Getting the Most Out of Volunteering

Kris Roselle, Volunteer Resources Manager

January is a great time for reflection – taking time to identify your goals and interests, including your volunteer experiences, will lead to a richer and more enjoyable life. Think about why you want to volunteer. What causes are important to you? What do you enjoy doing? What skills can you bring to the table? You’re donating your valuable time, so it’s important that you enjoy and benefit from your volunteering. To make sure your volunteer experience is the best that it can be, think about the following:

Know what’s expected: Does your current volunteer role match your skills, your goals and the time you want to spend at Great Parks? Be sure to ask your supervisor about the time commitment, if any training is involved, or if there are any special skills, equipment or clothing needed.

Find out who you will be working with: Will you be interacting with park guests or helping behind the scenes? Will you be working with youth, adults or animals?

Know what the physical challenges are: Will you be walking a lot or doing heavy lifting? Will you be working indoors or out? If you have any allergies, will the volunteer work trigger reactions?

Don’t be afraid to make a change. Don’t force yourself into a bad fit or feel compelled to stick with a volunteer role you dislike. Talk to your supervisor or the Volunteer Resources Department about changing your focus.

Enjoy yourself. The best volunteer experiences benefit both you and Great Parks. If you’re not enjoying yourself, ask yourself why. Is it the task you’re performing or the people you’re with? Are you uncomfortable simply because the situation is new and unfamiliar? Pinpointing what’s bothering you can help you decide how to proceed.

Whether you’re volunteering to challenge yourself, make new friends, learn something new or make a positive difference, volunteer opportunities that match your goals and interests are most likely to be the most fulfilling.
Brenda & Judy McKinney

What is your favorite volunteer activity? (Brenda) I never thought it would be my favorite, but I love helping at the riding center.

What cause are you most passionate about? (Judy) Getting more volunteers for the Special Riders Program at Parky's Farm so everyone in need of equine therapy can receive it. I want to clear the waiting list!

When you’re not at Great Parks, where might we find you? (Brenda) Working during the day and with my beagles most of the other time.

What might surprise us about you? (Judy) I am a cancer survivor. I know what it’s like to feel weak and need help from others just to do daily routines. I had awesome support from my family and friends and I want to support others any way I can.

If you had a superpower, what would it be? (Brenda) Totally spidey senses. I have been bitten by brown recluse spiders multiple times and now think I can sense a spider miles away.

What are three things on your bucket list? (Judy) Take horseback riding lessons, day-hike on long, natural trails with my sister and our beagles, and retire from my job so I will have more time to volunteer at Great Parks!

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Starry Skies
Sat 1/4, 10 a.m.
Senior Girl Scouts have the opportunity to observe the night sky in an inflatable, indoor planetarium while working toward their Senior Sky Badge. Volunteers will help girls in and out of the planetarium and assist with various night sky stations. Meet at the Sharon Centre. To volunteer, contact Sydney Raftery at sraftery@greatparks.org or phone 513-563-4513. For volunteers ages 14 and up. [Interpreter Programs] [Sharon Woods\Education & Events].

East-Side Invasive Plant Removal
Tue 1/7, 9 a.m.
Come out to Avoca Park to help control the invasive shrub species here in Ohio. Learn what invasive plants could be present in your backyards and how to properly remove them. You’ll improve wildlife habitat and get to explore one of Great Parks lesser visited parks. Meet at the Avoca parking lot. To volunteer, contact John Walker at jwalker@greatparks.org or phone 937-302-7717. For volunteers ages 14 and up. [Stew Crew] [Avoca\C&P East].

Chipmunk Shelter Invasive Plant Removal
Tue 1/7, 12–3 p.m.
Join the Woodland Mound Conservation & Parks Team as they remove bush honeysuckle and other invasive plants. You’ll be giving our native trees and woodland flowers new life and opening up a view into the forest that park guests will enjoy for years to come. Meet at the Chipmunk Shelter parking lot. To volunteer, contact Dan Hart at dhart@greatparks.org or phone 513-250-0925. For volunteers ages 14 and up. [Stew Crew] [Woodland Mound\C&P East].

Sharon Woods Invasive Plant Removal
Wed 1/8, 8–11 a.m.
Let’s team up and remove invasive shrubs from the future forest growing along the parcours/fitness trail. Learn what invasive plants could be present in your backyards and how to properly remove them. Meet at the Rocky Creek parking lot. To volunteer, contact Jeremy Barkley at jlbarkley@greatparks.org or phone 724-814-1008. For volunteers ages 14 and up. [Stew Crew] [Sharon Woods\C&P East].

Clearing Out Invasive Winter Shrubs
Sat 1/11, 9–11 a.m.
We’ve done our best to clear the ridge of honeysuckle, but there could be some stragglers that were left behind. In addition, autumn olive is lurking nearby and we don’t want it to invade areas freshly cleared of honeysuckle. Join us as we tackle these two menaces in order to make space for native species. Meet at the Shawnee Lookout Maintenance Building. To volunteer, contact Adam McCosham at amccosham@greatparks.org or phone 513-978-7198. For volunteers ages 14 and up. [Stew Crew] [Shawnee Lookout\C&P West].

