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## A Volunteerism Perspective on the Days after the 11th of September

By [Susan J. Ellis](#)

October  
2001

It's been an overwhelming two weeks since the terrorist attacks in the US on the 11th of September. Whether physically close to New York City "Ground Zero," Washington, DC, western Pennsylvania, or much farther away, the emotional and psychological reactions ripple out to affect just about everyone, as well as past our borders to the rest of the world. One of the ways that many people respond to crisis is to "do something" - write a check, donate blood or items, or give time, talent and energy to a volunteer project formed to provide immediate assistance to victims. Volunteers come forward to do everything from searching for survivors to feeding the rescuers to providing solace to grieving relatives. The list of expected and unexpected roles volunteers have filled in response to the attacks is enormous, not just in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington but in local communities everywhere. As I've said on other occasions, volunteers are the "silver lining" of the cloud of disaster.

Volunteers have received much media attention in these past two weeks - all of it good. This is the one time during which no one minds being called a "volunteer," either. In fact, the word becomes a badge of honor in a crisis. "Volunteer" becomes synonymous with "hero." Participation in rescue or relief efforts when it is not a professional obligation or a paid job is seen as patriotic, courageous, spiritual, and other elevated adjectives. This halo effect is deserved and I add my genuine appreciation to all the rest.

It is also valuable to note, as Robert Leigh of United Nations Volunteers pointed out in an e-mail to me this week, that the outpouring of offers to help in this emergency clearly demonstrates the reciprocal nature of volunteering. In addition to genuinely wanting to help, many volunteers deeply need to be doing something constructive and communal for their own mental health, as an outlet for rage, and to overcome the sense of powerlessness. No apologies necessary and great proof of how such service benefits the giver and as well as the receiver.

But, particularly as time goes by, we in the volunteer field need to ask some important questions. I raise these not to be negative, but to be constructive. I see contradictions in this helping frenzy that I believe can be resolved in positive ways. And, if you believe (or fear) as I do that terrorism attacks may occur again in the future, it is important that we learn from this experience.

### **The Minimal Role of Volunteer Management Professionals**

Emergency response in a city the size of New York mobilizes literally thousands of people, many of whom are paid to be on the front line. The obvious ones are employees such as police, firefighters, FEMA staff, or medical personnel, and the less obvious are Mayoral staff, telephone operators, or crane operators. Also on call are major disaster-related nonprofit organizations, notably the Red Cross. But what also happens is that hundreds (even thousands) of concerned citizens converge on the site of the crisis and surrounding hospitals and offer to help.

Who gets them working? At what? Who turns them away? Why? Who redirects them to other ways to serve?

The Red Cross is experienced in managing large numbers of volunteers in times of natural disasters (along with various other local nonprofit agencies), and recently Volunteer Centers have been preparing themselves to serve as a key component in community emergency response. VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) is a national organization that has worked hard to build a coalition of agencies who do first response work.

In New York City, the Mayor's Voluntary Action Center, a city government agency, has indeed been mobilized to handle some of the workload of the crisis, especially to communicate important emergency information to organizations in their network. But, the extensive and diverse number of volunteer program managers in New York have not been tapped for their expertise. Rustie Brooke, director of NYC/IYV was surprised to see an unknown name on a press release listing the "Volunteer Manager" of the Jacob Javitz Center (coordinating point for the deployment of paid and unpaid workers and supplies). She called to introduce herself and offer help when she learned he was an investment banker who had arrived on the scene the day after the attack and was assigned to "coordinate volunteers" because he had "some organizational training." He, in turn, was amazed to learn that there was a profession of volunteer management and that people in NYC could be of help to him in this work. (Talk about a volunteer rising to the occasion! He deserves everyone's admiration.)

How could this happen? Is it really necessary to re-invent the basics of volunteer management in the middle of this sort of crisis? Why did no one in charge call upon one (or many) of the civilian volunteerism experts in the city? The answer, I'm afraid, is that they didn't even think of it. And that apparently none of our colleagues either volunteered their expertise, gathered others together, or knew someone powerful enough to make a difference. I understand that one factor is that this is not being handled as a local operation, but as a federal one, and a "crime scene" at that. But activity

connected to the disaster is occurring everywhere - and all these efforts can benefit from volunteer management skills.

When you heard of the attack, did you recognize that you were one of the key people with skills that might be needed?

### **Turning People Away**

Last week, I heard a news report that said: "As of today, volunteers are no longer allowed at Ground Zero." It was in the context of the sad news that little hope was left for finding survivors and so the clean up effort would actually go faster with fewer people on the scene (and more machines). But I immediately knew the reporter was wrong in his statement. He meant to say no "unskilled people" would be allowed on the site. In fact, at that time many of the people still working at Ground Zero were still, in fact, volunteers, but they are trained firefighters, construction workers, and others who have the credentials to be of assistance, but who have come from all over the world-at no pay-to help. In time, it may be that only federal, state, and city trained, paid workers remain on the site, but it will take a while.

More important, many newscasts began to say things like: "Please do not come to the Javitz Center. No more volunteers are needed right now. Your checks are most important at the moment." We all can understand that there is such a thing as "too much help." But...is it really possible that every agency in New York City had "enough" volunteers at that moment? Of course not. In fact, one of the longer-lasting tragedies of this nightmare might be the missed opportunities for signing up some amazing volunteers for all sorts of important causes.

I find myself asking:

- When people were turned away, did anyone keep their names and addresses for future contact?
- Were the people turned away asked vital questions, such as what their occupation, education, or skills were - since some types of people were very much still needed? Or was the assumption when someone asked to volunteer that they were nice, but unskilled?
- Were they turned away pleasantly, with thanks? Or shrugged off?
- Did anyone mention where else in the city such people might offer their services? (The New York Cares Web site does have some information <[www.nycares.org](http://www.nycares.org)> if a person is informed enough to visit it.)
- Did volunteer program manager associations in a wide variety of settings make it clear how people could help in the crisis, even if in lower visibility roles?

It is very important to emphasize that New York has done an incredible job under unimaginable circumstances, and I am not criticizing anyone here. It is also evident that ordinary citizens asked to do extraordinary things would understand being "turned away" if other crises were more pressing.

But consider how this tragedy could potentially channel the outpouring of emotion and energy to activities that - in the long term - could truly rebuild New York, not simply be a disaster response.

## Opportunities Still Exist

Every one of us in the volunteer field can still work towards transforming a tragedy into a new direction. Here are some possibilities:

- No matter where you are, you can tap the frustration and sense of powerlessness many people have right now by offering them meaningful volunteer roles. This is not "capitalizing on tragedy." It is community action.
- If your organization is doing any sort of work that directly serves the NY relief effort, your recruitment pitch is obvious. But there are so many other "angles", such as:
- If you work with children, you can point out how important it is right now to demonstrate caring, role model lack of fear, and create a sense of normalcy.
- Similarly, older people may have fearful reactions to the crisis, so volunteers can offer support and caring
- Many people are turning to the arts - museums, performances - as a respite from horrifying t.v. news. What a great way for volunteers to help others while also surrounding themselves with cultural inspiration.
- This is also a good time to stress that "returning to normal" means not forgetting causes and issues that still need attention, from AIDS to homelessness to school violence.

