Volunteers, Volunteering, Voluntary

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Museums, historic sites, zoos, aquariums, gardens, libraries, and parks recruit cadres of volunteers. Volunteers are engaged for a wide variety of in-house activities, from serving as cashiers at the retail shop or clerical assistants in the mail room to greeters at the admissions desk. Even most institutional Boards of Trustees are composed of volunteers. But of all the volunteers who are culled and cultivated, it may be the volunteer docents who have the most active professional role, the most direct impact upon visitors, and the most profound affect upon the public’s perception of the institution.

Volunteers who freely give their time, energy, and enthusiasm to an institution should be demonstrably appreciated for their generosity and supported in their endeavors. After all, if their hours were translated into monetary donations, these stalwart supporters would be among an institution’s largest and most important individual donors.

During my twenty-five years in museum education, I’ve learned of many institutions who appropriately honor their volunteers by providing them with all the tools necessary to succeed and grow. They speak of their volunteer docents respectfully and remain aware that the institution could not begin to accomplish all that it does without their assistance. Regrettably, I also continue to learn of institutions that do not afford their volunteer docents the respect they deserve for the services rendered.

Ill treatment can take many forms, but it is often first apparent in the choice of words used to discuss docents and their performance. When I hear staff members making derogatory or snide remarks, I find myself wondering more about the institution — how it recruits, prepares, counsels, and trains its volunteers — than I do about the volunteers who attempt to tour and teach the legions of student and adult groups who enter through its doors.

Words Matter

The words used by paid staff to describe volunteer docents are important. They give shape to thoughts and perceptions, while also conveying values and judgments. Words that reflect a lack of appreciation can lower the docents’ status and, consequently, the paid staff’s respect for the volunteers’ donated efforts. The result can cause a downward spiral of both expectations and performance.

For instance, one might appropriately use the word “amateur” to describe docents. The primary dictionary definition of the word “amateur” is a praiseworthy one. It means “a person who engages in some art, science, sport, etc. for the pleasure of it rather than for money…” The same word can be used in a pejorative and depreciatory sense, however, if, for example, it is used to indicate a lack of advanced academic degrees or credentials.

A different duality is true of the word “professional.” The primary definition, as found in Webster’s New World Dictionary, is “conducit worthy of the high standards of a profession.” It is not until reading down to the fifth definition that one comes to “engaged in a specified occupation for pay or as a means of livelihood.” While the word “professional” is frequently used to distinguish paid staff from volunteers, let us not forget that both are expected to serve, behave, and perform as professionals — to exhibit “conduct worthy of the high standards of a profession.”

A Brief Digression

The “English dictionary,” as it is commonly known today, is a relatively new invention. Four hundred years ago, there was no such convenience available on any bookshelf. There was no such reference when Shakespeare was writing his plays to determine the appropriate use of words, or their proper context.

The first dictionaries began appearing in the mid-1700’s, the most famous of which was authored by Samuel Johnson. His work provoked great controversy because of the subjective nature of his definitions and his allowance for the fact that words and their definitions would change over time. Johnson knew an essential truth — that language could neither be fixed, nor kept pure, but would change with time, context, and usage.

While I recognize that words like “amateur” and “professional” have undergone several transmutations in common usage, one should be certain that the meanings intended are the meanings conveyed. When selecting words as descriptive labels, for instance, keep in mind that job performance usually has less to do with paychecks or pedigrees than it does with interest, attitude, determination, and flexibility. To avoid sending unintentional or counterproductive messages, make the effort to choose words positively and purposefully.

The Volunteer as Professional

There is an axiom in education that student performance is directly related to the expectations of the teacher. Students who are challenged to succeed, and who are thought to be
intelligent and capable, generally do well. Conversely, students who are not expected to succeed, and who are assumed to be below the standard, generally languish behind.

The same might be said of docents. Docents who are challenged to learn, and who are supported in their efforts, often do succeed. Challenging docents to learn means inspiring them. Inspiration seems directly related to the caliber and qualities of the staff who supervise docents. Supporting docents in their efforts requires providing them with access to subject matter information, routes for professional development, exposure to educational philosophies and pedagogical techniques, and constructive evaluations and feedback.

Paid staff should set standards of performance that they, too, exemplify and uphold. For instance, those who train docents shouldn’t teach solely by transferring information if docents are expected to teach school children experientially or through inquiry. Likewise, docents shouldn’t use the excuse that they aren’t paid to shirk responsibilities or to excuse substandard performance. Whether paid or voluntary, being professional means “conduct worthy of the high standards of a profession.” And the profession referred to here is that of educator.

Volunteers recruited to become docents should be informed of their professional standing and the professional expectations and rigor inherent in such a prominent position. Better to have too few docents than a full roster of poorly-prepared or poorly-performing docents. A docent whose talents do not jibe with the skills required to be an educator should be directed to other volunteer positions within the institution. This can only be accomplished fairly if there are periodic assessments and evaluations. If a docent understands what he or she is asked to do, and has ample opportunity to receive guidance and feedback, then both the volunteer and the staff members know if things will ultimately work out.

There need be no shame or blame involved in counseling a volunteer to shift from docent work to some other voluntary contribution within the organization. There are people, for instance, who are extremely factor-oriented and who may never get the hang of teaching in a more “conversational” manner. Such volunteers would be better suited to working with the registrar, the curators, or in the institutional library than engaging with third-grade school children. Teaching requires particular proclivities and talents, but so does research. Neither activity is better or worse; the only thing better or worse is the “fit” between volunteer and responsibilities.

"The Art of the Deal"

Docents should be accorded status similar to that which a paid instructor would receive and be expected to perform as such. The “deal” demands that an institution take docent needs and concerns into consideration and, in exchange, that docents perform up to professional expectations in both manner and demeanor. This requires that the institution clearly define what “professional” means, and express these expectations in writing. (An institution’s educational philosophies and espoused teaching styles must not be implied, but definitively stated).

Many forms of respect are easily demonstrated. Docents demonstrate respect by being dependable, punctual, available for training, and willing to receive evaluation. Institutions can demonstrate respect by keeping docents informed of changes in the galleries, having the institutional director meet with docents periodically to discuss the long-term direction that the organization is charting, having curators speak to docents to acquaint them with the content of exhibitions and such things as traffic flow and object labeling, and saying “thank you” whenever possible.

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Publishing Editor

The Docent Educator
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Will There Be Enough Volunteers?

For at least three decades, those of us who work in non-profit agencies dependent on volunteer labor have faced an uncomfortable decline. Organizations run by volunteers, from Rotary Clubs to the League of Women Voters, have watched their membership and contribution base grow smaller and smaller. Museums, zoos, nature centers, aquariums, and other such agencies have had to learn to “make do” with fewer and fewer volunteers.

In many such institutions, volunteer recruitment is an on-going process, and some of the more affluent museums have opted to give up the battle and turn entirely to paid staff. Is the search for volunteers to be never-ending? Maybe not. Generational theorists give us hope for a rise in the spirit of volunteerism in the not-too-distant future.

The blame for the declining volunteer base is most often placed squarely on the shoulders of women. Women have traditionally constituted the larger portion of volunteers, and, since more and more women work outside the home, the connection seemed obvious. More women in the paid work force meant fewer women in the non-paid, or volunteer, work force. Volunteer recruiters responded to this logic by attempting to enlist the services of more men within their volunteer ranks. They offered working women more flexible volunteer hours and created cooperative ventures with companies and schools to offer incentives to business people and students who volunteered in their institutions. While these efforts are admirable, they haven’t solved the problem. Rather, an examination of and response to “generational theory” may hold the solution.

