

VOLUNTEER AND SERVE OTHERS

It's not easy to give up your free time. In a cynical world, the first question that comes to mind is often, "What's in it for me?" The answer is simple: Volunteering gives people the chance to give back to their communities. The North Coast of Oregon has no shortage of organizations needing a hand.

Camp hosts

Like many who serve as camp hosts, Carolyn Colbert and her late husband, Dick, of Rockaway Beach, were looking for something meaningful to do with their retirement.

After talking to friends who had hosted at Oregon State Parks, they decided to give it a try. "We always loved to camp and loved meeting people," Colbert says.

As lifelong Oregonians, they felt that helping new visitors experience Oregon was the biggest draw of their decision.

With that in mind, they chose to host close to home at Fort Stevens State Park, a popular destination that can book campers up to a year ahead of time. Colbert thinks that bustling energy made it their favorite park at which to host. "We kept coming back to Fort Stevens," she says. Volunteer hosts bolster the ranks of Oregon State Parks year-round.

In exchange for an RV site and

hook-ups, hosts perform a variety of duties: clean-up projects, maintenance duties, and on-site supervision. They do everything from simple meet-and-greet of visitors to repairing sites and maintenance.

They also participate in helping park rangers organize nature talks and history presentations.

"Even when there was nothing going on, we were never bored," Colbert says.

Hosts bring accumulated knowledge from former occupations, such as mechanical expertise and woodworking, something that adds to the camaraderie.

"Hosting gave us some of the best memories of our lives," Colbert says. "If I never had to get mail, I would never have gone home."

Volunteer in your community

For hosting information at Fort Stevens State Park, call 503-861-3170

To learn about volunteering at the Seaside Visitors Bureau, call 503-739-3097

To get involved with EVC, visit www.evcnb.org

'A different kind of energy'

Sitting right along U.S. Highway 101, the Seaside Visitors Bureau gets foot traffic year-round, ranging from steady to hectic.

Jon Rahl, director of the visitors bureau, knows the value of knowledgeable

local volunteers. "They are our first line of defense," he says.

Rahl adds that not only do volunteers greet and assist visitors, they perform a variety of staff support tasks, such as pack Seaside visitors guides for distribution.

"They are always busy doing something," Rahl says. "Our volunteers don't want to just sit, they

want to keep busy and give back to their community."

The Seaside Visitors Bureau uses about four volunteers during the off-season and six or seven during peak tourist times.

Luckily, recruiting and retaining volunteers has never been a problem. Rahl says the bureau maintains a solid core of regular volunteers, and when one moves on to something else, there is always someone willing to take their place.

"They really enjoy being around people, and this is a great place for that," Rahl says.

Conversely, Rahl feels that visitors' experience is enhanced by interacting with volunteers.

"They bring a different kind of energy and perspective to our visitors," he says. "It's fun for both of them to engage."

Coastal communities like Seaside often rely heavily on volunteers, not only to meet-and-greet visitors, but to carry out large-scale annual events, such as Hood to Coast, the nearly 200-mile-long relay event that starts at Mt. Hood and ends in Seaside in late August.

Rahl feels that because Seaside isn't a big city, it's easier for volunteers to feel invested in where they give their time.

"People always step up here when they're needed," he says. "It's a very redeeming quality."

Helping your neighbors

Volunteers are counted on in times of serious need.

Such is the case with Emergency Volunteer Corps of Nehalem Bay (EVC), an organization born of necessity following the devastating winter storm of 2007.

Since then, EVC's focus has been on creating a culture of emergency preparedness and resiliency.

It's a lot of work, and the EVC team consists entirely of volunteers.



Submitted photo

Oregon State Parks rely on volunteer camp hosts to perform a wide variety of services.



Submitted photo

EVC volunteers train regularly to help their neighbors in the event of a disaster.

Linda Kozlowski, president of EVC, has been amazed at the enthusiastic response. "We have around 200 volunteers from the three towns (Manzanita, Nehalem and Wheeler)," she says.

Volunteers participate in everything from CERT and ham radio training, to setting up emergency shelters and mapping neighborhoods for disaster readiness.

"Mapping neighborhoods is working together to take care of each other," Kozlowski says. "We started with 18 neighborhoods and

now have 130. It's really energized the communities."

For a relatively small area, Nehalem Bay's three communities boast a lot of people with a lot of know-how in emergency preparedness.

While that is the basis of EVC's strength, Kozlowski hopes the organization will start finding younger volunteers to gradually take the reins.

"We have an aging demographic who can't do this work forever," she notes.

Coastal Life

Story by DAN HAAG