It should be noted that some volunteer program leaders have, in fact, already seized the moment and bravo to them. Also, some online sites such as VolunteerMatch <<http://www.volunteermatch.org>> have made a special effort to respond quickly to the crisis with a long-term view in mind.

## Those Millions of Dollars

Interestingly, in recent days there has been a good bit of discussion in the American media about the enormous amount of money raised in the name of the disaster victims. It looks as if the final total of funds will be unprecedented, coming from an endless variety of sources. The media is raising some good questions: How will the money be spent? How can donors be assured it will reach the right people? What will be the effect on financial contributions to "regular" charities, particularly as the December holiday season approaches?

Needless to say, there has not been similar questioning about volunteer involvement. First, let's note that volunteers (board members, at a minimum) will undoubtedly be part of the decision making about the expenditure of the money and its stewardship for future needs, such as scholarships for orphaned children. But I'd hope that someone, somewhere - and it can be YOU and ME - begins to ask what is happening to those volunteers who came forward in crisis and may - or may not - have been well utilized then. Those people are still there to mobilize.

## International Year of Volunteers 2001

Many of us in the United States have been critical that our country has done so little to acknowledge the International Year of Volunteers. Maybe we've been given a new chance! Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could celebrate the efforts of the disaster volunteers in the context of all volunteers and IYV2001? We can broaden the applause beyond Ground Zero and note that volunteering brings out the very best of people, everywhere in the world. There is nothing good to say about the events of September 11, but maybe it can unify citizens everywhere in positive ways.

As Rustie Brooke said to me so well: "We are showing that participatory democracy can and does work. IYV is 'International Unity through Volunteerism.'"

### Your Response

I feel torn between emotional and cerebral reaction to current events, and it's important to me that this Hot Topic not be misinterpreted as unconstructive or even obstructive - and certainly not as criticism of the extraordinary efforts of so many incredible people (volunteer and paid) whose contributions have been important beyond measure.

I have tried to pose my reflections more as a series of questions for future discussion in volunteerism professional circles. Maybe they're rhetorical or unanswerable. But perhaps together we can decide on the answers we most want to work toward.

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***Submitted 2002May21 by Camille Tumolo, Director, Volunteer Services, New York Presbyterian Hospital and President, NYSADVS, New York, New York***

In your October "hot topic" you emphasize the lack of involvement of professional volunteer administrators in the aftermath of the 9/11 disaster. As the Director of Volunteer Services at New York Presbyterian Hospital and President of the New York State Association of Directors of Volunteers, I can assure you that my colleagues and I at all the hospitals in New York City and the tri-state area were overwhelmed that day and days to follow by what needed to be done immediately. When you are in the throes of a horrific disaster of the magnitude we found ourselves in and utter chaos all around, there is little time to think about the future and what role people might play in it.

My particular hospital has about 2,500 dedicated volunteers who come in to work every day of the year. When the disaster hit and we were unable to use land or cell phones to call volunteers in, they just came on their own, knowing that we would need their assistance. For obvious reasons, these volunteers have all been thoroughly screened and trained prior to joining our volunteer program. Although each volunteer has a regular assignment, they came in willing to do whatever was necessary. In addition to all that needed to be done, we were overwhelmed with over four hundred

well meaning individuals from the community, who were not regular volunteers, but were desperate to help in any way possible.

My staff and I had to juggle what truly needed to be done, such as deploying our volunteers to where they were needed and dealing the people who came in to our office in huge numbers desperate to do something. Although with the best intentions, these people could not be of much assistance and in some cases got in the way of our staff and had to be asked to leave. I know this sounds harsh, but in a time of crisis and chaos, the last thing we need are masses of people wandering around trying to be helpful. The volunteer administrative staff could not do what they had to do and cope with the outside people at the same time. We did politely explain to these well-meaning people that we could not utilize them at that time and took their name and number.

For the future, the hospital administration has made the decision that in the event of another disaster, uncredentialed people will not be allowed in the building at all. The hospital will effectively be in lock down to ensure the safety of our patients and staff. Although you state that you are not being critical, I must say that the overall tone is that volunteer administrators were "asleep at the switch" in New York and were not utilized effectively. I have little patience for those people who did not personally live through the horrors of 9/11 and after and yet have their opinion of how things should have been handled.

Those of you who were not personally involved cannot possibly imagine in your wildest dreams what those days were like. I personally am proud beyond measure of the work that my fellow DVS's did at each and every hospital in New York City and beyond. We are prepared, we have effective disaster plans in place and we know how to effectively utilize the thousands of volunteers who dedicate themselves to working in healthcare on a regular basis. Others should re think their priorities and consider becoming a volunteer for an organizations that can use their skills in times of peace as well as disaster.

*Posted 02Jan24*

***Submitted by Nora Simmons, Volunteer Services Coordinator, Jefferson County Open Space, Golden, CO, USA***

Kudos to Diane Knudeson and her team in Boulder County for recognizing and addressing the need for professional volunteer managers for communities in crisis! Offering additional support to cities at a time when those that manage volunteer programs are stretched to their limits will more effectively and professionally place the overwhelming throngs of citizens wishing to help in some manner. Let's hope her team will never be called on, but feel assured if they are they will make a great difference in relief and recovery efforts by lending their professional expertise.

*Posted 02Jan15*

***Submitted by Janine Winter, WTC Emergency Task Force, USA***

Before Sept. 11th, I was a comedian and bartender. After, I have been blessed and honored to be a part of a volunteer WTC Emergency Task Force, sponsored through the State Senate to ensure the

changing needs of the emergency rescue personnel were being met. During the first month after the attacks, I was inspired daily by the outpouring of love as action I was witnessing in our community. I was also equally upset that NO ONE was coordinating what seemed to me, to be nothing short of a divine communal calling.

I can't express to you how grateful I am to have found your article on the Web. The questions you have raised are at the core of my tempered but impatient response to the federal, state and local offices that did not address what was, and is, the best way to heal ourselves--through service. I raised this question often to many powerful people, all of whom showed interest, but did nothing. It is discomfiting to realize that the closer you get to any political office, the less you can affect. We continue to work, unaffiliated and happy.

It is a huge comfort to me, feels like breathing deep, really, to read your words. Proof and confirmation that Democracy lives in individuals, not as institutions. It just so happens that I was the secretary for our team, and I have lists and lists of volunteers who traveled from every borough and almost every state.

*Posted 01Nov30*

***Submitted by Diane Knudsen, Boulder County Volunteer Initiatives Coordinator, Boulder CO USA***

I took seriously this hot topic and, with agreement from Boulder County's volunteer program managers, wrote the proposal shown below. The County's Emergency Management Director will meet with us in January to discuss how we will implement. The Sheriff and the County Commissioners think the proposal is excellent. We will be adding city and non-profit volunteer program managers to the plan also.

