognition as a means to kick-off volunteer training opportunities throughout the year. As a result, I developed my own workshop-Giving Back to Yourself This was a one day motivational workshop put on during National Volunteer Week. It opened with a Board of Park Commissioner and Executive Director giving park wide updates, followed by a short film and two great motivational speakers. Volunteers asked questions, got some answers, meditated and left feeling a renewed sence of commitment to the parks and to themselves. It was one of the best recognitions we have had. *Submitted by Merle Walker, Volunteer Program Manager, Lake Metroparks*

Resume Writing

In my volunteer program at the Philadelphia Family Court, we recognized graduating student volunteers with a special seminar on resume writing, with emphasis on how they could describe their volunteer work as a credential that would impress prospective employers or university admissions officers. *Submitted by Susan J. Ellis, Energize, Inc.*

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- [Holiday Events as Recognition Opportunities](#)

Holiday Events as Volunteer Recognition Opportunities

[Recognition](#)

Thanks into Thanksgiving

This fall I decided to put the Thanks into Thanksgiving by sending out hand-made notes to each active volunteer. A very artistic volunteer helped me to make the notes - no two were the same! Then I wrote a short Thanks inside making sure to mention specific things that they had helped with. In addition, I had people from the departments they had volunteered in add something - at the least signing it. They went out right at Thanksgiving and the responce has been lovely, with vounteers coming in specially to thank us for making their day! A Win-win, I think!

Submitted by Heidi Walker, Coordinator of Volunteers, Natrona County Public Library, Wyoming

Volunteers are the Recipe for Success

Every year we have a potluck holiday party and our volunteers have asked us to print up the recipes from their various co-workers who brought dishes. This year, we created a blank recipe form and mailed it to each volunteer asking for their best recipe. We then compiled the recipes into a cookbook that would be given to each volunteer as a gift at the recognition event. The theme was centered around cooking so we held it at a rustic venue in the country and printed awards on paper designed to look like a picnic. Instead of the generic thank you speeches from the volunteer coordinators, the Executive Director and members of the Board, we created a skit on "What is the recipe that makes up an ideal volunteer" and each official stood up and told the crowd what they think that recipe would be (a cup of smiles mixed with a teaspoon of wit...etc). The message at the end of the skit was that there is not just one recipe that makes up an ideal volunteer. Instead there are many recipes that include the different traits, personalities and styles that make the volunteers so necessary and unique. In the end, we concluded that each volunteer and his/her unique traits are equally valuable in ensuring a successful volunteer program. Kind of like a big, gourmet potluck...

Submitted by Miranda Prescott & Rachael Park, Volunteer Coordinators, Snohomish County Tourism Bureau, Washington, USA

Volunteer Luck

Our volunteer dinner last year was held on March 13 using a St. Patrick's Day Theme because we feel 'lucky' to have our volunteers. We used green derby's planted with green and white carnations for centerpieces. Planning ahead we planted shamrock bulbs in green spray painted peat pots as favors at each place setting. We had prints of different Irish Blessings rolled and tied with green ribbon by each plate. Our menu was corned beef and cabbage with potatoes, green salad, and grasshopper pie. For entertainment we had a local clogging group perform. Awards and recognitions were given. Two staff members then sang 'Oh, Danny Boy'. To give away the centerpieces we had some silly questions and trivia questions that we asked...such as who: 1. has 13 pennies in their pocket 2. has visited Ireland 3. has an Irish Setter at home 4. knows the legend of St. Patrick 5. showered with Irish Spring today etc, etc. I closed with the Irish Blessing: May the road rise up to meet y! ou... It was another successful program suggested by the words of praise and thank you notes we received.

Submitted by Jayne Rice, Director of Community Programming and Volunteers, Honeywell Center

