

Community Solutions

A call to action for volunteers

Do you have time to give?

ShelterCare Brethren Housing
Volunteer with this charity during its 7th Annual Open House. ShelterCare Brethren Housing serves the needs of the mentally disabled. Positions needed for the open house include setup, cashier assistant, artists, musicians, advertising, chef, chef assistant and many more. For more information, contact Gene Obersinner at 686-1262, Ext. 305.

Center for Family Development
Volunteer to be a tutor in the afternoons and/or evenings at the Day Reporting Center in the Department of Youth Services. Hours and days vary, and training is provided. For more information, contact Marcus Poppen at 342-8437.

Beyond War
Put your organizational skills to work coordinating community presentations for this grassroots group committed to ending warfare. A coordinator is needed to explore new opportunities for speakers to present to groups and to schedule volunteers from among a pool of speakers. Contact Martin Jones at 485-5762.

Pro-Bone-O
Volunteer as an assistant at these monthly animal-care clinics. Duties include intake, food and supply distribution, assisting clients with spay/neuter vouchers, providing instructions, completing rabies certificates, and helping with checking outs. Contact Vicki Bockes at 607-8089.

Relief Nursery
This childcare organization needs classroom assistants to help teachers in therapeutic classroom and playground settings. Orientation is required before starting as a volunteer. Contact Kristin Kauble at 343-9706.

Alvord-Taylor
Volunteer to help the development director with many projects, including event planning, fundraisers, newsletter creation and distribution, designing promotional materials, and volunteer recruitment. Alvord-Taylor Independent Living Services is a non-profit human services agency that helps people with developmental disabilities live quality lives. For more information, contact Anna Rendes at 736-3444, Ext. 213.

For more volunteer opportunities, go to www.unitedwaylane.org.

To our readers

This special Volunteer of the Month page will be published during the last week of the month throughout 2009. It is part of the Community Leaders Together initiative by The Register-Guard, United Way of Lane County and local businesses to encourage volunteerism and corporate citizenship. A United Way committee meets monthly to select outstanding volunteers from nominations in five categories: youth and children's services; essentials for life (health and welfare); arts and culture; education and schools; and civic and community. A volunteer does not have to be associated with a United Way agency to be recognized.

To nominate your favorite volunteer, see details following the main feature story on this page.



Suzette Malkasian, a volunteer with Make-A-Wish Foundation, greets Marcus as he steps out of the limo she arranged for him as part of his special wish day.

Collin Andrew/Special Publications

The dream maker

This Make-A-Wish volunteer won't take "no" for answer.

By Linda J. Sellers
Special Publications

Getting people to say "yes" is Suzette Malkasian's specialty. She perfected the skill as the owner and top saleswoman of her own retail clothing store, and now uses her persuasive talents for brightening the lives of seriously ill children through the Make-A-Wish Foundation of Oregon.

In a decade of volunteer work with the charity, Suzette has been a "dream maker" for more than 40 children. She's never been told "no" by the businesses she contacts for donations. "And I've asked for a lot of stuff," she says, laughing at her own audacity.

Suzette's responsibility as a wish coordinator is to find out what the child wants and make it happen. Make-A-Wish is supported by some cash donations, but the charity relies heavily on the generosity of businesses to fulfill the dreams of children with life-threatening illnesses who have typically undergone an intensive course of treatment.

Suzette has garnered donations from airlines, Disney World, Disneyland and many local businesses, including Costco, Dairy Queen and Dominos.

Her latest "wish child," Marcus, asked simply for a laptop computer. Suzette called the manager at Costco and asked the store to donate the computer and all the peripheral equipment. Then she arranged for Marcus and his family to travel to Costco in a stretch limo and be greeted at the door by applauding staff members. Next came the party, complete with cake, balloons and some very nice gifts.

"I try to make the wishes as

Volunteer of the Month Essentials for Life

magical as I can, especially if the child isn't getting on an airplane," Suzette says. "There's nothing in the world like walking into Disneyland. So if they're not doing that, I want the child to have that same feeling of never forgetting the day."

"Suzette is such a great ambassador for the Make-A-Wish organization," says Michael Cotton, Costco's warehouse manager. "She is so passionate about her work. And extremely organized."

Not to mention creative and determined.