## **ORGANIZING VOLUNTEER CITIZEN RESPONSE TO A CATASTROPHIC EVENT**

The events of September 11 and the response from citizens who urgently wanted to volunteer in some way, particularly in New York City, have prompted the Volunteer Program Managers in Boulder County government to offer their expertise in case of an act of terrorism or any catastrophic event in this area.

As trained professionals in volunteer management, we have useful skills to offer in volunteer organization and direction. We recognize that we do not have expertise in disaster response, but believe that our volunteer management skills would be useful within the total disaster response plan.

Immediately following a traumatic event, great confusion could occur as hundreds or thousands of well-meaning people, wanting to help, descend on an area. However, placing our organizational skills into the total plan now could, at the time of an event, lessen confusion, mitigate the possibilities for citizen frustration and disappointment when offers of help are refused, and move volunteers more efficiently into areas where their skills are needed.

We do not propose taking responsibility for the volunteers who are part of disaster response teams, such as firefighters, rescuers, medical personnel, and public safety staff. They are trained and organized. Nor do we propose taking responsibility for agency volunteers with awareness, knowledge, and skills within their own environment, such as hospitals, mental health centers, and the Red Cross.

We do offer volunteer management at a location where citizens who want to help or spontaneously show up at the disaster site could be directed, thus relieving rescuers who are managing the scene of being responsible for new arrivals. At that location, we and others with volunteer program management expertise could 1) be the recruiting point for teams or agencies/organizations that need immediate help with disaster response; 2) welcome, screen, refer or defer, and thank those who come for a myriad of reasons to volunteer; and 3) when there is no further immediate need, suggest other avenues for involvement in the community through its agencies and organizations.

Knowing that we can be prepared for the human response that will come following a major community disaster, we look forward to discussion about this segment of the disaster preparedness plan in Boulder County.

Diane Knudsen, Boulder County Volunteer Initiatives  
Jan Allan, Justice System Volunteer Program  
Lynette Anderson, Parks and Open Space Department  
Larry Colbenson, Parks and Open Space Department  
Emily Cooper, Aging Division, Community Services Department  
Tessa Davis, Project Work Together  
Cole Early, Parks and Open Space Department  
Sarah Jussen, Sheriff's Office  
Donna Koehler, Health Department  
Eric Schulz, Social Services Department

*Posted 01Oct25*

***Submitted by Susan Ellis, writer of this Hot Topic***

Many thanks to Frank Tsu for his posting (and for his valiant efforts in NYC!), Especially since we have not had anyone make a comment since Oct. 15, when the responses from several other New Yorkers may inadvertently have made readers cautious about saying anything that seemed to "argue" with anyone so directly involved with the events of and after September 11. Please know that I value the comments of all the colleagues who have shared their feelings and always welcoming opposing views.

Just for the record, let me share something that I did not include in the original posting. As it happened, I was in New York City on September 11. I had a mid-day appointment with a client and was on an Amtrak train traveling from Philadelphia when I eyewitnessed the collapse of the second World Trade Tower building from across the New Jersey Meadowlands. Horrifying and surreal - and



as close to war as I ever want to come. I tell this simply to note that I was not completely viewing the situation from a distance.

It's important to me, however, that we return this Hot Topic discussion to two key points:

1. The tragedy in New York is without precedent, but may not be the last incident of significant proportions to hit places in the free world over the next months and years. If a crisis hits your community, are you sure that people who want to volunteer will be properly welcomed, placed, referred, and thanked? In the days following the initial outpouring of offers to help, will local organizations be able to make their needs visible to the public and coordinate their efforts to channel important aid?
2. If you conclude that there was "no need" for directors of volunteers to respond to this crisis or you feel that directors of volunteers without emergency aid expertise were not needed, what does that say about our profession? I was never advocating that any colleague go down to Ground Zero, disobey orders from the Mayor, or place her or himself in harm's way. But I still believe that people skilled in the requirements of volunteer coordination have a key role to play and can adapt their skills to any situation. Officials at FEMA, the police department, fire department, hospitals had to call the shots as to WHAT needed to be done. That is not what volunteer program managers do. But who is better at welcoming prospective helpers, listening with that "third ear" to what peoples' talents may be (especially if not immediately visible), monitoring that people are actually connected to real work, seeing who is wandering away in frustration, and creating a positive atmosphere? If that isn't our job, or if we think anyone can do it as well as we ought to, then I'm not sure we have a profession.

I'll say it again. New Yorkers are heroes and everyone did their best. But can we learn from what happened and rise to the occasion somewhere else? Frank has already agreed to work with me to find good answers to this pertinent question - what do YOU think?

*Posted 01Oct25*

***Submitted by Frank Tsu, Civilian Volunteer Crisis Relief, NY, NY, USA***

As the volunteer at Jacob Javits whom Susan Ellis mentioned in her hot topic, I am very honored to contribute to this forum. With so many experts representing the various agencies I am encouraged as a volunteer by the amount of discussion taking place.

We all have been presented with an opportunity to become more actively involved. This is certainly a time for everyone to reconsider where we are and how we can use our skills better.

No one should feel threatened by what was or was not done in response to the WTC attack. The overall size and impact that these attacks have had on just New York City has left even the most prepared agency scrambling. At the same time it enabled all of us to embrace the spirit of cooperation

and support that has sprung forth. The amount of support directed towards New York City be it in the form of volunteers, donations, or funding has been incredible.

Certainly the world knows that the United States has pulled together. At the same time, all of us must realize that things have changed. Americans now understand the way so many other nations' citizens understand that modern warfare is aimed at civilians. Let none of us fail to learn from the countless lessons being taught as a result of these attacks.

With so many people willing to help, anyone who has the experience and the knowledge to point people in the direction of opportunities, should not hesitate to use their expertise. The volunteers who have come forth are not simply responding to the crisis. They all share the desire to do just about anything to help New York City. The skills of professional volunteer managers are extremely relevant especially knowing that days after the attack thousands of people continued to come forward. Unfortunately they were immediately turned back because thousands of other individuals were already helping as volunteers. What would have happened if the power of those additional volunteers had been harnessed? Might not other tasks been accomplished? Wouldn't we all then benefit?

Volunteerism for me has many functions with respect to this disaster. I was able to start healing by becoming actively involved and affecting change in a positive way. I was able to help effectively with an open heart and an open mind. I formed connections with groups and individuals alike that are stronger and deeper than connections I have had for many years. I have reconnected with the city in which I grew up and I have come to realize how important it is for all of us to remain involved. I am thankful for all of the people who came forward and who continue to come forward. I hope we can all continue to lend our strengths and remain connected as our nation recovers and moves on to the next step.

