

The Chamber Connection: Collaboration Among Organizations will help us all!

By T. Myers

At a recent summit between organizations in Central Oregon, The Volunteer Connect people hosted the commissioner on volunteerism, Kathleen Joy at the Environmental Center (Betsey Warriner from Volunteer Connect is housed there, too on Kansas St.). Joy was in town to discuss how we can maximize volunteerism by presenting a discussion of what elements of volunteerism and engagement are working well in Central Oregon communities and it was followed up by a second part of the equation to determine which issues are plaguing the success of various projects in the region.

From this first two-point discussion it was revealed that the organizations across the region are facing the same issues: motivation of volunteers, training and retention, getting younger people to volunteer and raising the self-esteem in communities that will help motivate wanting to volunteer. Transportation to and from a volunteer activity was especially important, child care and personal invitations to be a part of something was a crucial component for successful capacity building. There was a note about the fact that working parents with children in school is now the biggest source of volunteer hours.

There was a second point discussed. The question 'what if someone dropped 150-200 volunteers into your community to help you' what would you be able to do? What are the two to three issues that would benefit most from a service infusion of that magnitude? Strangely enough, it stopped the conversation. Mostly because the group did not know what to do with an actual influx all at once.

It led to silence with the actual point being with so many people needing so much- some of it crossing over between organizations, and further, without clear purpose, defined boundaries, an exact goal for getting things done and knowing what needs to be done across the board in each community, everything stopped when an offer like that came to the table!

How do we move ahead? Only when we can get out of the tunnel vision we get for our own organizational needs in our specific organization and focus on what everyone in the community (among our community partners) needs to accomplish, will we be able to come to terms with building volunteer capacity and achieving goals for the entire community.

Do we continue our individual work before coming to a consensus of where we are all heading? Do we meet and decide how to arrange the goals and dreams of each organization collectively- across the board? Do we decide what the community priorities are in advance as a group of organizations and work together to achieve the goals?

In a community the size of La Pine, we have many local organizations and charity concerns. If you count the churches, civic organizations, charitable organizations and governmental agencies, we are close to fifty that are working in the community to provide for residents, members and visitors to the area. People like the La Pine Park and Rec, the La Pine Rural Fire District, the City of La Pine, the Community Health Center and others serve thousands of residents in the bigger area of South County. The Social Services at St. Vincent de Paul and the Community Kitchen serve close to 1000 persons each month at their locations. Fraternal organizations like the American legion and the La Pine Moose or the La Pine Lions are directly involved with community giving in a variety of ways. Churches regularly work to help their congregations and the Latter Days Saints holds the great

Giveaway for the community one time each year where the entire community benefits from their outreach. Since all of the entities have individual goals and needs they want to fulfill, how do we convince all of the different agencies to work as one community entity that schedules fundraisers using a calendar that all of the organizations consider to avoid cross over dates, recruiting volunteers for the different projects that need doing and setting goals so that the community as a whole is well covered?

We talk about the beautification of La Pine and the economic development of La Pine, but do we know how much our nonprofits give to the community in terms of the gross economic product of the city? It is huge. Maybe now is the time to consider how we work together as nonprofits, too. Think about it.