The Idealists

In 1991, William Strauss and Neil Howe burst on the pop culture scene with the book *Generations: The History of America’s Future.* They proposed the theory that generational groups, or “cohorts,” move through America’s history, and, by extrapolation, her future in four cycles of repeated “attitudes and approaches to life.” The first of the groups that Strauss and Howe identify are the Idealists, those individuals who are born in a time of euphoria after a “secular crisis” such as war. The current Idealist generation is more commonly know as Boomers.

The Boomers were born between 1943 and 1960, and, as the new millennium gets underway, they are middle aged and approaching retirement. After World War II, the offspring of the ex-GI’s swelled the American population by a whopping 18.4%. The hospitals where they were born were over-crowded, as were their kindergarten classes a few years later. With Dr. Spock in hand, their parents allowed them to set the parameters of family life. *Father Knows Best* soon gave way to *Leave it to Beaver.*

The “every man for himself” attitude engendered by such competition created self-immersion, an impatient desire for self-satisfaction, and a weak sense of community, not exactly the recipe for strong volunteerism. Two interesting trends, however, seem to indicate that this generation may yet promise a ripe harvest for the volunteer recruiters who’ve tried, so far with mixed success, to reach them.

A poll by the American Association of Retired Persons concluded that 35% of Boomers who intended to work during their “retirement” years would do so for reasons of interest and enjoyment. Only 23% said they would need the extra income. According to the *Christian Science Monitor,* students 40 years old and over represent the fastest-growing population on college and graduate-school campuses — 11.2% of all those enrolled. They may start for work-related reasons, but often stay because they discover that they enjoy learning.

What a windfall for museums and other centers of informal learning! Perhaps renewed emphasis on the continuing self-satisfaction available for volunteers in such institutions will be just the enticement needed to attract some of the 79 million Boomers looking for a meaningful future!

The Reactives

The next generational group is identified by Strauss and Howe as Reactives. This group is born in an “awakening” era when society attempts to re-create itself. It is a time of re-examination and creates a generation that is individualistic and self-centered. This generation today goes by many names. Strauss and Howe refer to them as the Thirteenth Generation, but they are more commonly known as Generation X. The introduction of the birth control pill in 1960 brought an end to the baby boom, and babies born during the next 20 years grew up taking care of themselves. The term “latch-key children” was invented for this generation as both their parents worked to support an increasingly materialistic life-style. The X’ers learned to be skeptical of long-term commitments as they saw the marriages and mergers of their parents fall apart. Volunteer recruiters have had success placing Gen X’ers on short-term projects with clearly defined goals.

One particular trend — the increasing diversification of the American population — offers even more promise for connecting...
### Generations at a Glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age in 2000</th>
<th>G.I. 76-99</th>
<th>Silent 58-75</th>
<th>Boomer 40-57</th>
<th>Gen-X 19-39</th>
<th>Millenium 18 and under</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>The same patience, team work &amp; organizational know-how that saved the world from fascism is still available in this group that, as they aged, missed the deference they feel they deserve from the “younger generations.”</td>
<td>Excellent communicators and “people” people, this group has always been the bridesmaid, never the bride. They’d like, just once, to win the race, take the prize, get the recognition they’ve always missed.</td>
<td>From “hippie” to “yuppie” to “politically correct,” this group has always known what’s best for America, and they’ve never been afraid to say so. Other generations find them a little hard to take, but that never bothers a Boomer.</td>
<td>Sometimes too eager to believe their own bad press, this group is street-smart and has no delusions about the realities of life. They won’t believe your long-term promises, but they will get the job done.</td>
<td>The Boomers’ “family values” rhetoric is being realized in this group -- more family -- and community-centered, more “traditional” than any of the generations between them and their “twins,” the G.I.’s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Sample</td>
<td>In many countries, those age 75 &amp; older are the fastest growing portion of the population. The U.N. declared 1999 the Year of the Older Person. AARP, UNESCO, and the National Retired Teachers Assoc. responded with a colloquium, “Learning Never Ends.”</td>
<td>Strauss &amp; Howe point out that this generation has produced top presidential advisors, but no presidents. The nation’s voters skipped from G.I. George Bush to Boomer Bill Clinton, and only one of the current contenders is a Silent.</td>
<td><em>Modern Maturity,</em> AARP’s magazine, applauds their newest members who’ve “reinvented” themselves -- a physicist who became a rabbi, a clothing manufacturer who became a doctor, and a speech pathologist who became a children’s choir director.</td>
<td>Gen-Xers are returning to church membership, according to 21 Bridges to the 21st Century, but only in churches that “…place a premium on quality in everything from preaching to nursery to meeting rooms to internal communication.”</td>
<td>Students in Hillsboro High School in Nashville, TN, started an anti-violence manifesto entitled “I Will.” With the help of the internet, it has spread across the nation to high school students intent on taking back their schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try This</td>
<td>Give this group a pulpit and get out of their way! Let some of your older volunteers plan and implement small-group and one-on-one docent training for high-school and middle-school youth.</td>
<td>Put this group’s communication skills to work. Creating a Web Page, writing curriculum, and “nurturing” older and younger volunteers are right up this group's alley. Just be sure to allow them to “sign” their work.</td>
<td>The visionary nature of this group makes them perfect for long-range planning, evaluation of programs, and the creation of new directions. Just don’t be surprised if they want to trash the whole thing and start over!</td>
<td>This group knows, better than most, how to make the best of a bad situation. Got an impossible task? Don’t know where the funds are coming from? Give the problem to a Gen-Xer.</td>
<td>Build committed audiences and future volunteers with dynamic, participatory programming that involves this group in the planning. Ask for and heed their evaluation of your programs. Let them see multi-generational staffing at your institution.</td>
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An Approach to Motivate Volunteers

Volunteer management is like any other management. It requires planning, organizing, leading, and controlling. Good management requires another essential element — motivation.

Traditional and Behavioral Approaches
Organizations that use a traditional, hierarchical management approach believe that supervised workers should be simplified, standardized, and specialized, and that supervision and pay incentives should be used as principal motivators. In this context, only managers are allowed to think, coordinate, and control. Institutions adopting this model assume that hierarchy and vertical work relationships are the best way to assure productivity and create the best products.

A more effective style of management uses a behavioral approach. Organizations adopting this model envision the organization of supervised jobs to be challenging, interest, and inherently motivating. This theory assumes that every individual can exercise a considerable amount of self-control and self-management and that every individual can add value to the final product by sharing their ideas and efforts.

Levels of Control
The volunteer manager's job is to make sure things get done and to enable volunteers to do their work. One of the challenges, however, is that he or she must get things done indirectly through other people. Consequently, in addition to planning volunteer programs, creating volunteer jobs, recruiting, interviewing, training, supervising, and communicating information, one of the most critical roles of the volunteer manager is to create a motivating climate. Basically, the work environment and the work of volunteers are affected by the degree of control the manager has over them and the degree of control volunteers have over their own functions.

Often, managers are anxious about letting employees decide how to proceed in doing their jobs. The natural response of volunteer administrators is to adopt a management style that will give them the most control. However, when volunteers must get approval from supervisors for each step in achieving a goal the volunteers lose the ability to think for themselves. This leads to two important consequences. First, it means more work for the manager who has to continually issue assignments and supervise. Second, creative input from volunteers is low or absent, resulting in low rates of innovation.