Low-Cost, High-Impact Life-Changing Recognition

This past year, our program lost one of its most beloved volunteers. One month shy of her 90th birthday, she worked two days a week in our laboratory and at one of the hospital information desks. Though frailer in the past few months, she was still at the hospital working the week before she died. At word of her passing, I called the family, to inquire about funeral arrangements. The daughter-in-law informed me that there would likely be no memorial service, because, in her words, "she (the volunteer) didn't really have any friends here." I assured her that the volunteer circle of friends was sizeable, and included many fellow volunteers and hospital staff. The family eventually decided to have a service. Other than family and a few other attendees, the pews were filled exclusively with volunteers and hospital staff. The family was shocked that so many people knew and loved their quiet little mom, and that they had never known about this support system of friends, despite her seven years of involvement as a volunteer at our hospital! Something about this experience troubled me greatly. I fear that many children and spouses, especially of our older volunteers, see their volunteer activities as just something for them to do to keep busy. They really have no idea that their loved ones are doing important, valuable work with our patients. I wanted to find a way to avoid a scene like this with others in our program, if at all possible. Volunteers were asked for the names and addresses of their immediately family - spouses, children, or close friends. They were not told the exact reason for the information - ironically, many assumed we were gathering next of kin info, in the event of their death on the job! With those names, we created a family database. At Christmas, instead of the usual inspirational letter to volunteers, talking about the meaning of the season and their wonderful deeds throughout the year, I wrote letters to each of these on the mailing list. I told them about what their wife, mother, brother, etc. did at our hospital, and how important they were in the lives of our staff, patients and families. Many of those who received letters have called, and told very touching stories of how they read the tributes to "their" volunteer at a family gathering during the holidays. Several said they had the letter framed, and gave it as a gift to their loved one. The volunteers had no idea this was happening, and were moved beyond words. In over 25 years of managing volunteers, I have never done any recognition activity that has had a more profound impact on the timbre of our program, and on the lives of our volunteers! Obviously, this was quite time-consuming (I wrote about 150+ letters), but extremely high-impact on the recipients and, as a bonus, on the author. It really made my holiday season very meaningful. I will continue to look for opportunities to communicate the countless ways our volunteers make a difference to the other people who care so much about them - their families.

Submitted by LouAnne Smith, Volunteer Coordinator, Doctors Hospital of Dallas

Staff-Made Dinner

I work for an AIDS Service organization where volunteers give their time in a variety of programs and services. Every year we have an annual holiday party for volunteers which has always been an open house style event. This year I asked the staff to help plan something a bit more ambitious - we cooked and served a full course meal! The menu was a choice of turkey dinner with all the trimmings, or a vegetarian pasta dish. Staff volunteered to cook the various dishes, turkeys, mashed potatoes, stuffing, salads, etc., or contributed buns, cranberry sauce, salad dressing, etc. The staff were all assigned jobs; cooks, plate fillers, servers, etc., and all of the staff wore black pants, white shirts and colorful name tags. We had a Christmas tree with donated gifts underneath and drew names for a chance to pick a gift. We utilized space in our multi-purpose room and set beautiful places using rented cutlery and plates. Everyone contributed decorations and we had plenty of candlelight and twinkle lights strung up. Our physicians offered grace and a toast to the volunteers that reaffirmed their value within our organization. All in all, it was a tremendous gift of caring by the staff, and a wonderful experience in feeling appreciated by the volunteers!

Submitted by Corrie McGibney, Coordinator of Volunteer Services, Village Clinic

Thanks at Thanksgiving

The week before Thanksgiving, the Center always recognizes the volunteers with a catered meal and music as a way to show our appreciation and thanks. This year the theme was "Handful of Thanks" with decorations, centerpieces and even the certificates adorned with cookie cutter dough hands. I gave a speech incorporating hands as the theme (right hand men and women, hand you can rely on, etc). The highlight though was the many frail older clients (the receivers of the volunteerism) giving testimonials as to how their lives are better because of these wonderful volunteers.

Submitted by M. Judith Nortman, Director, Westside Senior Adult Day Center

Personal Note from Board

Our Board of Directors has a Volunteer Services Committee. These members write a personal, handwritten note to each volunteer who donates anything over four hours during a year. The committee members are given enough information to let them know what work the volunteer has done. The notes are written around Thanksgiving and around Valentine's Day, for those who started volunteering after Thanksgiving. We have recently added a printed note to all our one-time volunteers with the personal signature of the committee chair. This wonderful tradition, which is above and beyond the annual Volunteer Recognition Party, wasn't started by me, but I am happy to be apart of an agency with such caring board members. Submitted by Marty Atherton, Coordinator of Volunteer Services, Families First Thanksgiving Day Cards Thanksgiving Day cards to the families of volunteers. The response from the volunteers was terrific.