*Posted 15Oct01*

***Submitted Kaye Derman, Mount Sinai, NY USA***

I feel that my colleagues in New York City have expressed the situation that many volunteer administrators were faced with, immediately following the September 11 attack. What I would like to add is that I found membership in a professional association - in this case Greater New York Association of Director of Volunteer Services (GNYADVS) - to be very helpful and comforting. Colleagues from our state association e-mailed those of us in New York City, offering their support. I knew that if I needed to quickly run an idea by another association member, I could. As a result of the network that my association provides, I also received up-to-date information on many citywide relief-planning efforts. I have always believed in the power of a professional association, and do urge colleagues around the country to join and support their respective associations. The past month has reinforced the value of a professional network.

*Posted 15Oct01*

***Submitted by Harriette Heller, Executive Director, Mayor's Voluntary Action Center, New York City***

On Tuesday, September 11th, the face of New York City, and indeed the face of American, was changed. Our Office, The Mayor's Voluntary Action Center, is located seven blocks north of The World Trade Center. On that terrible morning, we were evacuated fifteen minutes after the second tower was hit. While trying to walk uptown, some of us looked back and some did not. By now, you know what those who looked back saw.

Our computers and telephones were down, and we had no access to our database; therefore, most of the MVAC's employees were relocated to The Brooklyn Navy Yard. There, we have a satellite office that houses our Clothing Bank. The New York City Office of Emergency Management state of the art command center was located at 7-World Trade Center. Within a few days, an emergency command center was re-established in an empty pier on the river. Assistant Jerry Pannozzo and I were asked to report to The Command Center and distribute the ever-changing information relating to the disaster to the not-for-profit community.

Jerry put a list together of NY AVA and GNYADVS members, umbrella agencies and anyone else we could think of. We then asked the agencies on our list to pass the information along. Meetings were set up around the city in central locations to give further clarifications about an ever-changing situation. On October 9th we returned to our office, still without telephones and Internet access. The professional volunteer managers in agencies throughout New York City were working within their agencies, responding to the ongoing needs.

I cannot overstate the horrific difficulties that all New Yorkers were facing in the first two weeks. Volunteer managers responded to the ongoing needs of their agencies as well as the enormous needs brought on by this tragedy with courage and clear thinking. In regards to The Javits Center and Ground Zero, it was quickly realized that the decision to use The Javits Center as a depot for supplies and volunteers was problematic; the center was closed for that purpose in a very short time.

Unfortunately, the media instructed people to go to the Javits Center for days after it was closed. Not hundreds, not thousands, but tens of thousands of calls from people wanting to help were received through the various hot lines that were established to aid victims of the tragedy. Could it have been handled better - of course - but at the time, when New Yorkers were living in a war zone, mistakes were made.

No one had developed a system to deal with 100,000 calls from prospective volunteers who were compromising the rescue efforts. Now, knowing what we know, a system that could handle that many people is currently in the design phase.

*Posted 15Oct01*

***Submitted by Gloria Deucher, Director of Volunteer Services, Thirteen/WNET, New York, New York USA***

During the first couple of days of the disaster I had the distinct privilege to observe (and assist) Red Cross and OEM staff- people who are highly skilled in emergency management. These people were in no way "re-invent[ing] the basics of volunteer management" as they shifted the relief effort into gear.

Neither I, nor the majority of my colleagues, would have presumed to be more adept at volunteer management than these professionals. We were not missing opportunities; we were letting the professionals do their jobs.

When asked if I recognized that I was "one of the people whose skills might be needed" in the days following the disaster, the answer is a resounding YES. I, and other volunteer administrators throughout the city, used those skills right where they could best be applied- in our own organizations. In the days immediately following the attack, my company's staffing levels were at 1/3 of normal, as was typical throughout the city. My management would have been dumbfounded had I suggested going over to the Javits Center to see if I could help out over there instead.

To suggest that "none of our colleagues volunteered their expertise, gathered together or knew someone powerful enough to make a difference" is a gross misrepresentation of the situation here in New York City. The Mayor's Voluntary Action Center, having been evacuated from their offices and having lost phone, e-mail and computer capabilities was back on line within days despite being scattered all over the city in temporary offices. They kept all of us informed and in touch. Message after message went out regarding relief efforts and resources. It's true that nobody was tugging on the mayor's coattail demanding recognition and praise for our efforts and capabilities as volunteer administrators. Perhaps it didn't occur to any of us to capitalize on this unspeakable horror as a real publicity coup for our profession.

The Red Cross and OEM put out a very clear request for skilled (and licensed) medical and mental health workers. Even so, hundreds more volunteers showed up than could be mobilized safely and effectively and many well-intentioned people who were aching to help were turned away. In an ideal situation, each one of these people would have been asked to fill out an application and given information about volunteer opportunities throughout the city. Needless to say, conditions weren't ideal. Besides, my experience was that people wanted to do something immediately and directly related to disaster relief. Their minds were not on working behind the scenes in public television or a nursing home assignment in Queens.

What we know from this experience is there is a tremendous feeling of community and generosity in this city and its suburbs. There will be much work to do and many challenges in the weeks, months and years ahead. As volunteer administrators, it will be incumbent upon us to keep that spirit alive and to channel those resources effectively.

*Posted 11Oct01*

***Submitted by Gina Ritter, EMS Youth Corps Director, EMT-D, Rural Health Comm Systems, New York, USA***  
Our volunteer network had a hard time finding resources on IYV and had an even harder time getting the media interested (they hadn't heard about it in their 'grapevine'). We worried that this huge event we've planned over the last year to celebrate the IYV would flop this coming Saturday. However, now with the influx of patriotism and new interest in volunteerism, we are hopeful that the event will be bigger than we can handle! We are showing our diversity yet unity through this event with all kinds of

booths and talents with an international flavor. Indeed something good has come from something so bad.

*Posted 11Oct01*

***Submitted by Sheri Wilensky, Director, Volunteer Outreach, American Lung Association, New York, NY***

Sorry for the length of my reply but I guess I have a lot to say! Susan's comments offer much food for thought but I unfortunately feel that this has served as an inaccurate portrayal of what has and will continue to transpire here in New York City. Susan comments that "the volunteer program managers in New York have not been tapped for their expertise." I disagree with that statement on many levels.

Firstly, I do consider myself to be skilled in volunteer management but I do not have the skills needed to coordinate volunteers in a disaster situation. I won't even pretend to know the first steps that need to be taken or what are the city, state and federal agencies that are involved in such a process. There are however agencies with those skills most noticeably the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army. This is their area of expertise and I applaud them for the work that they do.

Additionally, each of us had responsibilities to our own organizations and the work that was being done in our own offices to help with the tragedy efforts that have not been publicized. Susan asks "Is it really necessary to re-invent the basics of volunteer management in the middle of this sort of crisis?" but I don't agree that the basics of volunteer management are applicable at a time like this. She continues to ask, "Why did no one in charge call upon the civilian volunteerism experts in the city? The answer I'm afraid is that they didn't even think of it." I agree that they probably didn't but given the enormity of what was happening, I wouldn't expect anyone to. And as someone who lives in Manhattan as well as works here, I'm glad that their attention was on more pressing needs at that time than how do we practice sound volunteer management to coordinate those wanting to volunteer.