Ultimately, in an environment where people are denied control over their work, they come to resent their responsibilities.

The better way to empower volunteers is to progressively give them more control over their duties. Volunteers earn the authority to decide what they do, first by acknowledging what needs to be done, then doing it, and then giving progress reports to their supervisor. This offers a good balance of control for both the manager, who sets the agenda, and the volunteers, who decide upon methods of implementation.

Creating a Motivational Environment
Motivational climates are created only if people really enjoy what they are doing. Obviously, this is key to creating a challenging and interesting atmosphere for all. At the McCord Museum of Canadian History in Montreal, Quebec, two paid employees manage a team of about 50 volunteers. The requisite functions of the department are to ensure an adequate pool of volunteer guides and to provide a motivating climate. Several methods of recognition are used to create such a climate...
an atmosphere. Adequate and inspiring training, the availability of supervisors, evaluations, and gifts (such as free issues of each exhibit catalog and discounts at the museum's gift shop and restaurant) are the main methods used.

For several years now, the education department has faced a public asking for more entertaining and interactive approaches. In most cases, the museum's exhibits do not, by themselves, answer these desires. Therefore, in the last three years, the department set up a new interpretation strategy based on new interpretive approaches. The first step was to offer the public a learning approach based primarily on objects and their observation instead of standard lectures. The next step was to create, with the active collaboration of volunteers, scenarios for each exhibit. The scenarios divided exhibits into several sections. This approach generated two immediate results. First, interpreters gradually felt more comfortable interpreting objects in their presentations. Secondly, now that exhibits are divided into "blocks" of interpretation, interpreters can start and end their tour virtually anywhere in the exhibit. Thus, more guides and groups can be present in the exhibit at the same time and rotate from one section to another.

Lately, this new interpretative approach has generated another, even more interesting result. Now that exhibits are divided into distinct parts, the department heads are stationing one volunteer guide to a section. Instead of guides walking the entire exhibit with one group, the visitors move from one section to the next during their visit while the volunteers stay in place.

This new interpretative technique has several advantages. First, the guides have a greater tendency to remain focused on the exhibit. Guides observe more carefully the time allowed for each section. Since guides have the choice to learn only small parts of the exhibit, they usually feel more comfortable to interpret it in a shorter amount of time after the training is done. Furthermore, since the guides tend to stay closer to the scenario, visits are more consistent. Another advantage is that groups are in contact with more than one guide and thus with more than one style of interpretation. It creates visits that are more lively, enthusiastic, and diverse. Finally, this technique allowed the department to increase the visitor capacity, especially for school groups. While this approach presents many advantages, it has some inherent drawbacks. Some interpreters get bored interpreting the same section over and over. The contact with groups is briefer and makes it difficult for interpreters and their groups to develop a relationship. It requires the presence of a supervisor in the exhibit to make sure that everything is under control and timing is respected. Plus, it demands a larger number of guides.

This new interpretative technique has generated an array of unexpected results. Since the guides have an increased tendency to stick to the "ready-made" scenario primarily based on the interpretation of objects, an increased number of guides feel more comfortable including objects in their discussions. Another result is that guides feel interpretation is a team effort rather than a singular enterprise. Therefore, supervisors have observed a decrease in the competition among guides and an increase in collaboration and the sharing of expertise. Finally, this program has allowed the McCord to develop a "Student-Guide Program," training seventh grade students to be guides. Each student is assigned a mentor-guide from the museum and, together, they prepare the interpretation of one section of the exhibit.

Later, the student interpreters' classes come to the museum and the student-guides interpret the sections they have learned.

Using this practical example, we can determine the management strategies used by the education department to motivate their volunteers. The approach is behavioral. The staff is in charge of organizing the elements for production and arranging the conditions and methods of operation. The volunteers have opportunities to decide on their own methods and are allowed to use their full capacities. Volunteers are motivated because they have the freedom to choose what type of assignment they want and when it will be accomplished.

All of this leads to job enrichment. Job enrichment results from horizontal job enlargement — an increase in the number of functions an individual has to do in the realization of a product or service — and vertical job enlargement — an increase in the involvement with supervisory personnel in planning and decision-making.

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Breaking Up Is Hard to Do

Fire a volunteer? Staff members hope never to confront a situation where they must ask a volunteer docent to leave. The very thought is nightmarish. But, sometimes, it is necessary.

Steps can be taken, however, to minimize the likelihood that such a drastic measure might be needed. Among those steps are: clear and concrete declarations of departmental standards and regulations; appropriate “job placement;” frequent performance reviews and evaluations; open avenues for communication; and pre-determined grounds for dismissal.

An Ounce of Prevention

By making departmental expectations known to both new and continuing docents, an education department takes its first, big step toward preventing the need for dismissals. Open and effective communication will stave off many problems before they occur.

Education department standards and methods ought to be clearly, effectively, and tangibly communicated to all volunteers. The need for explicitness reinforces the usefulness of written contracts or other forms of agreements between volunteers and institutions. Such documents begin and guide an important conversation that should detail docent roles and responsibilities, institutional and departmental expectations, and learning opportunities and “perks.” Such written materials are important as both the staff and volunteers may wish to refer back to them. (No, it is not sufficient to discuss these issues orally. Only written documents reduce the potential for miscommunication and eliminate possible claims such as “No one ever told me that!”)

Among the many items that might appear in written recruitment materials and within the docent handbook are:

✓ How much training time is required to become a docent?
✓ How much touring time is expected of a docent once trained?
✓ Where is additional, periodic training available for further skill development?
✓ What are the minimum requirements that must be met, annually, to be retained as a docent?
✓ How are docents kept abreast of new or changing exhibitions?
✓ What performance standards are docents measured against, and when do evaluations take place?
✓ Are there opportunities to receive individualized attention or assistance?
✓ What avenues for communicating with staff are available?
✓ What is the appropriate route for airing concerns or complaints?
✓ What are the programmatic regulations concerning attendance, absences, and substitutes?
✓ Are accommodations made for voluntary absences, such as vacation travel?
✓ What institutional benefits are conferred upon volunteer docents?
✓ And, what are grounds for dismissal from the docent corps?

The Match Game

Many people who volunteer for museums, historic sites, zoos, aquariums, parks, and gardens do so because they want to learn more about the subject matter. While this is a good reason for a volunteer to be affiliated with a particular institution, it does not finalize the decision of how that volunteer might best contribute. Registrars, curators, exhibit designers, preparators, and others use and need volunteer assistance, too. Good “job placement” is essential.

People who take volunteer positions want to be successful. Success begins by matching personal attributes to institutional responsibilities and, then, guiding people toward the appropriate volunteer opportunities. For instance, among the attributes most valuable to someone assisting a registrar might be orderliness and precision. While these qualities may be useful to a docent, of greater priority are such attributes as enthusiasm, flexibility, and verbal aptitude.

Prospective candidates for the docent program should be encouraged to think about their response to the act of teaching. While having a reserved personality and research-oriented nature might be terrific attributes for the more solitary pursuits of gaining knowledge, they are not, necessarily, a good match for the more extroverted responsibilities of an educator. Does the prospective docent enjoy public speaking? Is she a good communicator? How does she feel about working with young people? How does she put her own knowledge to work? What is it about teaching that most interests her? Is she able to put aside preconceived notions and personal prejudices?