Submitted by Mike Corbin, Director of Volunteer Services, Lutheran Social Services of Michigan

- [Involving Families and Employers](#)

Involving Families and Employers in Volunteer Recognition

A Free Evening

Many volunteers who donate their time to museums or other cultural institutions do so for access to the facility in addition to their interest in the mission of the facility. When it came time to organize a recognition for volunteers at the science center, it was assumed we'd have some sort of recognition dinner.

I felt the best gift we could give our volunteers was a free evening for them and their families in our great facility. The bonus was seeing how easy it was to get staff to volunteer that evening so the volunteers could party. We usually offered some sort of light food in the cafe and had every bit of the center open and free to our volunteers and their friends and families. We always had some sort of food related thank you theme, like Pizza and cake, "Volunteers, thanks for sharing a slice of your time" an ice cream social became, 'OMSI has the scoop on the best volunteers!' Staff truly enjoyed helping out, with the food serving positions usually the job everyone wanted.

The added bonus was hearing staff say the next day how much they enjoyed meeting all the volunteers and seeing how much these people loved our science center. The staff, especially those who didn't work closely with our volunteers, were especially struck by how much our volunteers treasured and valued what they did for us, and how proud they were to "show off" for their families. I almost think the staff looked forward to this yearly event more than some of the volunteers, it was a great way to build camaraderie and a real morale booster. Now, at a new science center, I'm looking forward to continuing this tradition with a new group of volunteers and staff. Submitted by Marcia Hale, Manager, Volunteer Services, Chabot Observatory and Science Center

End-of-Year Picnic

In the past we used to organize volunteer "teas" at the end of the year to say thank you to our school volunteers. The teas were held after school, in each of the five district school buildings, on days that were different from each other. That way a volunteer who helped in more than one building could conceivably attend two (or more!) different "teas". Our volunteer turn-out usually ranged from mediocre to down-right poor. No big surprise when I look back. The time of day was convenient for teachers and staff but terribly inconvenient for the very people we wanted to recognize-our volunteers! I decided to organize an event that would be more volunteer friendly, one with food, family and friends. Now for the past 4 years, we have had a big end-of-the-year picnic for all the volunteers of the district and their family members, to celebrate the year and their contribution to our schools. There is no meal cost to the volunteer or their family members and we get together around 5:30 pm to accommodate the majority of work schedules. We eat, visit with each other, hear a few words on volunteerism, hand out awards, and that's it! People are able to get out of there within an hour or so. Volunteers appreciate having family members included and being able to get to evening meetings or home at reasonable times. The staff of the district help with decorating, serving food and clean up. Financially, we utilize donations and keep costs down by doing one event rather than 5 separate events. We serve about 200 people hamburgers, salad, chips, a cookie and beverage. Hamburgers are grilled by a local men's service group. It is a great way to end the year! Submitted by Bobbi Murphy, Coord of Volunteers/Workforce Coord, Sauk Rapids-Rice School District 47

- [Ongoing and Informal Ways to Say Thank You](#)

Ongoing and Informal Ways to Thank Volunteers

Giving Thanks at Thanksgiving

This year I sent out Thanksgiving cards to my volunteers. It's a great way to show our appreciation toward the end of the year and at the beginning of the December holiday season without having to pick a religious holiday. The spirit of Thanksgiving is of course perfect

for the message we're sending, and it lets our volunteers know we're thinking of them at that busy time of year.
Submitted on 14 February by Traci Lato

Let them know they are FAN-tastic

We recently sent our volunteers a pink (our campaign color) paper fan with a note, "Thank you for all of the FAN-tastic help at the kick-off". The fans were found inexpensively and are easy to mail.
Submitted on 5 July 2007 by Sally, MSABC Volusia/Flagler

Hats Off to Volunteers

Our library volunteers received varied baskets of goodies, box of chocolates, book certificates, plants etc. The staff wore hats all week and tipped them toward the volunteers as we saw them. In the library lobby we displayed a tree with the volunteer names and photos, where permitted, on paper hats. This was our first year of not having a party and spending our limited funds on presents instead. The volunteers here seemed to appreciate the silent effort to recognize them.
Submitted on 25 April 2005 by Aimee Hepler

