

## Spotlight on Volunteers

Our country celebrates National Volunteer Week April 15-21, and all month long in some places. The San Juan Island Library celebrated its 112 volunteers with a party just for them on Monday, April 15.

Throughout the year, Library volunteers donate the equivalent of another 1.5 full time staff members at the Library. Library volunteers support your ability to check out books and movies, from getting new materials ready with library markings and book covers, to repairing damaged materials to circulate again. Some of the most visible volunteers donate hundreds of hours to checking materials in and returning them to their correct places on the shelves. Volunteers also help tutor English and help people with technology problems on their phones, tablets and computers. The Art Committee makes the Library look good showcasing the community's art. Friends of the Library volunteers run a variety of fundraising activities to expand the reach of the Library, including the Treasure Cove store at the Library entrance and book sales. Our Board of Trustees oversee Library policy, and set the budget. We are so grateful for all the time, energy, and impact of the people who volunteer for the Library.

But the Library is just one of dozens of community organizations reaping the benefits of volunteer time. I polled a few groups and found out that our San Juan Island Fire District 3 reports four times more volunteer hours than the Library. Those volunteers aren't all firefighters rushing into burning buildings; other volunteers work on logistics, as part of the major emergency response team, or as Firewise specialists, working to prevent the spread of fire by making neighborhoods more fire resistant.

Forty volunteers for the Family Resource Center gave approximately 3000 hours; Mullis Community Senior Center volunteers averaged two and a half weeks of full time work per volunteer last year where Fire District 3 volunteers averaged almost four weeks of full time work over the course of the year as their work requires ongoing training time. The Friday Harbor Film Festival reported the largest number of individual volunteers (124), who donated slightly more hours than the 20 volunteers helping Wolf Hollow Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre. Volunteers working with Animal Protection Society are seeing this year that keeping track of their time is another responsibility, and documenting volunteer time can strengthen an organization by demonstrating community involvement.

Whether volunteering on a regular basis or just for an event, volunteers make so many organizations in our community strong. If the eight organizations who responded to my poll had to pay for all the time they received—the equivalent of fifteen staff members—and if they were paid just \$15 per hour it would cost \$497,000 or more each year. My guess is that volunteers on San Juan Island contribute closer to ten million dollars annually, including the volunteers from the SJI Community Theatre, Grange, Peaceland Hospital, EMS, PTA, public and private school volunteers, the American Legion, Master Gardeners, service groups and numerous other organizations.

If you are reading this and you volunteer, thank you. If not, perhaps you might consider donating a few of your valuable hours. In addition to saving organizations money, volunteers receive the rewards of feeling good about their work and themselves, feeling like they make a difference, hearing "hello" and "thank you" as often as they show up, meeting new people, and being part of something bigger than themselves. It's worth it!

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