

Volunteers get as much as they give

Build networks while helping in a good cause

By Heather Rothbauer-Wanish

“I’m just too busy.” How many times a day do we think this or say it out loud? It seems like the busier we are in today’s society, the more society views us as being important or having a valued life. However, what are you busy doing? Are you busy doing activities you enjoy are you just plain “busy”? What about volunteering? Are you able to share your time and talents with others who need it the most?

Business people in our communities serve as role models. These are the people who others look up to and emulate. What better people to serve as volunteers for our local organizations? But how can busy people possibly take on volunteering in addition to everything else they do?

Evaluate/organize your schedule

Are you doing things you are “supposed” to do but don’t have to do? Maybe some of these things can be delegated to free some of your time. What about your lunch hours during the week? Are there volunteer activities that could fit in that time period? Be creative.

One local woman who volunteers much of her time is Carrie Heath. As a Realtor with Prudential Benrud Realty in Eau Claire, and mom of three children, Carrie already has a hectic schedule. Carrie mixes her volunteer time with her family. “I typically spend four to five hours per week volunteering. I include my family in most of my volunteer effort; it becomes a family event and part of our leisure activity.”

Choose carefully

The more organizations you can work with, the better, right? Not necessarily. Choose one or two volunteer activities you really feel strongly about and concentrate on those.

Consider organizations that may only need assistance a couple of times per year. For example, the Special Kids Day is a once-a-

year event at Lake Wissota. This is an event focused on mentally and physically disabled children throughout the Chippewa Valley. On this special day, there is food, pontoon rides, music and various other activities. For many of these children, this is a special occasion they look forward to each year.

Remember, even though an organization may only need your help once per year, it doesn’t make that assistance any less important. You may meet someone this year you look forward to seeing the next time volunteers are needed. Connections can be made; it’s the quality of the connections that matters, not necessarily the quantity of contacts.

Networking/contacts

When working with organizations, you never know

who you are going to meet. Your fellow volunteer may be your business contact tomorrow for a new account. Volunteering with several organizations allows you to interact with like-minded people who have the same values as yourself. Women may find volunteering allows them another outlet beyond their homes for camaraderie with other adults in the community.

An organization you are working with may need someone to organize an event, do financial analysis or conduct marketing efforts for the latest fundraiser. Each of these responsibilities can give you the opportunity to shine as a volunteer or allow you to use skills you have already learned in your career. In addition, these tasks can be wonderful to list on an upcoming job application or resume.

Volunteer opportunities in the Chippewa Valley

If you are interested in helping high school and college students, an organization of interest is the Professional Division of the Future Business Leaders of America (high school division)/Phi Beta Lambda (college division). Many of the high schools in the area have FBLA chapters with students interested in careers in the business world. In addition to preparing these students for the business world, FBLA offers students the chance to compete in regional, state and national events to test their business savvy against other students.

By becoming a volunteer with the Professional Division, you will find chances to speak to local chapters as well as serve as a judge at regional



Contributed photo

Seventh-grader Lynsey Mueller and her mentor, Karen Baker, enjoyed a game during one of their recent mentoring sessions through the Chippewa Area Mentor Program.

and state competitions. These students look to business people for feedback on their communication skills, impromptu speaking and business plans. Helping to cultivate this next generation of business leaders is rewarding and fulfilling.

One local organization that readily accepts business people as volunteers is the Chippewa Area Mentor Program (CAMP). The program serves Kindergarten through 12th grade students who are enrolled in the Chippewa Area Public or Catholic schools. Students are matched one-on-one

with a mentor who provides encouragement, guidance and support.

Each mentor/student pair meets once a week at the school during the school day for approximately a half-hour. Some of the students do not believe they are capable of success in school, nor do they see value in education. Mentoring students provides them with the

support, encouragement, guidance and hope to help them choose the path to success. Business people can show students that education is

important and that with hard work and dedication, they too are capable of success.