Afternoon at the Movies

During National Volunteer Week we recognized our volunteers by taking them to the movies. We rented out the local movie theatre for an afternoon. We had our recognition awards program before the movie started down front of the theatre. After all the awards were given out we had a 15 minute intermission break. The volunteers were instructed to go to the refreshment counter and they had a bag of popcorn and a drink waiting for them. I also had small bags of chocolate treats for them. The cost for each volunteer was \$9.00; much less than providing a banquet for them. They also had their choice of 2 movies. I chose ahead of time a PG and a PG-13. It was very well received and we will do it again next year.
Submitted on 2 April 2005 by Linda Bacon, CAVS, Volunteer Coordinator, IN

Recognition Doesn't Have to Be Expensive

Over the years, I've tried to come up with no- or low-cost ways to say thank you to the volunteers and staff who made my programs function effectively. Most of these were the day-to-day "thanks for helping"

I believe that recognition is one of the most important parts of working with volunteers. These have included simple yet meaningful things such as writing a brief "thanks for being an angel by helping with XYZ project" on angel-shaped note paper.

Like most administrators, I send birthday and get well cards. But I believe that treating my volunteers as part of the staff is one of the most effective ways to recognize their value. I acknowledge my volunteers by always saying hello and goodbye each day, even if they work in a different part of the building. I let them know if I will be out of the office or need to leave early when they're scheduled to be in.

I also provide each volunteer with his or her own in-box. I distribute copies of appropriate memos, include volunteers in meetings and trainings when I can, and make sure each is informed of new policies, procedures, or activities in the organization.

One low-cost thank you gift that I gave was a small booklet of quotes about volunteering that I did on the computer and ran off on the copier. I received a number of calls and notes thanking me and saying how much the booklet was appreciated. I also gave these to staff at collaborative agencies as a small way to show how much I appreciated how they and their volunteers helped my program.

Recognition doesn't have to be expensive. It does have to be sincere.

Submitted 20 November 2004 by Sherry Leigh Mitchell, The Greater Kalamazoo Area Holiday Food Drive, Michigan

Online Volunteer "Notes"

There are lots of ways to use a Web site to recognize volunteers. Thanks to Catherine Jackson for her posting on CyberVPM, directing others to the way the Walter & Connie Payton Foundation gives Web space to volunteers at

<http://www.payton34.com/volunteernotes.html>. This "Notes" section not only allows volunteers to feel a part of the organization, but serves as a great introduction to the work of the Foundation for visitors to the site.

Posted 11 Aug. 2003 by Susan J. Ellis, Energize, Inc.

"Pat on the Back"

Here's an idea for a very inexpensive recognition idea that should work for any type of organization. I simply drew around my hand on a plain piece of paper, printed "Here's a pat on the back for _____ for all the hard work and effort you've made here at First UU" on it, then copied it on to colored paper (2 on each page). The teens at our church helped me cut them out. We invited anyone who wished to give a public "pat on the back" to someone special to write their name on the handprint and tape it on a wall we had decorate. We had over 450 pats once we were finished. It was a very visible, but inexpensive way to recognize a large group of volunteers.

Submitted on 25 May 03 by Karol Haynes, Volunteer Coordinator, First Unitarian Universalist Society of Syracuse, New York/USA

Note and Candy

Our volunteers are basically college-age students and we understand that they have busy lives with classes, tests, jobs and other activities. Every so often I like to send via mail a card with a thank you as well as some candy. I just recently sent chocolate coins and confetti to make them smile. They all appreciate this thought and thank us constantly for our recognition of them!

Submitted on 16May03 by Becky Degnon, Volunteer Coordinator, Sexual Harassment and Rape Prevention Program (SHARPP) at the University of New Hampshire, New Hampshire, United States

Volunteers - Wall of Fame!

When volunteers come into our facility, they enter into our break room where they can put their coats down and get a name tag. The most important thing a group does before they start working, is go to the Wall of Fame to find their picture. If it's a group's first time, they will remind me to make sure they will be added. The wall is completely covered with photos. It's a constant reminder of how we value and appreciate each and everyone of our 100 groups represented. Our volunteer groups come from grade school to retirees, but one thing that they have in common, getting their picture taken. Some groups will even plan out where and how they want their group photo. I use a digital camera, and print the photo onto a picture of a box, using the top part of the box to fill in the group's name and date. The box looks like one that they use to repack the donated products. The next time the volunteer group is here, they look for their picture! A picture says it all.