Some institutions are so eager for volunteers to fill their docent ranks that they pull everyone and anyone into their programs, hoping to mold their recruits into effective teachers later. This reluctance to be more selective from the start can result in misunderstandings, tense relationships, disappointed or disaffected visitors, and volunteers who feel unappreciated and unsuccessful.

Evaluate Frequently

How do volunteers know if they are doing an adequate job? Unless they
are provided with periodic reviews and evaluative feedback, volunteers have no true measure of their performance. Evaluation offers concrete opportunities to assess teaching abilities, modify techniques, and to demonstrate improvement. Without the benefit of evaluations, dismissing a docent could seem arbitrary or even punitive.

Evaluations must be an essential component of every docent program. Any volunteer who wants to be invested with the responsibility and authority of teaching visitors should expect to have his or her performance reviewed and evaluated. Such evaluative critiques serve to maintain a level of quality incumbent upon public programs, especially those administered for school children.

Evaluations should be positive and constructive. They should also be frequent so that they become customary and lose the stigma that can be attached to such a process. Evaluations should be objective; they should result in information that helps docents hone skills, adjust teaching methods, and gain content knowledge.

The evaluative process should be a “two-way street.” Docents should be provided with ample opportunities and routes for assessing the guidance and training they receive. On specific occasions, the departmental chief and/or institutional director should meet with the volunteers and learn their assessment of the supervision and direction the staff provides.

(To understand more about instituting and conducting evaluations, re-read the Summer 1997 Issue — Volume 6, Number 4 — of The Docent Educator, which focused on the topic of Evaluation.)

Establishing a Dismissal Policy

The last thing a staff member wants to tell a volunteer is that there are grounds for dismissal. But, establishing a clear-cut policy for dismissing docents should eliminate the potential for confusion and bigger problems down the line. In addition, such a policy should greatly reduce any opportunity for, or appearance of, subjective or vindictive actions on the part of a supervising staff member.

Of the several behaviors that could result in the immediate dismissal of a volunteer from his or her docent responsibilities, physical or psychological endangerment of visitors tops my list. Any volunteer found to be intoxicated or similarly impaired while conducting public tours or programs must be dismissed from the roster immediately. While this might seem harsh, our visitors’ well-being and physical safety must come first.

An action that should result in eventual dismissal is methodical insubordination. Attempting to create change by continually denigrating an institution or its staff to the visiting public is inexcusable. Naturally, there should be ample ways for docents to vent their frustrations and to make recommendations to the powers that be, but burdening visitors with such stuff is unfair and unprofessional.

Refusing to recognize the institutional mission as pre-eminent or to adopt its preferred method of instruction might be another reason for a docent’s eventual dismissal. Volunteers should not be allowed to defy organizational policies and decisions. The results can be disastrous and often undermine programming. If allowed to continue unabated, such behavior usually leads to recurrent arguments and a fracturing of the docent corps.

Finally, if a volunteer’s performance simply proves that teaching is not his or her forte, that person should be advised of other volunteer positions within the organization. There is no dishonor in learning that one’s efforts would be better applied to a different set of responsibilities than teaching. If teaching in the prescribed manner is uncomfortable, a volunteer can assist in some other area of institutional activity. Should the volunteer truly want to remain part of an education department, he or she might gather reference and research materials from the library, assist with tour scheduling, or maintain supplies and equipment used for hands-on activities.

A Parting of the Ways

Even though people voluntarily donate time and energy to a docent program, they still must conform to the rules, meet departmental standards, and serve as productive contributors to programmatic goals and activities. Not dismissing a troublesome or poorly performing volunteer usually leads to greater problems for all concerned.

Communicating expectations, conducting periodic reviews, and holding open discussions should minimize the need to remove someone from a docent program. If that need arises, however, an established written policy, with delineated grounds for dismissal, will be important. It will ensure that the dismissal will be viewed as objective, and may help both the volunteer and staff member reach such a decision mutually and agreeably.

Alan Gartenhaus
Publishing Editor
Disbanding the Docent Council

by Carol Eames

change! We either welcome it or fear it, depending on how the change will personally affect us.”

That sentence was the first paragraph of a letter I sent to all Tulsa Zoo Docents nearly 10 years ago when I made the decision to “restructure” the Docent Council and its relationship to the Education Department. In other words, I disbanded the Docent Council and its by-laws.

I had several reasons for taking what appeared to be a drastic step. These reasons were based on a number of problems I know can be common to any volunteer organization. One of the most pressing problems was the power struggle between some of the paid staff and the volunteer staff.

There were times when I felt as if I were no longer the head of the department. The Docent Council attempted to set policy for the department and impose its rules that had nothing to do with educational activities. An inordinate amount of time was spent on Docent Council activities, including Board meetings, monthly meetings, special committee meetings, etc., rather than on actual education programs. The organization had become more important than the programs.

The more I thought about it (and this was over a time period of several years), the more I realized that most of the Docent Council’s activities had nothing to do with fulfilling our education department’s mission. The mission statement of the Education Department is “to help people of all ages develop a greater understanding and appreciation of the natural world.”

Was the Docent Council helping to achieve this mission? Much of what they did was superfluous to our mission. They simply created another bureaucratic layer, working to support their own organization.

Committee meetings ate away at the time volunteers could give to the zoo. Instead of touring, docents were meeting to select uniforms, meeting to plan and decorate for our Christmas party, or meeting to develop and conduct docent graduation ceremonies. There was a real misdirection of energy toward the peripheral things and away from the reasons for being a docent in the first place.

My decision to disband the Docent Council was not an easy one. The Docent Council was an organization that I helped found 15 years earlier and for which I had served as first president! However, I slowly came to realize that the Docent Council was not needed in an institution that has paid staff to coordinate its volunteer program.

I have to admit that I was slightly naive to think that all, or at least a majority of docents, would welcome such a change. But the idea of doing away with “their” organization was shocking to many of our volunteers. There were various reactions to my initial proposal letter. Some found it a relief and were not threatened in the least. Some were puzzled about the need for change. Many were angry and outraged, and had no qualms about expressing their feelings to me or the zoo’s director.

One of the major factors in my ability to remain strong through all the transition was that I had the complete,
unwavering support of my supervisor, the zoo director. The "battering" went on for weeks and weeks, but I did not back down as I felt it was best for our institution. We answered questions over and over but some of the docents were never able to accept our answers. We were threatened with the loss of at least half of the docents, but in the end no one resigned. Although it was an incredibly stressful time, I knew, in the long run, managing the Education Department and its activities would be much easier and more efficient. That has proven to be true.

Looking back over the past 10 years, I know that I was right to disband the Docent Council. Now, we operate with only one layer between staff and individual volunteers. That layer consists of day captains, one for each day of the week and one for each Saturday and Sunday of the month. This group works directly with the education coordinator to make certain that our programs and activities are accomplished.

We still do all of the things that the Docent Council once did, but getting there isn’t such an elaborate ordeal. Instead of being embroiled in meetings that seemingly went on forever, docents now spend their volunteer hours doing all of the activities that directly affect the Education Department. They care for the collection of animals that we maintain for programming, they provide tours, they visit schools and do other outreach programs in the community, they teach classes, they assist with our special events, and do a million and one other jobs that support our MISSION. When we need special help, there is always a docent willing to step forward.