One of her wish children asked for a hot tub for the family. Suzette's supervisor was skeptical. No one had ever donated a hot tub before. Suzette not only got the tub, Cedar Works Spas donated its top-of-the-line product and arranged for the setup as well.

"It's so much fun," Suzette says. "People want to help."

Suzette's goal is to someday pull off a no-cost wish. "So far my best is \$39 (cash outlay) for a \$4,000 wish," she reports, "but I'm determined to do one at zero."

Suzette's volunteer efforts are especially important because not everyone can do the work. Many people have the misperception that all wish kids are terminally ill, and prospective volunteers often think it would be too depressing to get involved. The truth is that now most of the children eventually recover.

"People ask me how I do this," Suzette says. "What I do is focus on the positive aspect of making a difference in someone's life. I

forget that these kids are sick."

For other volunteers, the most difficult task of being a wish coordinator is asking for donations. The responsibility terrifies them, and they often don't make it through the training.

For Suzette, it's the easy part, and she feels perfectly matched for the job. "All you have to say is, 'On behalf of Make-A-Wish ...'" she explains. "And people say, 'What can I do?'"

Suzette does more than just ask for donations and plan parties. She also makes public presentations, helps with events and promotes the foundation at every opportunity.

"Her gift is building partnerships in the community to help make the best wish experience possible," says Kara Minkoff of the Make-A-Wish Foundation. "Suzette inspires staff and volunteers. Her commitment to the mission is unwavering, and her ability to find creative solutions is endless."

Raised as a Catholic with the volunteer ethic built in, Suzette is also a member of Assistance League Eugene and volunteers with Riverbend hospital doing bereavement counseling. "I love that work, too," she says.

To make a donation or volunteer with Make-A-Wish, contact the Portland office at 800-934-WISH or www.orwish.org.

Nominate your favorite volunteer

Readers, nonprofits and other local agencies are invited to nominate volunteers for recognition. Forms are available at www.unitedwaylane.org. Or, call United Way at 741-6000 or Bridget Baker at The Register-Guard, 338-2469.

Volunteer Spotlight



Grace Moore
Children and Youth

Grace volunteers as a court officer with the West Eugene Teen Court and has served as a jury member, court clerk, defendant advisor and case presenter. She also participates in Teen Court community presentations and recruitment efforts.

Volunteer hours: About 58 hours in the past year

"Grace has learned every role in Teen Court and is always willing to do whatever task is most needed of her. I see Grace as a key person for both the present and the future of the West Eugene Teen Court."

— Bruce Steinmetz
Eugene Teen Courts



John Tilson
Arts and Culture

As president of the Eugene Opera board, which he has served on since 2001, John leads fundraising efforts and has initiated successful campaigns to sell advertising in the opera's performance programs. His efforts have resulted in increased contributions even in the current economic climate.

Volunteer hours: About 25 per week, more than 1,000 hours in the past year

"John Tilson is outstanding at what he does for Eugene Opera. He contributes not only the hours but the heart."

— Tony Meyer
Eugene Opera board member



Carolyn Vike
Education and Schools

Carolyn volunteers with Assistance League Eugene, where she served as president for two years, ran the thrift shop for two years, and now leads various other efforts, such as shopping events to acquire new clothes for school children.

Volunteer hours: About 7 hours per week

"Carolyn leads by example. She has been a mentor to me and many others who have chosen to serve their community through Assistance League Eugene."

— Kathy Lees
Assistance League Eugene



Craig Soderberg
Civic and Community

Craig is a member of the Pre-Mo MS Charities' golf committee. He helps organize the tournament, gathers items for the silent auction, and recruits sponsors, golfers and volunteers.

Volunteer hours: About 50-60 hours per year

"Craig is an inspiration because he gives his time in so many different ways. He is committed to helping our youth with his school involvement, and he helps raise funds to fight multiple sclerosis here in Oregon."

— Todd Bradshaw
Pre-Mo MS Charities

Partners in Building a Better Future

COMMUNITY LEADERS TOGETHER



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United Way of Lane County **United Way**

SELCO
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SWB

The Register-Guard

These businesses have joined with The Register-Guard and United Way to encourage volunteerism and the support of nonprofits across Lane County through their sponsorship of Community Leaders Together.