Submitted by Laura Fronko, Volunteer Coordinator, World Vision

Thanks Online

I found a great way to say thanks to a volunteer, friend, co-worker when you have no time. Send a thank you email through this website, www.baudville.com (click on epraise). Click on a category of thanks, recognition or celebrations, personalize it and the company will send you a copy. It's great!

Submitted by Kim Gube, Volunteer Coordinator, American Red Cross, National Capital Chapter

Our Brightest Stars

In our facility, the Volunteer Manager and I (coordinator of Volunteer Services) worked on a bulletin board. We cut out blue stars and in them we printed each volunteer's name and, in the center of the board, we posted their pictures with a slogan that read "Volunteers Our Brightest Stars." It was a hit. The bulletin board was hard to miss and the staff and volunteers loved it! *Submitted by Mirna Alberto, Coordinator, Volunteer Services, Misericordia Health Centre, Canada*

Thank You Notes to Volunteers' Workplace

Many of our volunteers have full time jobs and busy careers. We began sending letters of recognition to their places of work either directly to their superior or through the Human Resources office. These letters often find their way directly into the personnel files and in many cases reflect well on an employee to their employer. What has been really interesting is that our organization has actually received donations from companies whose employees have been our volunteers. A letter from our organization has often prompted an inquiry from a company to the employee about who we are and what we do. This method of recognition has become greatly appreciated by our volunteers.

Submitted by Christine Cooper, Volunteer Coordinator, Citizens for a Clean Caledon

Free Motivational Messages

Here's a free service to send motivational messages/cards via e-mail at <http://www.motivationalquotes.com/servicequotes.shtml>. Most of the messages relate to serving others.

Submitted by Steve McCurley, consultant/trainer

Honors for Volunteers and Staff

Our hospital launched a new recognition program whereby ANYONE can nominate a person for service above and beyond. As recognitions are added, staff reaches built in "levels". This program includes employees, physicians AND volunteers. Volunteers are part of program, rather than having their own separate "volunteer of the month" that may be perceived as lesser than staff programs. It is great to see their names posted on the bulletin board along with physicians and staff who are recognized!

Submitted by Marcia Ferguson, Director, Volunteer Services and Telecom, Mercy Medical Center

A Personal Note from You

It's not earth-shattering, but our volunteers really appreciate and respond to the personal notes I send out periodically. On our organization's note-card or a card especially chosen for the individual volunteer, I remind him/her how important his/her efforts are to me and the organization. I usually emphasize a recently accomplished task or project and point out how it affected our operation. When I host a volunteer group, I multiply the number of volunteers by the number of hours they've worked, then divide it all out to let them know how many (non-stop!) eight hour days it would have taken our tiny staff to complete the same volume of work. It's often quite staggering!

More than a Plaque or Certificate

How can you recognize outstanding staff or volunteers without relying on the typical plaque or certificate? Try these creative ideas:

- Attach the following note to a box of candles: "No one holds a candle to you." · Send a "thought-you'd-like-to-know" letter to the volunteer's employer, acknowledging his or her positive contribution to your organization.
- Ask volunteers or staff members to train other volunteers or staff members, to lead meetings, to give presentations, etc.
- Forget separate luncheons for deserving staff and volunteers. Bring them together for a joint recognition lunch in their honor.
- Send an anniversary card to volunteers or staff, highlighting their year(s) of service. Note how they made a difference in your organization over the past year.

From the Non-Profit Nuts & Bolts newsletter, August 1997

- [Community-Wide Events](#)

Community-Wide Events for Volunteer Recognition

Volunteer Book Launching with Community Celebration

Volunteer Nelson NZ has produced a book of volunteer stories and photos. The book is to be launched on December 5, 2007 at a cafe, with a special guest (NZ author) and Darnz Hip Hop Salsa group to perform—a group of young people who mentor and lead others through example. New Zealand delicacies to be cooked and served by two local chefs, with the event organised by a Texan events coordinator and generously supported by DeVille, our local cafe. All generously volunteered to Volunteer Nelson and a very special event for all volunteers in our region. "It's a sign of mediocrity when you celebrate gratitude in moderation." Goooo Volunteers!!!!

