

**Coast** from 7A

volunteer are dependable. Over the seven years Mealer has supervised the driving program, not one volunteer forgot about their commitment.

"It's kind of amazing to me," he said. "When I worked for the power company, people would not show up for work. I don't see that with volunteers. They're there," he said.

And with thousands of volunteers in the community giving up their time, it's become the most dependable workforce in the Siuslaw region.

But Mealer sees problems when it comes to volunteering, particularly when it comes to the boards who run these organizations.

The size of the boards can vary. SOS has a board of 10 members, while other organizations can have as few as three.

"It's a commitment," Mealer said. "These boards are working boards. You're on different committees to fundraise and work on your bylaws. It's not just showing up to have coffee and cake and go home. You have to get somebody

to commit the time to do that.

"You want to have somebody who can bring resources to the board. If you have an attorney on a board, that's a good thing. They can't represent the board, but they have knowledge of law. If you have somebody who works at a bank with financial background, that's always a good asset. You kind of look at your board and where they can benefit the organization."

But the number of people who actually volunteer to be on these boards is finite.

"Someone on one of my boards made the comment of, 'Yeah, if you see someone on a board, they're probably on a different board,'" Mealer said. "If they know you're on this board, then they want you on another board. It's the same people just moving around the town on different boards."

This creates a number of problems for nonprofits. First, a person can get overwhelmed.

"If you're on four boards, you can get burned out. I'm retired. Do I want to work 60 hours on all of these different boards? It can be a passion to help community, but at

what expense? We've asked people to get onto the SOS board, and they said, 'I'm off of boards now, I need to take a break.' You can't be Mother Teresa doing one thing 80 hours a week."

Another problem is diversity. "Grantors ask, 'What's your board makeup?'" Mealer said. "You need to have different ages, sexes and races. They want to see what you look like. Are you just a bunch of old white guys?"

"We were at a board meeting and we were trying to get some younger people on our board. I said, 'I'm looking around the room here, and every one of us is either on social security, or is eligible for social security. We have to diversify.'"

The general notion is, Florence is a retirement community, therefore retirees will be on the boards. Mealer takes umbrage with that. In fact, he believes the "best place to retire" is a bunch of hooley.

"I disagree with the concept that Florence is a Del Webb retirement community," he said. "It's not. Yeah, there are a lot of people who moved here and retired because they sold their house in California. That's all well and good, but then

who's going to pump your gas? If this is going to be only a retirement community, then there's just going to be a bunch of old people living here. That's silly. It's not reality. There are a lot of people in this town that volunteer, of all ages. That's the lifeblood of any community from anywhere you go. It's all people that volunteer. That's what makes things run."

Enter Kim Erickson.

**"You have to give people a chance"**

"I am 39 years old," Erickson said. "I have two children, a 13-year-old and a 6-year-old. I'm married, divorced, remarried. I'm an open book. I was born and raised here, everybody knows me. That's who I am."

She currently sits on the Rotary Club of Florence Board for Public Image, the advisory committee for Lane Community College Florence Center (LCC), she sat on the Siuslaw School District Advisory Committee, and was also the treasurer for Quality Childcare of Florence.

"And I help with a lot of things that my kids are involved in. My daughter was just in a CROW pro-

duction, so I helped with that."

She spent another five minutes listing other organizations she's worked with.

Education, both for herself and her children, was the primary factor in getting Erickson into the philanthropic fold. Her first volunteer job was with LCC at the age of 29.

Just out of high school, Erickson left Florence to attend college in another town. She didn't like it.

"It was nothing like I expected," she said. "I wish I wouldn't have left, but it was a good experience. If I hadn't left, I would have always wondered, 'What if?'"

Within a year she was back at Florence, attending LCC. She literally took every class the college offered. In fact, the college brought in extra courses just so she could graduate from the center.

It's that commitment to her education that made Erickson feel she had to give back. She had a unique perspective on what the college needed, being able to honestly describe both the good and bad experiences of the center. She could make a difference.

At the same time, she got

involved with Rotary International Club of Florence. She had seen the work Rotary had done before by attending the yearly auction and being a Rotary "Student of the Quarter." She was impressed with the organization, but didn't know if she wanted to join.

"If you're not passionate about it, you don't feel like you should be there, because you don't feel like you have as much energy and you're just there doing the foot-steps," she said. "There's so many different facets with Rotary that you don't have to be passionate about everything. Even if your passions change within the club, you can still do that at Rotary. That's why I felt like it was something I could do."

But to join, she had to be a part of a committee.

"I knew that a huge part of the auction was providing scholarships back to the youth, and that's what I wanted to be a part of," she said. "This is where my passion was, and this was a perfect fit. So, I jumped in with both feet and haven't left."

Passion is what drives Erickson in all of her decisions about volunteering. At first it was her college, then it was scholarships. Later on, it was her children.

"If my kids are doing things and they're in a program, and if I want to be involved with them, then I need to be involved with the things that they're doing," she said.

But as a working mother of two, she had to set some boundaries for herself. She learned to parse which one would be too much work, and built up the ability to say no to organizations.

"I have to know when my cup is full and that I'm not neglecting my family and my kids," she said. "If I'm not still on the board, I'm still a member," she said. "I can still give my insight."

Plus, she feels that it's important for organizations to get a constant flow of new ideas. If the same people are on the same boards year after year, it becomes an echo chamber and ideas become stale. This is why it's important for organizations to keep looking for new members, both old and young.

"I feel that sometimes people in their younger ages get overlooked," she said. "(Organizations) have to ask. To be honest, when I was a new Rotarian, I wouldn't

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