

PERSONALIZED RECOGNITION IS BEST... Each Volunteer Is Unique

VOLUNTEER (from volo, velle, volui - be willing) — one who enters himself into service by his own free will.

RECOGNIZE (cogno - to know; recogno - to really know) — to acknowledge the de facto existence of the independence of.

She was presiding over the punch bowl at the Residents' Christmas Party and she was wearing her long white evening gown (which she'd had some trouble financially redeeming from the corner dry cleaner). She was in her glory — a very plump shining angel — the official dispenser of the Holiday cheer. This honor meant more to her, a mental health patient herself, than a gift or certificate.

Never mind other volunteers who said, "WHO was that? An easy answer was "One of Santa's helpers."

He receives his noon meal paid as a courtesy by our Activity Department — most days it's delicious and the main meal of the day. He's a young handicapped man who has a small income and could afford his own lunch, but somehow this small extrinsic reward makes him proud as, interestingly, it does his mother with whom he lives.

Never mind the volunteers who say, "Why aren't we treated, too?" The answer is "Anytime you work all day as Tom does, you are treated to a meal also as a guest of our department."

Each volunteer's recognition should be individualized and it should be ongoing. Recognizing the volunteer's own right to "shape" his work and to be treated as a co-planner, co-problem solver, co-worker and co-evaluator is perhaps the most important part of real recognition. As in working with students, the freer the rein possible, the better. Let him know his presence and his work have enabled an activity to materialize or a goal to be reached. At our Center this may be a change for the better in the physical, mental or spiritual condition of a resident to whom the volunteer has been assigned. Or it may be a new activity planned and evaluated by the volunteer and bringing something not possible without him: a monthly movie with popcorn and punch — a beautiful Vesper Service — a Sing-A-Long — a Wine and Cheese Party.

Recognizing volunteers by sharing information and pertinent results with them may seem obvious. Yet once I watched 100 Little Leaguers sell their hearts out — and they never found out from the adult leadership how well or how badly they did.

Letting volunteers know that their time and work is appreciated is important and needs to be accomplished in the *ongoing* situation. The person helped, of course, can work wonders in gratitude — a smile from a hospital patient or nursing home resident is all the "pay" that most volunteers want. Pins showing years of service, plaques and certificates, engraved silver trays or boxes all have their place, but individualized, ongoing, demonstrated appreciation often means more than these.

In a setting such as ours the volunteer may be serving those unable to thank him, and hence an expression from the Volunteer Coordinator may be substituted and doubly important. In any setting a Volunteer Coordinator should show ongoing recognition of volunteers.

MARY RADCLIFFE
Activities Coordinator
Commonwealth Care Center
Des Moines