Submitted by Jude McNabb

Lovely legacy of IYV: View the "Volunteer!" - an original, exclusive, new tulip produced in honor of IYV. It's now in full bloom within the five boroughs of New York City, synchronistically for National Volunteer Week . [Read more about it.](#)

Join Hands Day

A committee comprised of volunteer managers from a variety of non-profits organized a "Join Hands Day" to celebrate volunteers from all sectors of our island community. We got the local newspaper on board to provide publicity which was the key to our success in creating a community wide recognition event. We did a mailing to over 100 organizations asking them to create "hand prints" representing their volunteers. They were encouraged to be as creative as they wanted in making the "hands". We collected over 1000 very unique hands that were strung up in a park for a day. There was also some refreshments and entertainment to celebrate the day. The simple act of submitting a hand print was fun for the volunteers. The newspaper ran 6 separate articles to spot light the event which generated awareness of volunteerism and showed much appreciation to our local volunteers. Submitted by Lisa Coble, Manager of volunteer Services, Newport Hospital

Honoring All Volunteers in a Community

Several years ago, another DVS and myself pulled together all the volunteer coordinators of all the non-profits in our area. We now have an annual event which honors all volunteers in the City of Loveland. Our group is called..."Loveland Honors Volunteers" We are planning our event for April and using the theme of "A World of Thanks" in keeping with the International Year.... We ask all non-profits to submit an honoree each year. Submitted by Patty Morrison, DVS McKee Medical Center

Recognizing Youth Volunteers

Every summer we have approximately 500 youth volunteers spread across the city in various facilities such as: pools, leisure centres, area offices, art centres etc.... Rather than having small multiple celebrations, we pool our resources and plan one large event the last Sunday evening before school starts. This year we were able to gain access to one of our Leisure Centre facilities after public hours. The facility closed at 6:00 PM and we started at 6:30 PM We provided pizza and pop from 6:30 - 7:15 PM and then the games begin! Activities include: the wave pool, carnival games set up in the gym with a DJ and prizes, the dunk tank and climbing wall, beauty tips and makeovers, photo booth and craft station, temporary body tattoos, henna painting and great door prizes the last 10 minutes of the evening about 9:15 PM. This is our second year providing this type of recognition event and the attendance increased by 30%.

Submitted by Kathy Sokolan-Oblak, Volunteer Coordinator, Calgary Parks & Recreation

Community Volunteer Recognition Program

When I first arrived at my child advocacy volunteer program, there was nothing in the budget for recognition. I did some research and found a free community volunteer recognition program. Nonprofit agencies nominate volunteers every month. The volunteer's name and story is announced on a local talk radio station, and the volunteer receives a free engraved plaque from a local trophy company. It's

great advertising for the radio station and trophy company, and the volunteers love it. This program was organized by the local volunteer center, and was a huge help to non-profits. *Submitted by Lori George, Volunteer Coordinator, CASA*

Mini-Grants to Volunteers

For several years, the County Commissioners have awarded mini-grants to volunteers in County government volunteer programs. Volunteers submit proposals for grants that will benefit the work of their volunteer program, the clients served by the volunteer program, or the program volunteers, e.g., a demonstration project, the enhancement of a current project, the purchase of a piece of equipment or supplies that will improve or enhance the volunteer experience or the volunteer program, training or publications that will increase volunteer skills or knowledge. Awards are made at a Commissioners' meeting followed by a reception. The volunteers are recognized publicly as are the very creative programs in which they work. *Contribution from Diane Knudsen, Volunteer Coordinator, Boulder County, Colorado*

Downtown Mural

Many years ago Columbia, South Carolina had a construction project going on downtown with a rather ugly protective wall. The Volunteer Center coordinated a community-wide volunteer recognition event that started with permission to paint this wall (it surrounded a complete city block) and the donated services of an artist who painted an outline all around it of people of every description tugging together on a rope. The local agencies were asked to submit photographs of a representative volunteer. The photos were blown up and placed on the faces of the painted people in the mural. And then, on a designated day, all the volunteers from all the agencies were invited to come out and paint in the rest of the mural with all sorts of colors! The mural painting itself generated publicity that day (and new knowledge of volunteering in the community) and the mural stayed up for the duration of the construction project. *Submitted by Susan J. Ellis, president of Energize, Inc.*

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- [National Volunteer Week Celebrations](#)

National Volunteer Week Celebrations

Recognition

Several countries now have National Volunteer Week celebrations. For general information about these weeks, see our [events](#) page. Also see the official annual information at these sites:

- USA (Points of Light): <http://www.pointsoflight.org/programs/seasons/nvw/>
- Canada: <http://www.volunteer.ca/volcan/eng/content/nvw/>
- England: <http://www.volunteersweek.org.uk/> -- click from this page to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
- Australia: http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/sheets/nat_week.html

Volunteers Rock!