We communicate in a variety of ways. Our general curator sends zoo animal updates via e-mail to docents and staff who have this computer capability. We make this same information available on the docent bulletin board. We have sign-up sheets for all up-coming activities. We ask for help developing programs, and docents often accept this greater level of responsibility. We always try to use the docents’ special skills and talents, and, in a group of 175 volunteers, their range of skills and talents is vast and numerous.

We continue to host appreciation and recognition events for our docents. Docents are always invited to zoo parties and special events. They receive discounts at the food and gift concessions. We try in every way we can to let docents know that we consider them the most valuable part of the Education Department. In other words, we treat them with respect, but they also know that we have high standards and high expectations.

When we get letters from teachers and other people using words like “fabulous,” “outstanding,” or “the best program we ever had,” we know that the docents live up to our expectations.

One important consideration must also be providing volunteers with a venue for their concerns. We have always had an open-door policy, from the zoo director on down, and we make it clear that volunteers are welcome to come to us with their concerns; however, we also make it clear that they need to go through the appropriate “chain of command.”

It has been 10 years since we made this major modification. If you asked me if I had any regrets, I would answer absolutely not. The transition time was rough as most transitions are, but now we run so smoothly and efficiently that it’s hard to remember

Carol Eames is the education curator of the Tulsa Zoo, in Tulsa, OK. Ms. Eames began her work with the Tulsa Zoo 28 years ago as a volunteer, helping to start the docent program and serving as its first president. In 1975, she was hired by the zoo. Her department has grown from a staff of one, with 25 volunteer docents, to a staff of four with 175 docents. Ms. Eames earned her B.A. degree with a double major in anthropology and biology from Kent State Univ. in Kent, Ohio.

Illustrations provided by David Eames, graphics illustrator for the Kansas City Star.
Your institution's most creative resource for fresh public programs is already part of your organization. Docents! When docents are used as a resource for program development their participation and quality levels will stay very high.

The Chicago Architecture Foundation's (CAF) docents are responsible for developing and executing the entire CAF Tour Program. Through the work of CAF docents, the organization was able to provide tours to 116,000 tourists in 1999. The Tour Program produced 37.7% of CAF's total revenue in 1998. Our tours are conducted on foot, by bus, boat, bike, and train and cover the Chicago metropolitan area. Topics range from specific Chicago architects to a survey of downtown buildings. These tours are developed by docents and executed through two docent committees, the "Tour Committee" and the "New Projects Chicago Committee."

**Developing the Core and Neighborhood Tours**

Core and neighborhood tours are managed by the Docent Council's Tour Committee. Core tours are held on a regular daily or weekly basis highlighting popular sites. Neighborhood tours are offered 2 to 12 times per year and focus on lesser known architecture outside the city center. Each of the tours in our tour catalogue has been the inspiration and creation of a docent.

The Tour Committee is authorized to develop and implement the Foundation's regularly scheduled public tours conducted under the auspices of the Foundation. The committee monitors the quality of these tours — both the content and the tour manuals — and the committee assists the Foundation staff in publicizing them.

The committee meets one evening each month and is comprised of approximately ten members. The committee includes both recent graduates of the training program and experienced docents. Two staff members, the manager of tours, and the vice president of public programs and tours serve on the committee. They provide advertising, budget, and attendance information, as well as a link between staff and docent activities.

**Developing A Tour**

Any docent may bring an idea for a new tour to the Tour Committee. The *Chicago Theater District Tour*, for instance, came from the suggestion of a committee member after seeing that the City of Chicago had revitalized its Theater District. This docent volunteered to write an outline for a 1.5 hour walking tour and become tour director.

Each tour needs to have a tour director who is annually awarded 16 tour hours of credit (docents are required to give a minimum of 30 tour hours annually) for content development, coordination, docent recruitment, and scheduling. The tour director for the *Chicago Theater District Tour* coordinated her research efforts with some members of the new docent training class as final research projects.

Throughout the whole process, the *Chicago Theater District Tour* director periodically submitted her work to the Tour Committee for approval. Several committee members attended a trial run of the tour with the tour director. After the Tour Committee gave its approval, the tour director recruited other docents for training and submitted dates, times, and a description for the next year's tour catalogue.

Each year, the Tour Committee evaluates tours and decides the schedule for the upcoming year. This evaluation is based on the following criteria:

- What was the recorded attendance on the tour for each year?
- If attendance is falling off, should the tour go on hiatus for a few years?
- Is the time of day, day of week, and time of year that the tour is scheduled appropriate, or does it conflict with any other CAF or city programs?
- Are we advertising and promoting appropriately?
- Did we miss any obvious (or not so obvious) media such as community newspapers?

To ensure quality, we've implemented a tour content evaluation system, whereby 1/3 of all tours are reviewed by committee members annually. Each tour has a Tour Committee liaison who does an evaluation every three years by reviewing the tour manual, attending public tours, and confirming sufficient docent staffing.

**Developing The Tour Catalogue**

The tour catalogue is a marketing tool used to reach CAF's 5,500 members and the general public. Preparing the tour catalogue is a four month process. Beginning in September, the Tour Committee contacts all 68 tour directors to inquire about their interest in offering their tour for the next year. Tour directors are provided a current description of their tour from the catalogue copy and asked to make any changes. They must submit the dates they want to offer their tour, an updated list of docents trained for their tour, and proof of updated tour manual content.

Once the tour directors have submitted their paperwork, the Tour...
Committee sits down in front of a huge calendar and pieces together the tour schedule. The Committee practices a type of "asset allocation" whereby there are only 4-6 tours on a given day, and different types of tours (walking, bike, bus, etc.) are spread out evenly.

The CAF's graphic designer provides the design and layout of the tour catalogue and takes it to print. And, viola! Another year's worth of programs is sent to our membership and interested public!

Special Tours and the New Projects Chicago Committee

Another important component of our tour program is the work of the New Projects Chicago Committee. The New Projects Chicago Committee works closely with CAF to provide one-time-only tours in conjunction with our exhibition offerings, new developments in the city fabric, or special opportunities in collaboration with other institutions.

Docents working on these projects must research and write a tour on short notice and deliver a quality program. The Committee membership is made up of a small number of very active, well-practiced docents.

This Committee began in the 1980's, during a tremendous building boom in Chicago. To show off the work of fellow architects, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Chicago Chapter contacted CAF to request help putting together a one-time-only, day long, behind-the-scenes tour of skyscrapers while under construction (entitled "Chicago by Design").

In 1990, CAF initiated its own special tours program. We currently try to offer 3 to 4 tours of special projects each year, as well as special tours to run in conjunction with major exhibits.

Developing the Special Tours

The development of special tours for the 1997 exhibit SOM at 60 is a good example of this process. The architecture firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), designers of the Sears Tower and the John Hancock building, contacted us with the idea of using our space to show an exhibition they developed to celebrate 60 years of their designs. We wanted to provide public programming around the exhibition to make it a multi-faceted educational experience including lectures and tours.

The challenges were many. Docents had three months to develop tour outlines; research enriching content; recruit, train, and schedule docents; and promote these tours to the public.

The New Projects Chicago Committee co-chairs collaborated with the staffs of CAF and SOM. In turn, the New Projects Chicago Committee quickly went to work creating an outline of SOM's most important Chicago commissions in four different geographic locations throughout the city. The research was delegated to committee members, and those docents met with representatives from SOM to prepare information for the content of the tour manual. Once the tour manual was assembled, the committee reunited to review the material and practice on a trial run.