Glenwood Gardens Honeysuckle Hunt
Thu 1/16, 9 a.m.–noon
Get ready for the Glenwood Gardens honeysuckle hunt. We’ll be removing this invasive species to improve native wildlife habitat. Meet at the Glenwood Gardens Tech Center off Sheffield Road. To volunteer, contact Shan McClary at smccclary@greatparks.org or phone 513-869-9525. For volunteers ages 14 and up. [Stew Crew] [Glenwood Gardens\C&P Central].
Lake Isabella Invasive Plant Removal
Wed 1/22, 8–11 a.m.
Let’s team up and remove invasive shrub species. Learn what invasive plants could be present in your backyards and how to properly remove them. You’ll also be creating better habitat for our native plants and wildlife. Meet at the Boat House. To volunteer, contact Jeremy Barkley at jbarkley@greatparks.org or phone 724-814-1008. For volunteers ages 14 and up. Stew Crew [Lake Isabella\C&P East].

Chipmunk Shelter Invasive Plant Removal
Thu 1/23, 12–3 p.m.
Join the Woodland Mound Conservation & Parks Team as they remove bush honeysuckle and other invasive plants. You’ll be giving our native trees and woodland flowers new life and opening up a view into the forest that park guests will enjoy for years to come. Meet at the Chipmunk Shelter parking lot. To volunteer, contact Dan Hart at dhart@greatparks.org or phone 513-250-0925. For volunteers ages 14 and up. Stew Crew [Woodland Mound\C&P East].

Winter Hike Series
Sat 1/4, 1/11, 1/18, 1/25 & 2/1
Hikes start at 10 a.m., volunteers must arrive no later than 9:30 a.m.
Join us for this very popular, annual sell-out hike series. Each year hundreds of hearty souls band together in the middle of winter to hike our trails. Why? To explore our parks, learn something new, make new friends and probably also to gobble down a hot, hearty bowl of soup and yummy cookies at the end of the trail.
Sign up for one, several or the whole series! Spots fill up fast and registration is first come, first served. Whether you are interested in leading a group, being follow-up support, or lending a hand serving up soup, we would love for you to join us. Please note that this is an entirely outdoor event, and hikes range between 4-5.5 miles over uneven terrain. Some hikes are a little more challenging than others. Volunteers must be present for a 9:30 pre-hike meeting. To volunteer, contact Suzanne Roth at sroth@greatparks.org or phone 513-385-0075. For volunteers ages 18 and up.

Jan 4
Winton Woods
Chicken noodle soup
Winter Hike [Winton Woods\Education & Events]

Jan 11
Sharon Woods
Chicken and wild rice soup
Winter Hike [Sharon Woods\Education & Events]

Jan 18
Woodland Mound
Vegetable beef barley soup
Winter Hike [Woodland Mound\Education & Events]

Jan 25
Shawnee Lookout
Chili soup and crackers
Winter Hike [Shawnee Lookout\Education & Events]

Feb 1
Miami Whitewater Forest
Bean soup with cornbread
Winter Hike [Miami Whitewater\Education & Events]

Get Certified in First Aid CPR
Sign up for National Safety Council First Aid CPR classes. First Aid CPR is an optional training, free and open to all Great Parks volunteers and employees. Certification cards will be mailed to you approximately 6 weeks after completion of training. All programs will be held in the Employee Training Center at Sharon Woods. Upcoming training dates are:

Tue 1/14, 8 a.m.–12:00 p.m.
Weds 1/29, 8 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Registration closes one-week prior to training so don’t delay. Sign up on line at:

If you register for this training and can no longer attend, please cancel or reschedule by logging into your Bridge account using the link above.

Not able to log into Bridge? Contact the Volunteer Resources Department at volunteer@greatparks.org or phone 513-521-7275 and ask for Kris, Niki or Lauren.

Please record these training hours under First Aid CPR [Training\Risk Management]. Training hours may be doubled. Drive time to and from the training may be included but not doubled.
“One’s Trash is Another’s Treasure”
Moran Slakmon, Sustainability Coordinator

This month, I dug a bit into Great Parks’ waste and recycling history. I was surprised.

On the one hand, the Electronics Recycling Day was a huge success! With Mount St. Joseph University as a partner, more than 500 vehicles arrived in four hours. We collected 64,708 pounds of electronics for recycling. That’s 32.35 tons in one day! 100 participants replied to a survey on sustainability issues. They encouraged us to organize more recycling days, pointing to community involvement as an area directly related to building sustainability in the parks. More than half of those surveyed asked to be involved and want to volunteer.

Another beautiful example is the Holiday Lights Recycling in which Great Parks partner with Cohen Recycling. This initiative is six years old, taking place in six parks. Recycling percentages have increased each year. What a beauty!

However, take a guess at what the ratio of trash bins to recycling bins in parks is? Get ready ...

It’s 5:1. That means there are five times more trash bins than recycling bins. But more important than the numbers, a lack of recycling bins means we prevent our visitors from choosing sustainable options on a daily basis. The electronics recycling event and the holiday lights initiative showed that a sustainable lifestyle is a matter of opportunities and priorities. Although it is not as easy as it sounds, when we offer the public the option to be involved and educated, they’re willing to engage and take responsibility for their environment.

As I keep digging in, I’ll let you know what other treasures I find.

Volunteer Happiness Survey

Great Parks is always looking for ways to make volunteers happier in their roles and to maximize their experience. To do this, we need to hear from you! Please take a few minutes to share your thoughts with our staff. Our happiness survey will only take about 10 minutes to complete. The more people who participate, the better we’ll be able to understand how we can improve your time with Great Parks.

This survey is being conducted through Survey Monkey, an online software system. Survey Monkey may ask you to opt into additional surveys when you are finished taking ours. The additional surveys are not connected to Great Parks and opting in is at your discretion.

If you prefer a paper copy, please send a request to volunteer@greatparks.org

Survey deadline is Friday, January 31, 2020.

To begin the online survey, click on this link.