To celebrate National Volunteer Week this year we chose to host a 50's themed *Rockin' Volunteer Bash* luncheon to say "Volunteers, You Rock!" Many of the staff wore 50's style clothing and all guests were encouraged to do the same. As guests arrived, two of our staff rolled around on roller skates with record-style trays full of bazoooka gum and red licorice. Music from the 50's played behind an inflatable juke box. The room which held the food had handmade music notes and records hanging from the ceiling. The seating tables were covered with black and white checkered tablecloths with a centerpiece of a cut-out couple dancing on records. We found many of our decorations at party supplies websites. The food also stayed with the theme. We served In-N-Out Burgers, fruit salad, macaroni and cheese, chips and brownies. We also set up a soda shop where two staff served rootbeer floats and refreshments. Our Rockin' Volunteer Bash was a huge success and a fun day for all.

Submitted by Jessica Richter, www.nclifeline.org

"What Does My Mentor Mean to Me?"

I coordinate an AmeriCorps Program in Texas and our members/volunteers tutor and mentor at-risk. For National Volunteer Week we are sponsoring an essay contest. The theme is "What Does My Mentor Mean To Me" We are going to post these essays on the program listserv and prizes will be awarded for the top three essays.

Submitted by Leslie, Special Programs Coordinator, AmeriCorps-UTA, TX

Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon

Every April during Volunteer Appreciation Week we hold a Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon to recognize the efforts of our volunteers. This past year we served 700 free lunches to say thanks to our volunteers. Other activities take place this week as well including a button program that recognizes our volunteers with special discounts from local merchants.

Submitted by Volunteer Centre of the Blue Sky Region, Canada

A Personal Moment

We are celebrating National Volunteer Week in our High School with an assembly that will recognize 3 volunteers that have always been there for so many of our school, community and veterans events. While we only recognize 3 with awards there are countless

others, parents, grandparents and friends that are there working in the background in so many ways. It only takes a minute to recognize them on a personal level when you see them. Bring them to a stop (they are usually very busy), look them in the eye with your best smile and say "Thank you for all the help you give!".

Submitted by Becky Dirks, Post Adjutant VFW Post 4077, Anamosa Iowa

Volunteers are Gold

This year for our Volunteer Recognition Event during National Volunteer Week, we are having an Olympic theme. We are having various staff members speak to recognize each group of volunteers as to why "Volunteers Are Our Gold"! We ordered volunteer-designed water bottles and filled with candy with our logo imprinted on the back with our theme "You Are Our Gold". We are greeting each volunteer at the event by hanging gold medals around their necks. We are decorating in red, white, and blue and having the Olympic ring display at the front of the room. Lastly, we are having a Power Point presentation of events and volunteer pictures from the last year with a gold medal design. We will play the Olympic theme during the presentation.

Submitted by Heather Melton, Volunteer Coordinator, The Elizabeth Hospice, Escondido, CA 92025

Hats off to Volunteers

Our theme last year for Volunteer Recognition was "Hats Off to You". All the staff came wearing outrageous hats of all kinds, the potted plants as centerpieces were in hats turned upside down. But the most fun was that all 100 of those present made newspaper hats - the kind that it takes at least 3 people to make - one as model, one to hold 3 or 4 sheets of newspaper down on model's head, one to wrap tape around the model's head and paper, and many hands to roll the paper up as the hat's brim. Volunteers met and worked with all sorts of new people, decorated the hats with flowers and balloons and whatever else they could find and had so much fun. I have never seen a room full of people who did not know each other have so much fun working together. Everyone left with a totally unique hat and a great memory. Their sense of commitment to our organization for another year was sealed by newspaper hats.