What the committee eventually produced was a weekend of walking tours — Franklin Street Corridor, Central Loop, and Cityfront Center. Each of these areas has a large concentration of SOM's work. Three buildings had interior tours - the Inland Steel Building, 33 W. Monroe, and the NBC Tower.

SOM also wanted CAF docents to provide tours of their latest work, the expansion of Chicago's Orchestra Hall into three buildings (renamed Symphony Center). As an opening celebration, Symphony Center hosted a 24-hour "Day of Music." Every 15 minutes during a 12-hour period, CAF docents would lead the public on tours of the new facility as a part of the celebration. More than 10,000 people attended!

Allowing docents to create the tours they lead not only produces powerful programs, but encourages the development of the intellectual and leadership skills of individual docents.

"Any docent may bring an idea for a new tour to the Tour Committee."

Barbara Hrbek is the volunteer coordinator for The Chicago Architecture Foundation, located in Chicago, IL. Previously, Ms. Hrbek contributed an article to The Docent Educator offering a descriptive overview of the Chicago Architecture Foundation's docent program (Vol. 8, No. 1, Autumn 1998).
Reflections of a Volunteer Science Educator

The multiple roles of a science museum make it a treasured resource. As a college professor who has been volunteering at the Museum of Science in Boston in a variety of capacities, I have seen the vital impact of a science museum in the promotion and education of science. As a scientist, I view the museum as more than a tourist attraction and science as more than a compendium of facts. As the Museum of Science logo states, “It’s Alive!”; it is an interactive, fun learning environment staffed with knowledgeable professional and volunteer docents.

As a scientist, I feel it is critical to keep alive the natural spark and excitement that children have for science when they are young. Too often, children, especially girls, are not actively encouraged to pursue science once they enter middle or high school. As a woman scientist, I feel it is important to share my enthusiasm for science with the public, especially children. Through the museum not only do I enjoy sharing my expertise but encouraging people to see the pleasure of science and to promote it as a career path for young people. These reflections on my volunteer work at the science museum are just one person’s view of the critical position of the museum in the realm of science education.

My first experience with the Museum of Science in Boston was as a scientist pen pal in the Science-By-Mail program. Begun in 1988, this program pairs children in grades four to eight with scientist mentors who correspond with them. In Science-By-Mail, small groups or a class of students choose activity packets, which involve simple but not simplistic, hands-on, enjoyable experiments from areas such as science magic, simple machines, flight, weather, the science of sports, communications, and planets. The experiments demonstrate the principles of the scientific method as well as specific scientific principles. The students actively participate in developing hypotheses, designing experiments, and in collecting and analyzing data. The excitement of doing experiments as an adjunct to their regular school work makes students feel special and delighted with their accomplishments. Communication between the scientist and students can be by mail, e-mail, fax, or telephone. The scientist listens to students and gives them positive feedback on their ideas. Children share the wonders of discovery with the scientist, as well as their teachers, home-school mentors, and parents.

Science-By-Mail Opportunities

Students who corresponded with me were in grades four to six and were from Vermont, Montana, and Alabama. The children were very enthusiastic about learning about me as a scientist and about science as well. It was significant to me that my students were from rural areas and from schools with little scientific equipment at their disposal. The museum provided a unique experience for them through the Science-By-Mail program. One of the most meaningful roles for me was answering their wide range of questions, from why the wind blows to why crickets make noise. The thank-you’s and positive feedback from the students were heartening. This program provided positive reinforcement for ideas and students’ dynamic engagement in scientific thinking. It was also clear that the students enjoyed having a real scientist talk with them and value their ideas.

Another way that I have volunteered at the museum has been as a life science interpreter in the Human Body Discovery Space, now the Human Body Connection. This room specializes in activities related to human anatomy and physiology and medical issues. The roles of the volunteer include doing demonstrations, answering questions, facilitating understanding and use of the exhibits, and encouraging exploration. The space is designed for asking several types of questions about many aspects of human biology: what, how, why, and should we? Whether exploring skeletal movement, AIDS, birth, or nutrition, the area invites critical thinking rather than giving “right” answers. It helps to discern real from “fake” science in the news. In addition, the museum shows naturally the importance of mathematics in life. Through surveys and physiological measurement gathering, visitors participate as subjects of experiments, generate their own data, and graph it.

Visitors to the Human Body space, whether home-schooled children, families, adults, or school groups, feel free to explore and learn in ways not usually available or readily accessible to them. The following examples illustrate the diverse experiences that enrich and educate people in a non-threatening way. One day a very young mother and daughter were enjoying the reproductive biology part of the room. The mother asked me to explain to her daughter “where babies come from.” Clearly she wanted her daughter to know the facts of life and felt comfortable with my explaining them. When the girl moved on to play with the anatomically-correct baby dolls, the mother asked me questions about birth control for herself. I sensed her
sincerity and her appreciation of this discussion.

On another day, I witnessed the sheer delight of two young girls playing doctor with stethoscopes and other real medical equipment. In one corner of the room was a computer with the ADAM program of anatomy and physiology. Out of the corner of my eye I saw two middle school-aged boys learning about the female reproductive system in an age-appropriate manner. Later a family where the parents were home-schooling their children were working with models and other materials not available to them at home.

Medical Information

In the area of health, this part of the museum has been instrumental in helping people understand medical concerns. For instance, one family asked me to help them comprehend what happened in the grandfather's heart attack and bypass surgery. Using the models and exhibits, I was successful in helping them comprehend some aspects of these conditions not explained by physicians in terms that they could grasp. On the same day, a young girl who needed a cornea transplant worked with me using eye models and a sheep eye to clarify what her surgery would entail.

These examples highlight the real connection the museum makes with the public. Whether people visit for a few minutes or for an extended time, they clearly learn in ways not usually accessible to them.

It has been a true joy to be part of another experience at the Museum of Science, the Eye Opener Program. This partnership between the Museum of Science and the Boston Public Schools second grades began in 1968 and has evolved over the years.

Adult volunteers are joined by junior volunteers, Boston high school sophomores participating in the Urban High School Collaborative. In addition to working with second graders in the Eye Opener Program part-time, high school students explore science in science laboratory and other classes. The purpose of the Eye Opener Program is to provide an engaging and fun learning environment for second graders to experience science while at the museum. Second grade teachers apply to bring students once in the school year. Adult and junior volunteers guide students in the museum while teachers attend their own workshop. Part of the teachers' experience is to evaluate developing exhibits using their expertise and perspective as educators. About 3,000 students and teachers participate each year, about 100 per week. The second graders show a great deal of excitement, and balancing and weighing.

The format of the experience includes a pre-visit where the Museum of Science staff visits the second grade classrooms about one week before the children come to the museum. They see a video of the museum, and staff members wear their red lab coats, identifying themselves as safe museum friends. The staff talk with children about their experiences, what to expect, and answer questions. Afterward, the children write questions they would like to discover at the museum. When the students arrive they are divided among the volunteers, usually four children per volunteer. The volunteers determine what the students want to see and learn about in the exhibits. In addition, there are special activities available to the second graders, such as receiving a magnifying glass that they keep, a special visit to the animal room, and particular materials and experiments available related to the curriculum.