Susan comments on the announcement that volunteers were no longer needed at Ground Zero and guesses that what was meant was that no unskilled volunteers were needed. But, reality as told to me by "skilled" volunteers working down there was that they were being sent home too because there were too many people down there trying to help and that they were actually hindering the efforts rather than helping. Many were sitting around with nothing to do not because of lack of coordination but rather because there was a limit to what could be done. I was told by a nurse that I met who was working down there that she was impressed with how orderly the activities were at the Javitz Center where she was and how well organized things seemed to be.

Susan asks when I heard of the attack did I recognize that I was one of the key people with skills that might be needed. As I mentioned above, I don't agree that I have the skills needed since I do not and have never worked in disaster management. Additionally, we were all asked by the mayor to stay away from the downtown area so that the rescue and relief workers could do their jobs. Where my skills were best utilized at that time was providing comfort to my friends who had missing family members.

Posted 11Oct01

**Submitted by Alina Molina, Director of Voluntary Initiatives, Community Service Society of New York, New York, New York**

On the days following the September 11 disaster, there was an overwhelming response from New Yorkers, and from people all across the country, who wanted to volunteer and help in any way they could.

As was mentioned, the Red Cross is experienced in deploying and managing large numbers of volunteers in times of natural disasters. That is what they do. They are to be greatly commended for coordinating the paid and volunteer disaster relief efforts in New York City, Washington, D.C., and western Pennsylvania. The Mayor's Voluntary Action Center (MVAC), a city government agency only a few blocks away from the World Trade Center, was directly impacted by the disaster. Phone lines and e-mail were down for several days following the attacks and some are still down. As was the case with most businesses nearby, staff were not allowed to go back to work in their offices and are just now able to return on a limited basis. Despite these setbacks, MVAC leaders quickly mobilized New York City's nonprofit community to discuss what their agencies could do to help in the relief efforts.

For several days, much media coverage focused on the attacks and what could be done to help. This included donating blood, contributing supplies, and volunteering. People came out to give blood in record numbers. Contributions of material goods were so overwhelming that relief coordinators came to the realization that relief efforts were being impeded as a result. Requests for volunteers with specific and specialized skills were media blitzed all over New York City's newspapers and television networks. Hundreds came forward, and long waiting lists resulted for even these highly specialized volunteer positions.

Yes, to answer the question posed, NYC agencies did have enough volunteers in the days immediately following the disaster. As much as people want to help during times of crises, not all problems can be immediately solved by volunteers. The volunteer managers I know were very attentive to the needs of prospective volunteers coming forward to help and strove to engage them however, and whenever, it was appropriate. New York City's volunteer managers are responding proactively to the longer-term ramifications of the disaster and are thoughtfully developing ways in which to engage volunteers for what will be the ever-increasing needs of our city. Many agencies are now organizing special initiatives to counsel grieving families, educate children to fight prejudice, help survivors and displaced workers receive government benefits and find new jobs, and the list goes on and on.

It bears repeating that New York City's long-term needs will be vast. As a community, we are directing our energies and considerable experience in mobilizing volunteer resources in meeting the challenges ahead. New York City volunteer managers were not sleeping on the job when they were needed most. They were letting the disaster relief organizations do their jobs. They were helping to guide volunteers where they could be most helpful.

*Posted 09Oct01*

***Submitted by Kim Sanecki, Volunteer Coordinator, City of Coral Springs, Florida, U.S.A.***

Ditto, Susan!!! As a volunteer coordinator who is also trained in disaster response I was frustrated at not being able to DO SOMETHING!!! In addition, who would I have called to offer support? I did send an e-mail to Mayor Giuliani on behalf of the National Association of Volunteer Programs in Local Government to advise of our support. This is a wake up call to change the future direction of what our role is in the event of a disaster and the aftermath.

*Posted 11Oct01*

***Submitted by Gerald (Jerry) Pannozzo, CVA, Assistant Director, Mayor's Voluntary Action Center and 2nd Vice President, NY AVA, New York, NY, U.S.A.***

In response to, "...apparently non of our colleagues either volunteered their expertise, gathered others together, or knew someone powerful enough to make a difference." We took the "hit" in NYC-- an unbelievable event. Cell phones, phone lines, television -- became compromised communication links. My priorities were first family and friends and secondly colleagues, agency staff, and volunteers -- some witnessed horrific events on September 11th.

My role as a citizen was to be a good soldier and follow the orders of my government leaders. Don't go below 14th Street, relocate your office to the Brooklyn Navy Yard, report to O.E.M., etc. Shortly after the WTC disaster I managed to fulfill one of my public speaking engagements. I spoke to a new national service alliance for the same-gender-oriented community. I used this as a platform to educate the audience about the value of long-term volunteer commitment, encouraged them to hang in there because there was still much to do, and reminded them that they were uniquely positioned since they had hooked up with Rowena at the NYC Red Cross prior to September 11th. And I listened to them.

Three weeks into my new Job at the Mayor's Voluntary Action Center, I was introduced to OEM, FEMA, SEMO, VOAD and media problems. I learned you need to answer ethical questions before collecting data -- why collect it, what will you collect, how will the data be used, and where will the economic and human resources come from? (An organization did invest in this project.) I learned my colleagues were doing what they do -- managing their volunteer programs, serving clients, sharing information as fast as they received it, and attending meetings that were being organized to address short and long range needs. Those I spoke to did not see this as an opportunity for media attention with regard to our profession -- rather they were dealing with the "hit" we took.

I was frustrated with the expectations of some that we should not use those management skills we have fine tuned -- identifying agency needs, targeted recruitment, screening, orienting and training, and effective placement. Therefore, I arrived at the conclusion that it was best for Red Cross, Salvation Army, and the Hospitals (those focused on disaster relief) to lead and my role was to support them. If I hadn't looked out our office windows and seen the burning World Trade Center towers perhaps my perception of the situation would be different -- as well as my actions the

following weeks. However, that is what I saw and my perception of a disaster and disaster response is forever altered.

*Posted 9Oct01*

***Submitted by Jenny Girard, Manager, Youth Service Program, Volunteer Center of San Mateo County, California***

Thanks for the opportunity to take what has been quite a challenge for our society and reflect upon it in light of our work as volunteer managers. I am from the Bay Area, CA and was in NYC for vacation during the events of September 11th. I was safe, with friends and family, and I watched and participated in all that happened as all of us did. I struggled a lot, however, with what I could or should do to help. Immediately I guessed that volunteer and blood donation response would overflow--I had no doubts about that from the start.