Submitted by Catherine Graham, Volunteer Services Manager, IHS, The Institute for Human Services

Chocolate Bars

We always have our volunteer recognition event in June but this year, because it is International Year of Volunteers, I did not want National Volunteer Week to go by without some special acknowledgment. During April, I sent all our volunteers a chocolate bar in the mail with a special card inviting them to our BBQ in June and telling them all the scientific reasons why chocolate is good for you, plus a funny list all about chocolate I found on the Internet. It was such a small and simple gesture but I have never had so much feedback. The neat thing is that I have 200 volunteers and I only get about 60 individuals out to our official volunteer recognition event. This way even the volunteers who never come to events received a treat, and they were surprised and thrilled.

Submitted by Linda Sunderland, Coordinator of Volunteers and Education, Hospice Peterborough

Jeopardy

At a recent Volunteer Recognition night for our agency, we played a game of "Jeopardy" with topics relating to our volunteers and our agency's work. Those who answered questions correctly received a chocolate truffle. We also did a take of of Dave Letterman's "Top Ten" by coming up with our own list of "Top Ten" reasons to Volunteer with our agency. At various points throughout the evening, we revealed one of the reasons. We also read little poems we had written about certain volunteers we were highlighting with special recognition, then presented them with the poem.

Submitted by Robin Albert, Volunteer Coordinator, Sexual Assault Support Service

Hats Off to Volunteers Day!

How about a "Hats Off to Volunteers Day?" Just have the staff wear a hat (any kind) on that day and tip their hat to each volunteer they meet. Now I need some ideas. We still have the big luncheon to recognize volunteers during National Volunteer Week. Our theme next year will be "Celebrate the Magic of Volunteering." Of course we'll have a magician; centerpieces will be black top hats with rabbits in them.

Submitted by Jean Anton, Director of Volunteer Services, Shriners Hospital for Children - St. Louis

National Volunteer Week Packet

A great National Volunteer Week packet is located on the University of Nebraska - 4-H website at <http://www.ianr.unl.edu/ianr/4h/volun/packet.htm>. It has a lots of general recognition ideas! Submitted by Tina Veal, Extension Assistant, Youth Development, McLean County 4-H, Illinois

- [Resources for Your Recognition Ideas](#)

Resources for Your Volunteer Recognition Ideas

[Recognition](#)

Feel free to share resources you've found useful in pursuing your volunteer recognition projects. Also, we encourage you to check out our [Market Connection: Thank You Gifts](#) area.

Posted on 1 October 2007 by Barb Jackson

I have found that for \$0.39 I can have a digital picture of a volunteer group printed on a thank-you card. It also comes with an envelope

for mailing. Check at your site for digital prints. The Thank You card is in the book with the Christmas cards, etc. They look really cool and get posted wherever the group is from.

Posted on 25 August 2007 by Melanie

I found a great website called www.weddingfavours.ca. They have all sorts of inexpensive gifts for weddings, but many of them work well for volunteers. We gave the "Love Beyond Measure" spoons to women who had volunteered at our church. They cost a few dollars each and the volunteers loved them. We were surprised how warmly they were received.

Posted on 6 July 2007 by Laura Dilts, Girl Scouts of Montachusett Council, Inc., Worcester MA

Here's a list of websites that I loved getting ideas from:

1. Tips for writing thank you notes
<http://saularliner.home.att.net/leadership/thankyounotes.htm>
2. Volunteer Recognition Ideas Forum
<http://pub47.bravenet.com/forum/show.php?usernum=3992171003&cpv=1>

Here is a list of recognition products that I use:

1. Positive Promotions, www.positivepromotions.com, 1-800-635-2329
2. The Thanks Company, www.thankscompany.com/, 1- 888-480-1636
3. Great Events Publishing, www.GreatEventsPublishing.com, 1-888-433-8368
4. U.S. Toy, www.ustoy.com, 1-800-255-6124
5. Oriental Trading Company, Inc., www.orientaltrading.com, 1-800-228-269
6. Rhode Island Novelty, www.rinovelty.com, 1-800-528-5599
7. Baudville, "Putting Applause on Paper", www.baudville.com/index.asp, 1-800-728-0888
8. An Open Heart, anopenheart.org/, 707-546-2504
9. Bells International, Inc., www.imprintmall.com/volunteers/, 1-800-822-1923 (national volunteer week items)
10. It Takes Two (greeting cards), www.ittakestwodirect.com/vopr.html
11. Daily Apples, www.dailyapples.com/index.shtml
12. Fun Gifts for the Resourceful Crafter, sawyers-specialties.com/survival-kits/

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