To enhance the Eye Opener experience, museum staff members hold weekly in-service workshops for volunteers, and optional museum-wide workshops are held periodically. These workshops are tremendously beneficial for the volunteers' ability to communicate with visitors appropriately and effectively. Workshops include speakers, hands-on activities, and supplemental literature. Examples of workshop topics include: Boston Second Grade Science Curriculum; Learning Styles; Developmental Ages and Learning Science; Bilingual Education; Attention Deficit Disorder; Museum Exhibits; and Docent Education. These workshops help to enhance active learning and creative thinking within the museum setting and with the diversity of students from Boston.

Eye Opener Benefits

Benefits of the Eye Opener Program are widespread. Second grade teachers are able to complement the science curriculum in an exciting environment. In addition, teachers have the positive experience of using their professional expertise to continue to improve the museum's exhibits. Second graders see the fun of science and the wide range of fields that comprise science, work on developing critical thinking skills, begin to learn how to do science, and find that science involves asking questions and discovery. Children also see role models, adult and student volunteers and staff, with whom they develop a special rapport. In turn the teenagers

Continued on the next page.
learn science in and out of the classroom, beyond the typical curriculum and using the facilities of the Museum of Science. They also develop communication skills through their interaction with the adult volunteers and youngsters. Finally, they develop a feeling of accomplishment as role models, mentoring the second graders. Adult volunteers gain a tremendous amount from the Eye Opener Program as well — the personal thank-you's and joy of the children, and the agreeable experience of learning from workshops and especially from people associated with the program. Mentoring and assisting the teenagers and second graders are clearly worthwhile and highly enjoyable. Personally, I have gained significant insight into ways to make connections between young people and science that I feel help me be a better educator.

My latest experience at the museum has been as an interpreter in a traveling exhibit, Masters of the Ocean Realm: Whales, Dolphins, and Porpoises. Since the ocean is so much a part of Boston’s heritage and a critical part of its environment, this special exhibit has extra significance. Recently, a father and his young son from Boston visited the exhibit at the son’s urging. The boy was precocious and had a voracious appetite for learning about animals of the sea. His father told me that he, himself, did not know anything about science and did not have an advanced education. He was stunned to see that his son truly had garnered a rather comprehensive knowledge of whales and other marine animals through books. The boy and I discussed what a career in marine biology would be like. His father then spoke at length with me about training for such a career and what type of college would be needed. I was touched by the warmth of the father and son’s relationship, and I was happy to hopefully have helped both learn how the boy could pursue his dream of studying the ocean as his life’s work.

The world is becoming increasingly more scientific and technologically focused. Our society needs more scientists and needs to motivate young people to see science as an exciting career choice. I have devoted my professional life to educating young people about science and realize that exposure to science outside of the classroom can be a dramatic, driving force in propelling young people to dream and reach for a life in science. My volunteer work at the museum has solidified my appreciation of the Museum of Science in its role as an urban institution dedicated to discovery and the wonder of science.

Bette Weiss received a B.S. in Biology from Simmons College and a Ph.D. in Nutritional Biochemistry and Metabolism from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Dr. Weiss’s research interests have focused on nutrition, drugs, and brain physiology, and her publications include articles in journals such as Science and The Journal of Neurochemistry. Dr. Weiss is an Associate Professor in the Biology Department of Emmanuel College in Boston, where she specializes in Human Biology.
3 Docents, 70 Years

of Volunteer Experience

by Pat Brown, Jennet Bernert, & Betsy Browne

Some questions are repeatedly asked of volunteer docents.
Why do you volunteer?
What do you gain? Why have you continued to be a docent for so long?
The three of us have tried to address these questions and others as we reflect on our over seventy years of collective service to the Chrysler Museum of Art.

Pat Brown

Over the last thirty years, museums have struggled with their views of docents. Most encouraged docents by expanding their education programs. However, things changed when disparaging comments about volunteers and their "art interpretation" became an undercurrent at the National Docent Symposium in Toledo in 1987.

We learned that some museums were deciding not to use volunteer docent guides altogether. We discovered that all our programs were at the same crossroads and that we, the volunteers, needed to hone our skills in order to stay viable.

Thirteen years later, docents are being praised as vital links between their institution, staff, and visitors. Docents worked hard to deserve these accolades; we have developed a new vision for ourselves. The title of the Seattle Symposium in 1997 was right to the point: New Roles, New Goals. Those of us who attended for the Chrysler Museum returned with a hope chest full of ideas we hoped to implement. They included: long range planning, interactive techniques in every training, better contact between teachers and docents, multi-school visits, a junior docent program, more upper staff involvement, better use of local experts, a docent serving as an ex-officio member of the museum board, and additional copies of The Docent Educator. Some of these ideas have been implemented and some are still beyond our reach, but we continue to persevere.

The Chrysler Museum has mirrored the national trends. Our education department in the late 1960's was striving to put together a cohesive training program with a director and one secretary. Docents attended weekly lectures, totally unrelated to the objects on display at the museum. The docent core typically numbered 15 to 20.

Then, we all began to work together to formulate tours, and a year-long project involved three of us putting together a syllabus to be used with the collection. With its completion, we were no longer "winging it."

Our docent corps eventually increased, as did the size of our education department staff. We created new tours to keep our audiences interested and catered to the school system's curricular requirements. With our growth came new successes and new problems.

Despite the challenges, I have remained a docent for three decades because I love it. Touring was, and still is, an enormous challenge. I constantly revisit and re-think standard tours, research and put together scripts for changing exhibitions, help with training other docents, and serve on docent boards and committees. The rewards come from our visitors. It makes every struggle worthwhile when a young girl, who is part of a severely disabled group in wheelchairs, tells me in halting voice which paintings touched her most, and how she will envision them when she needs a lift.

Jennet Bernert

One day, in the autumn of 1972, I sat outside the Chrysler Museum theater looking around at twenty or so other prospective docents. I realized that I did not know a single one. I came to the museum to fulfill my placement requirement for the Junior League. I hadn't the faintest idea of what I was getting into, but I loved history and the few art history courses I took in college. That "docent business" sounded interesting, and so, there I was. Twenty-seven years later, I am still a docent (emeritus) at the Chrysler Museum.

On that first day we were given four or five sheets of information on approximately 12 to 18 works of art in the collection, told to read them, and then asked to sign up to lead groups of children through the museum. We were assured that we would know more than the children, and that we just needed to make it fun. That was the extent of our "training."

The following year, one docent who fell in love with the French art in our collection and spent time researching it offered to share her information. Other docents were at work researching the Italian, Ancient Worlds, and Dutch-Flemish collections. Our education director thought a costume tour would be fun but had no time to pursue it. Would I be interested? Oh boy, would I! What fun I had collecting books, reading and relating the costumes on the pages to those in our paintings and sculptures. I even combined my other hobby, sewing, with dressing dolls to be taken into the classrooms for outreach programs.

It was from these humble beginnings that our advanced training, now know as Level B, originated. In these early years, we were pretty much on our own. Later, curators became involved and generously shared their expertise with us.

Continued on the next page.

The Docent Educator Spring 2000
In April of 1985, I was asked to represent the Chrysler Museum at a meeting of the National Association of Museums in Phoenix, Arizona. It was there that I first heard about docent evaluations and brought the idea back to our museum. After much debate, we eventually instituted an evaluation procedure for docents. The process has been adjusted over the years, and in its present form is contributing to better tours every year.