Our human spirit lifts us all up to do good work in all times, especially times of great need. But in the days following the attack I kept wondering how I could help--as a volunteer manager. With communication inconsistent, I had no way of knowing how to inform people that I could help with volunteer management. I did not know where to go, who to contact and how to let people know that, though I am not a firefighter, welder or union worker, I have some unique skills that could make an impact in the situation. I also did not want to join in the burden of the masses and promote the stress of all the thousands of volunteers wanting to help. So I watched from a slight distance and was present for my dear friends, many of whom were experiencing much loss.

I share these reflections mostly because I had not reflected on what I was doing or thinking on September 11th until your article helped me remember. I also share these thoughts with the hope that our field, all of us who work to harness and manage volunteers of all ages, can take action (and soon) which will make it easier for us--& our colleagues--to help each other. If I had known that there was a place or way for me to tell someone "hey, let me help. I manage volunteers all the time, for a living" and had I also felt relatively certain that those I told would understand the uniqueness of volunteer management experience, I know I would have been doing my work in NYC.

I think we should take your article and this experience as a call for national, even international, preparation of volunteer managers to develop ways to be mobilized in the future--maybe we can consider a website which is specifically launched to provide details for volunteer managers during the time of emergencies. And all of us who work in Volunteer Centers or are otherwise connected to volunteers must know where to go to find out what we can do if we are able to help. Though I know now that what was best for me in NYC was what I did--care for myself and those near me--It was hard knowing that I had professional skills to share with that community and that my ability to do so was hampered. I look forward to seeing how this world changing event empowers us all to prepare the volunteer management community in the future.

*Posted 08Oct01*

***Submitted by Andrew Leone, Programs Director, Volunteer Broward, Florida, USA***



It became apparent very early on after the attack that "unaffiliated" individuals calling to volunteer their services weren't just calling to see what they could do, but also to grieve. It was imperative that even as we were taking these calls at our Volunteer Center in Broward County, Florida, and we knew that only medical or mental health personnel volunteers were being recruited for Ground Zero at that time, we had to take the time to do a full intake, commiserate and explain why it was best to make monetary donations to the various Relief Funds, as opposed to shipping bottled water to New York; why clothes and canned food may not be needed as much as we would need them after a hurricane; why it was important to look at the long term needs of the various local relief agencies once the ripple effects of the terrorist acts would start being felt here in our service/tourism based economy. There is almost always something a volunteer can do: if not now, soon. And it's the Volunteer Center's responsibility to not let that resource go away empty handed.

*Posted 08Oct01*

***From Energize***

When we sent out the monthly Energize "Update" last week, we received a computer-generated "bounce back" response that was so relevant to this Hot Topic we thought we'd share it with you. All identifying features have been changed to protect the not-so-innocent!

>>I will be out of the office starting 10/03/2001 and will not return until 10/13/2001.

Please ignore the out of office. I am in the office.

Thank you for contacting the Agency X Volunteer Office to offer assistance with the World Trade Center disaster.

Due to the overwhelming response from concerned citizens like yourself, we are no longer in need of Volunteer Help for the World Trade Center Disaster.

Another way you can help is to send a donation to the Agency X Disaster Relief Fund, [address].

Thank you for your caring and your support during this very difficult time.<<

*Posted 08Oct01*

***Submitted by Judy Groff, NC Cooperative Extension, NC***

I had most of the same concerns about lack of utilization of volunteer manager expertise as I listened to the news accounts about volunteer help abounding. Maybe something positive will emerge from this crisis and the realization that the potential exists for more terrorist attacks. A disaster response protocol seems to be called for. Cooperative Extension and numerous other agencies have been developing one relative to natural disasters in the Southern Region. We have so many hurricane, ice and snow storms it became very important. I lobbied hard to ensure the protocol included provisions for volunteer involvement from needs assessment on through and for volunteer manager expertise

to match volunteers and their skills to needs. The tasks are monumental at the time of crisis so it helps for protocols to be in place. I will be alert for opportunities I hear about and forward them to you. Unfortunately, Cooperative Extension, like volunteer administrators, tends to be overlooked as a resource for solving problems. Good job.

*Posted 08Oct01*

***Submitted by Linda L. Darling, Director, Development & Marketing, Towards Employment, Cleveland, OH***

I have been caught up in these events as an observer, New Yorker by birth, and as a career nonprofit management professional. I have been deeply touched by the heroism and charity of the people of our nation (and of the outpouring of goodwill from people of other nations). Indeed, it has often brought me to tears. On the grand scale, look what we have accomplished in barely 4 weeks! Raised nearly a billion dollars in donated funds, allocated hundreds of billions in federal monies, and mobilized thousands of volunteers along with our military. To a person, everyone says how meaningful their involvement is. My thoughts wander to the future. What if our leadership could bring a similar sense of urgency to the greatest challenges we, as a society, face? With one month of volunteering & giving, we could build homes and apartments for every homeless and poorly housed family in our country. Six months later we could clean every brownfield and polluted waterway. We could rebuild decaying schools and bring new life to the classroom. We, as professionals, have the vision. Lets engage our leaders, so they can engage our nation's collective passion and energies.

*Posted 08Oct01*

***Submitted by Kelle Rimmel, Volunteer Management Consultant, Santa Clara County, California***

Working in Northern California in the field of disaster volunteer management, we know that every disaster is a learning experience. There is no way to predict (or imagine) all of the different types of disasters we could face, but we can take some steps to plan for them. The first step is for volunteer managers to be part of their organization's emergency response plan and make sure that emergency planners in their community know who they are and what they can do BEFORE a disaster strikes. Admst the chaos and crisis of a response, the chances of being effectively activated are much higher if communication and planning has taken place prior to the incident. It is important for volunteer management professionals (Volunteer Centers, DOVIA's, etc.) both individually or in groups to introduce themselves and the resources they can offer to local(city/county) emergency management officials prior to a disaster. Most emergency management officials I have worked with welcome skilled resources and understand that managing volunteers in a disaster is an issue they will have to deal with, particularly handling "convergent" volunteers, those who spontaneously show-up and want to help after a disaster. While systems may not be in place to immediately place every volunteer where they want to be (such as at ground zero or in the front lines of a response) just having a system in place for registering volunteers and taking their name and contact information is the first step. Most emergency management officials have enormous jobs and limited resources, so if you want to play a role in your community, it is best to be pro-active and seek them out to offer your services as a volunteer management professional. Volunteer management organizations can be a key player at the table of community disaster planning and can serve a vital function should a disaster ever strike.

*Posted 08Oct01*

***Submitted by Sheryl Simons, Volunteer Coordinator, MI***

As a volunteer coordinator at a women's shelter I am trying to present articles in our area about volunteering locally in the aftermath of the tragedy. We have already received notice that our funding has been cut in several areas. We are the front line in a war of terrorism in the home. This war is every bit as real as any other war. Just ask the victims (nearly one hundred in Michigan in the last year) who died due to domestic violence. This is a crime that is not reported as it should be. We are not aware of the statistics. We have an enemy outside our country whom we fear, while many enemies are right in our own homes. Let's stop the violence!!!