Of the 296 current mentor matches, 80% of the adult mentors are women. Adult mentors in this program can meet with other mentors and talk about challenges and triumphs they have experienced with their students. Volunteers within this organization have reported wonderful experiences during the twenty years the program has existed. One mentor said, "This is the most important half hour of my whole week." According to data

provided by the CAMP, the time spent supporting youth equates to approximately 10,000 volunteer hours per school year.

If you ever wonder if volunteering does make a difference, you need to look no further than several comments made by students in the CAMP. "My mentor is like my best friend and my family."

Another student said, "She means the whole world to me. She's very lovable and she loves to spend time with me."

“From my volunteering, I have great compassion, which helps with many of my clients and customers. I have learned to be detail oriented, to economize effort and pay attention to what others are really saying...”

– Carrie Heath



Most organizations that need volunteers have an orientation for new volunteers. According to Janet Maier, Director for the CAMP, "We continually seek qualified volunteers and provide them with support and opportunities for training and networking. Mentor matches are carefully monitored to ensure the development of beneficial relationships."

Volunteering with an organization such as the CAMP allows those mentors to sharpen their listening and communication skills – two skills that can help you in your career. This program is also ideal for those considering a teaching position or a career involving education.

There are many other organizations in the area that are continually looking for volunteers. Carrie Heath particularly enjoys volunteering for the Boy/Girl Scouts. "I have been a Scout all of my life. I know I learned great leadership skills and self-motivational skills as

a Girl Scout, and my children are blossoming as they go through the program as well," Heath said.

Whatever your interest, there is sure to be an organization that needs your expertise. Inquire about volunteer opportunities with other people that you already know. Also, ask local organizations if they could use someone with your experience. It's a win-win situation – they get the help they are seeking and you are able to experience the joys of volunteerism while meeting other people with similar interests.

Volunteering has been a satisfying and rewarding experience for Carrie Heath. It has also helped her with her workplace skills. "From my volunteering, I have great compassion which helps with many of my clients and customers. I have learned to be detail oriented, to economize effort and pay attention to what others are really saying (both verbally and non-verbally)," Heath added.

Many employers in the Chippewa Valley and beyond look for employees that have volunteering on their résumés. You will also find that many employers are flexible when it comes to time away for volunteer activities. Capitalize on your strengths and then decide how they can best be used in a volunteer situation. You will find that volunteering is something that adds value to your life and doesn't just add another "to-do" on your list.

Heather Rothbauer-Wanish is a freelance writer living in Colfax.

Create your own paper-flower bows

By Cathie Filian and Steve Piacenza

DIY – Do It Yourself Network

Creating recycled gift wrap is really taking trash and creating a treasure. It is not only great for the planet, but it is also good for your wallet. With the prices of designer gift wrap, you could easily spend \$10 just to wrap a small gift. For just a few pennies you can get creative and craft your own gift bags, boxes and paper-flower bows.

For quick and easy gift-wrapping, you can transform plain gift bags and lunch sacks into stunning "designer"-look bags with the simple addition of paper flowers.

Who says a gift box can't be a

tube? Drink-mix containers can be stripped of their labels and decorated with scrapbook paper and ribbons. They are the perfect-size box for a bottle of lotion.

If you have some small jewelry boxes and they have a department-store logo, cover it with a scrap of decorative paper, ribbons, silk leaves and a paper flower.

You can use just about any kind of paper to create paper-flower bows. Grocery bags can be cut, crinkled and layered to create a natural-looking bow. You can add a layer or two of colored plastic wrap for a shiny look. By adding a petal from a mismatched silk flower, you can create an organic look. To add a pop of color, use magazine tear-

outs and bits of scrapbook paper.

Flower bows are super-easy to make, and they add so much flair and style to a package.

Now that you have the basics for creating your own paper-flower bows, all you need is a gift to wrap.

To create a small bow:

1. Cut eight circle shapes from paper or plastic. Begin with a 3-inch circle and work your way down to a 1-inch circle.
2. Add an organic look to the edge of the circles by cutting waves, scallops or zigzags. Gently crinkle each circle in your hand.
3. Layer the circles from largest to smallest and secure in the center with an office or scrapbook brad.



Attach to your package with hot glue or tape.

Scripps Howard News Service