Among the many reasons I have remained a docent for twenty-seven years, two are primary. They are the enormous intellectual stimulation of working with a group of intelligent and caring women, and learning from the leadership of our director of education, who had an extraordinary ability to make each and every docent feel special and talented.

**Betsy Browne**

My husband was a military officer, and we moved frequently during his thirty-year career. Perhaps the most interesting place we lived was in Bangkok, Thailand, in the early 1970s. It was there that I first became a docent.

I found myself among a diverse group of well-educated and dynamic women of various nationalities who had a common bond — we were in Bangkok because of our husband's careers. We were all drawn, for one reason or another, to the magnificent collection of the National Museum in Bangkok and the fledgling docent program that had been founded by a similar group of international wives.

The overall docent program was both administered and funded solely by the docents themselves. As I recall, my training consisted of an introduction to the collection. I was then asked to select a particular area of the collection to research, provided with some guidelines and a bibliography, and told to write a tour.

Since I knew nothing about Oriental art and even less about Thai history and culture, it was most definitely a learning experience! It proved to be a most rewarding one as well. During the course of my research, I became fascinated with an era of Thai history that had produced a prototype Buddha image and a remarkable civilization.

The friendships I made with a diverse group of docents, the opportunity to tour and talk with visitors from many different parts of the world, the fabulous trips that were sponsored by the umbrella docent organization (including a memorable week in Burma), and the incredible education experience of living in and learning about a different culture were among the many rewards I received as a docent in Bangkok.

When we moved to Norfolk, many years later, and my husband decided to retire here, I joined the docent program at the Chrysler Museum. Although the venue is far different and a world away from the National Museum in Bangkok, the rewards are similar. (There is only one object from Thailand in the entire collection here, so no one was particularly impressed with my knowledge of Sukhothai art.) Now, I am beginning my fourteenth year as a docent here, and although I do not have the longevity or historical perspective of Pat and Jennet, I have been involved in many aspects of the program, and have seen a number of changes over the years.

As docents, we constantly face challenges, and we find both rewards and frustrations in the program. An ongoing frustration is the fact that we work to develop innovative touring techniques that sometimes cannot be implemented due to the logistics of certain tours. The rewards, however, far outweigh the frustrations. The lasting friendships I have made, the ongoing education, the excitement of new intellectual challenges, the opportunity to work with children and use the museum's marvelous collection keep me returning to the Chrysler Museum year after year.

There are also those special moments when I know my efforts have made a small difference — when a child makes a connection with an art work; when children ask if they can come back again; when I get a group of teenagers to actually engage in discussion; or when I hear words of appreciation from the staff. These are some of the intangible, but very real, rewards of being a volunteer docent.

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**Pat Brown** grew up in the Washington, DC, area. In high school, she was a member of the debating team and credits the training with being her best preparation for touring. Ms. Brown pursued a BS/RN degree, but married before finishing college. She has been a docent at the Chrysler Museum of Art since 1969.

**Jennet Bernert** attended the University of Massachusetts, majoring in education. She spent four years as an elementary teacher before becoming a homemaker and volunteer. She entered the Chrysler Museum of Art's docent program in 1972 and is presently a master docent and docent emeritus. In 1999, Ms. Bernert was diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease). She now gives tours using an electric "scooter." She calls this yet another of her "docent experiences."

**Betsy Browne** was born in Washington, DC, and grew up in Bethesda, Maryland. In college, she pursued a liberal arts degree but switched to education. Although marriage interrupted her studies, Ms. Browne eventually returned to college and earned two degrees in early childhood education before becoming a docent at the Chrysler Museum of Art in 1986.
Volunteering and the I.R.S.

There are two very good reasons that docents and other volunteers working in the United States should keep careful records of the hours they contribute to a not-for-profit institution. For the benefit of the institution, of course, such records are useful in proving in-kind donations when applying for grant funds. Volunteers who itemize their income tax deductions can also use such records to their financial benefit.

Most people are aware they can deduct contributions of money or property they make to, or for the use of, qualified organizations such as museums. Membership fees or dues may also be deducted. However, in both cases, you can deduct only the amount that is more than the value of any benefits you may receive.

Some out-of-pocket expenses may also be deductible, if they are unreimbursed, directly connected with the services you give the institution, expenses you had only because of the services you gave, and not personal, living, or family expenses. If, for example, you are the chosen representative attending the National Docent Symposium or other such convention, you can deduct unreimbursed expenses for travel and transportation, including a reasonable amount for meals and lodging.

If you are required to wear a uniform as part of your docent duties, you can deduct the cost and keep of the uniform. You can deduct unreimbursed out-of-pocket expenses, such as the cost of gas and oil, that are directly related to the use of your automobile while serving as a docent. If you do not want to deduct actual expenses, you can use a standard rate of 12 cents per mile to figure your contribution. You can deduct parking fees and tolls, but for these and all other deductions, reliable written records are required.

As with all tax questions, you should consult a tax expert for information about your specific tax requirements. Personal assistance is also available by calling the IRS at 1-800-829-1040 during regular business hours. If you have access to TTY/TDD equipment, you can call 1-800-829-4059. While this information may be too late for April 15, 2000, do begin to document expenses and keep your receipts for April 15, 2001.
Will There Be Enough Volunteers?

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Generation X'ers and informal learning environments such as museums, zoos, gardens, and science centers. During 1994, the Hispanic population in the U.S. grew by 3.5%. During the same year, the Asian and Pacific Islander population grew by 3.8%, the African-American population by 1.5%, and American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut by 1.5%. The Caucasian (White), non-Hispanic population increased only by 0.4%. Generation X'ers, more than any of their predecessors, are used to living and working in a culturally and ethnically diverse society. As museums and other such agencies attempt to reach new audiences, and to include new cultural and ethnic groups within their volunteer corps, it is this generation that will be most successful at working with these new groups.

The Civics

The best hope for increased numbers of volunteers lies perhaps with the generational cohort called the Civics by Strauss and Howe. As a reaction to the rebelliousness of the Reactive generation, parents of the Civics, as well as society in general, work hard to make sure that these children “fit in.” They grow up to be civic-minded and community oriented, the definition of a good volunteer!

Currently, there are two Civics generations from which to draw volunteers, the so-called GI Generation (age 76 and above) and the Millennial Generation (ages 18 and younger). For the first time in history, one generational cohort has lived long enough to influence their “twin” cohort. Museums that pair these groups in mentoring programs build volunteer programs that will succeed into the next decades.

The Adaptives

The final cohort identified by Strauss and Howe is called the Adaptive generation. They were raised during a secular crisis and view such crises with a mixture of romanticism and a sense of duty. Today’s Adaptives are sometimes called the Silent generation, although in their silence they worked non-violently for civil rights, looked for ways to stay connected, and grew up to be great philanthropists. Born between the GI Generation and the Boomers, the Silent Generation provided the communication bridge between the two. As volunteers, they are steadfast, creative workers. Another Adaptive generation is just being born, a boon, perhaps, to volunteer recruiters 20 years from now.

This theoretical model is, of course, just that — a theory. It concerns itself with the behavior of groups; therefore, individuals within groups may or may not conform to these generalized characteristics. With that in mind, generational theory’s best lesson for volunteer recruiters must be: one size no longer fits all. When planning volunteer programs, generational characteristics should be part of the recruitment package. Finding the right volunteer for every position should then be a little easier.

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Associate Editor

Next issue: Demonstrations and Presentations

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