*Posted 05Oct01*

***Submitted by Louise Shivers, Coordinator, Office of Volunteer Services, Monmouth Medical Center an affiliate of the Saint Barnabas Health Care System,***

I am a volunteer manager at Monmouth Medical Center, a New Jersey Hospital just across the water from World Trade Center. Shortly after the planes hit the Twin Towers on September 11, my hospital was contacted and told to be ready to receive some of the "over flow" injured. We immediately went into "Code Green", our disaster plan.

With that among other things, security was stepped up at least 10 fold and officers began checking the identification of everyone entering the building. Anyone without proper ID was not admitted. I was very pleased when the first person from the community came in off the street to offer their help, the security officers immediately called me. Because I happened to have had a large amount of my hospital volunteers on hand to help that day; because our volunteers are screened and trained; and because we really didn't know who these people were, we couldn't use them. But I personally greeted each person who came to volunteer their services (approximately 25). I explained that at this time we had everything under control and I took their name, phone number, address and occupation/skill and told them that if we did need extra help, I would definitely call them myself.

I directed them to the Red Cross and the Central Jersey Blood Bank to give blood and sent them on their way. Thank God we never did need extra help. My hospital volunteers were incredibly helpful and we only got about a dozen people with minor injuries who came over on the ferry (at one time we were expecting upwards of 300 victims). I contacted each person on my community volunteer list during the week after the disaster to again thanked them for their willingness to help and I mentioned how they could become "official" hospital volunteers. I even followed that up with sending them a recruitment brochure.

*Posted 05Oct01*

***Submitted by Janet Sharma, Executive Director, Volunteer Center of Bergen County, New Jersey, USA***

Your observations regarding volunteer management in the aftermath of the September 11 terror attacks are excellent and certainly relevant. I want to add two points of information gleaned from living in and running a Volunteer Center in Bergen County, NJ, which is located directly across the Hudson River from Manhattan.

First of all, the office of the Mayor's Voluntary Action Center is located in lower Manhattan. Like every other office, including many City offices, MVAC lost their telephone communication when the twin towers collapsed. No one could find MVAC for several days -- not even City officials, of which my son is one. E-mail was also knocked out; their offices were evacuated and remained closed for several days.

Secondly, for reasons of safety and expediency, no one was allowed into "Ground Zero" after the initial response except union workers and others (paid or volunteer) with credentials indicating their training or specific skills. Security had become a major issue. Those who had volunteered immediately were able to keep on volunteering; others -- and there were literally hundreds of thousands who wanted to be in their digging for survivors -- understandably had to be turned away.

You make valid points about why no experienced volunteer managers were called to the scene. I think they were -- through the Red Cross, the various arms of City government, and many highly skilled managers from various professions. In a crisis of this proportion, you don't have to have bona fide, certified volunteer managers. You need good managers. Very few of those willing to help in the first few days considered payment as part of the deal. The fact that the City mobilized its response so effectively and in such a seemingly coordinated manner is remarkable.

As far as whether people were thanked, who knows. But judging from the vibes walking around New York (which I've done quite a bit, since my daughter lives in Tribeca and my son lives in Brooklyn), I suspect they were thanked profusely and with apologies. Yes, their names should have been captured for referral to other places, and perhaps their application forms are sitting somewhere.

However, now it is up to all of us who are in the field of volunteer mobilization to put on our most creative marketing caps, utilize every marketing tool in our toolkits, and encourage those who were so willing to help with the disaster to channel their energies to other areas where their help is needed. We have a tremendous opportunity to seize the moment for the good of our communities.

*Posted 05Oct01*

***Submitted by Pit Lucking, Coordinator, Volunteer Services, Arizona State University West, Phoenix, AZ***

I thought this article was so great I copied in onto our Volunteering page in our ASU Volunteer Services - thanks.

*Posted 05Oct01*

***Submitted by Marti Sowka, Director, Portage County Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), Wisconsin USA***

I am reminded of the adage "think globally, act locally". Certainly our thoughts turn every day to NY and Washington as people continue to struggle with the aftermath of the attack. Many citizens want to do something concrete - send clothing, provide food, physically be at the site. The best thing they can do is act locally - volunteer to address pressing needs in their own communities.

As local VPMs, we need to direct the feelings of fear and powerlessness into the hope and vision that volunteering provides. Jayne Cravens posted something to a listserv about one of the American Airlines pilots who was a volunteer. The person commenting on his volunteer activity asked that each of us do something to make up for all the lost good deeds of all the victims of the tragedy. That is excellent advice.

It is also clear to me that volunteer managers should be part of their local disaster plans. As a VPM (my RSVP project is sponsored by the county), my role in a disaster is clearly outlined in the county's disaster plan. I reviewed that plan recently. It says "RSVP volunteers will be available as needed. They will be briefed on available resources and procedures." It goes on to list specific responsibilities. I would encourage every VPM to contact their local emergency management departments to discuss inclusion in disaster plans.

*Posted 05Oct01*

***Submitted by Kate Quinn, Director, Volunteer Center, United Way of Lancaster County, PA USA***

At the United Way Volunteer Center in Lancaster, PA, we have developed a new package for prospective volunteers called "How We Can Help" - it contains a listing of specialized volunteer opportunities. Corporations and individuals were asking what they could do locally, so I included hospitals, shelters, educational opportunities, mentoring and children's agencies, human service agencies - about three or four choices for each.

I also included nursing homes after talking with several volunteer managers - they told me the elderly residents want to talk about their experience in World War II, Pearl Harbor, etc. They also told me the elderly are scared and volunteers need to just sit with them for a while and console them.

Included with the volunteer choices is a list of times and locations for blood donations, information on the United Way September 11th Fund, a listing of where they can make donations of clothing, food, etc. locally, and the address of our local United Way Web site which contains our Opportunities for Caring volunteer guidebook in entirety (about 160 agencies) for more choices in what they want to do.

Additional benefit to developing a vehicle of this kind is having a ready, viable answer to all the phone calls from people asking what they can do. Everyone wants to help in some way.

*Posted 04Oct01*

***Submitted by Lisa Coble, Manager of Volunteers, Newport Hospital, Newport, RI***

On a positive note....there has been a dramatic increase in the number of people who seek to apply for volunteer positions in our hospital since the September 11 tragedy. They have been moved to reach out and help locally as way to overcome the feeling of helplessness that they couldn't be there for those directly affected by the terrorist attack. I believe the trend will continue, and we should all be prepared to effectively manage the influx of volunteers to our organizations.

*Posted 03Oct01*

***Submitted by Diana O'Neill, Executive Director, Long Island Volunteer Center, New York, USA***

Volunteers are society's glue. The hope they give speaks volumes. Disaster response has brought out the good in everyone that already existed but hadn't been challenged to surface. I have attended four memorial services in two weeks. One was for a 39 year old man, a "tender warrior" as eulogized by his brother, who donated the computers to our Volunteer Center. He was lost in Tower One while attending a technology conference. He believed in us. The goodness he shared will never end because our work will never end. I am sure that kind of spirit prevails under any circumstances. Your article was right on. Thank you for expressing what I feel and cannot articulate right now so well.

