



## Nonprofits in need of volunteers

By Barry VanderKelen

Many nonprofit organizations are responding to increasing requests for services and programs by using more volunteers.

A recent report from the Corporation for National and Community Service, "Volunteering in America" -- [www.volunteeringinamerica.gov](http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov) -- suggests recruiting and retaining volunteers is becoming more difficult. One of the major findings of the report is that one out of three people who volunteered in 2006 did not in 2007.

To gain perspective on this issue, I spoke with two local nonprofit professionals who are involved with volunteers.

Marie Brinkmeyer is the executive director of the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program of the Central Coast, commonly called RSVP.

Nearly 1,500 people aged 55 and older annually contribute about 250,000 hours to local nonprofit groups.

Candice Conti is a Program Specialist for the Nonprofit Support Center in its San Luis Obispo office.

Conti organizes a bi-monthly roundtable discussion for nonprofit staff who manage volunteers.

Both women agree that recruiting volunteers is a crucial issue. Conti observed

that volunteers are facing the same economic pressures that nonprofits do.

"The financial pressures and the competition for volunteers among nonprofits are making it difficult to expand the pool of volunteers," she said.

Brinkmeyer said, "I don't see a huge change in the number of volunteers. But we're having more people go back to work and can't volunteer anymore." Additionally, more volunteers are requesting expense reimbursements as the economy weakens, especially for miles driven in services for a nonprofit organization.

Another reason volunteers state for not contributing more time is that they don't see a connection between many tasks and the mission of the organization.

Brinkmeyer is careful to match skills requested by nonprofits with volunteers. RSVP has a mentoring program that helps volunteers learn from their peers.

However, the burden is on the nonprofit group to help the volunteer see the connection between the activity and the mission.

Conti adds that volunteers want to feel appreciated for their efforts.

Planning an assignment well means the organization respects the volunteer's time and talent.

For many nonprofit organizations, unfortunately, finding the time to plan

volunteer assignments is difficult.

The same is true for planning appropriate recognition for volunteers.

Recruiting and training volunteers and clearly defining projects can be time consuming. Nevertheless, this work must be considered an investment of time and resources that will eventually allow the organization to fulfill more requests for programs and services.

An interesting suggestion of the "Volunteering in America" report is the amount of volunteering is reduced by the amount of television someone watches.

In a week, volunteers spend about 15 hours watching television, while people who don't volunteer watch an average of 23 hours.

When planning a recruiting campaign, a nonprofit will want to reach people who watch television and simultaneously convince them to turn it off.

A group of nonprofit organizations is meeting to coordinate efforts to increase the pool of volunteers.

This group was formed at the Collaboration Summit in September and Donna Kean of Hospice of San Luis Obispo currently leads it.

People interested are encouraged to contact Donna at 544-2266.

### Resource Use

- Support nonprofit leadership
- Board development/training
- Strategic planning

### Nonprofit Business Column of The Tribune

The San Luis Obispo Tribune publishes a column every other week in the Business section dedicated to the business practices of nonprofit orgs. Barry VanderKelen, Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation writes the bi-

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