*Posted 03Oct01*

***Submitted by Irene E. Dailey, System Director, Volunteer and Community Services, Heritage Valley Health System, Pennsylvania (USA)***

Susan, you are right on target with your hot topic this month. Just as command posts are set up to mobilize rescue efforts, professionals leading volunteer programs should set up a command post to process the volunteers. First, what a relief this activity would be to those leading a rescue/recovery effort. How many of us spend dollar after dollar on meetings to discuss how to recruit and yet were perfectly comfortable sitting by our TV sets listening to the reports of volunteers being turned away. I am ashamed to say...I did it too.

When you look at the magnitude of the situation and the horror of this event, one shouldn't be too critical. Hindsight is always 20/20. However, if we now sit back and do nothing with what we learned....shame on us! I think the word that impacts me the most is opportunity. Here is a global opportunity for us to take action. As past president of our State Society of Directors of Volunteer Services, I am going to look into a plan whereby we can be mobilized as needed. I challenge our other professional organizations AVA and ASDVS to look at this issue as well.

Susan, you and I also have a wonderful opportunity nationally when our own Gov. Tom Ridge assumes his role in the Bush Administration....let's get something put together and brought to his attention. Wouldn't it be great to have Pennsylvania leading the way in every respect? We have all seen the destruction from September 11, however, don't forget that out of ashes rises hope and opportunity. Let us not let opportunity be buried in the ashes. We have a lot to act on....let's just do it.

*Posted 02Oct01*

***Submitted by Manuel Acevedo, e-Volunteering Unit Coordinator, UN Volunteers, Bonn, Germany***

I really appreciate your writing of a cool-headed article at this time, because volunteers take on an added dimension during these episodes and its good to learn from the experiences. One of the clear questions sticking up through your article is : Do civil protection units have information about people with volunteer management expertise in their community (or nearby)? With the help of the Web, this shouldnt be so hard to arrange if/wherever it does not exist. I'm sure they have the contact information for doctors or other professionals that can provide valuable services in the case of any

disaster. I'd suggest, as you indicated, that volunteer managers be added to this type of "reserve" personnel.

*Posted 02Oct01*

***Submitted by Rob Johnston, President & CEO, Drucker Foundation, New York, New York***

In 1989 I was a student at Stanford when the campus and Northern California were hit by the Loma Prieta 7.1 earthquake. The next day I checked in with the student volunteer center to see if I could help. I met Catherine Milton, then the director of the Haas Center, and she and I took a walk around campus seeking volunteer opportunities. I spent the next day moving books in the main library.

Three weeks ago, on the day after the attacks, my wife and I walked a dozen blocks north to St. Vincent's hospital in Greenwich Village. We wanted to volunteer or give blood. Arriving at about 10:00am we were a few hours too late. There was a line a block-long to sign up for volunteering over the next few days and they were not taking blood for several more days. We were turned away. We went home.

Later that day we received an e-mail from the Council on Foundations and in response we made a contribution to the September 11 Fund. Organizing volunteers for acute problems (like the disasters noted above) is different from organizing them for the chronic problems most organizations fight. I sincerely hope that most people working to organize volunteers can spend their time on the long-range issues. Like all of us, though, they can benefit from some preparation for the disasters. When there is a disaster as huge and close as the destruction of the World Trade Center it's difficult to capture people's time and attention with volunteer possibilities that address the chronic problems. We all want to be on the "bucket brigade." I agree with Susan Ellis that these times present unique possibilities and opportunities for those expert in volunteer management; at the same time, those expert in disaster management need to take the lead.

*Posted 02Oct01*

***Submitted by Jayne Cravens, United Nations Volunteers, Germany***

Thanks, Susan, for bringing up this hot topic. I'm going to cut those that are organizing and directing volunteer efforts in NYC some slack given the extraordinary circumstances and emotions everyone was faced with, but you are right -- there's got to be a better way to direct and organize everyone who wants to volunteer in times like this, and we need to think about what that might like.

In addition -- WHERE is AVA and the regional DOVIAs in all this? Are they contacting organizers in NYC, NY and Penn to let them know about the volunteer management experts in their membership that could help in this? Are they asking members for advice on how best to respond? Are they directing members to write letters to their local newspaper editors talking about the importance of quality volunteer management? Are they approaching the various corporations who are organizing volunteer efforts to say -- hey, we've got people and expertise to offer as well?

I've tried to start some threads regarding volunteer management and this crisis on a few online discussion groups, and hardly anyone has responded. Surely volunteer managers, no matter where they are or what type of work their volunteers do, are facing issues particular to Sept. 11? I would so love to hear these stories. There has never been a better time for volunteer managers to show themselves -- so why aren't we out there doing it?

And one last thing -- the folks at Energize have been on my mind, given your proximity to both NYC and D.C., and the fact that you are in Pennsylvania. Triple Whammy. Must have been really hard on you all.

*Posted 01Oct01*

***Submitted by Keltie Gaunt, Volunteer Manager, Christmas Bureau of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada***

Your opinion is appreciated, and in fact echoes my own sentiments almost exactly. I too have been wondering where all the volunteer managers were in this. Like Linda Graff, whose response I just read, I saw the images of frustrated and skilled people being turned away. To me it was not a matter of them not needing the assistance; but a matter of not having somebody trained and skilled to schedule people. We heard stories upon stories of workers weak with exhaustion, and yet others were turned away. From my very long-distance view of the aftermath, they simply had nobody in charge to send in the relief, as well as being caught up in union issues with the workers. Either way, many thoughts and prayers are with them all in their search clean-up. I do believe, however, that this can be a learning opportunity for us about how to mobilize ourselves in the event of such a disaster.

*Posted 01Oct01*

***Submitted by Linda Graff, President, Linda Graff and Associates, Inc., Ontario, Canada***

Good thoughts Susan. I don't take your comments as criticism. All kinds of professions will be examining their role in the NY disaster with a view to learning how to do better in the future. That's a good thing.

We all have been deeply and profoundly influenced by the events of Sept. 11 and after. Of all the media coverage that I was exposed to (couldn't turn off, is the truth), one small piece sticks out in my mind in connection with your comments: a two minute interview segment with some very hurt and disgruntled construction workers who desperately wanted to help ... to do something ... and who had gone to the site only to be turned away. The reason was: only "authorized" workers were allowed, and the sense I took from what they were saying was that certain individuals/groups had been contracted more or less formally to do the work on site, and others were to be turned away.

These guys were on the street, hard hats in hand, in tears of frustration, shoulders hunched and heads down, walking away from ground zero. Big impact from a less than positive message. My thoughts, of course, were precisely those you outline in your hot topic. Where are the managers of volunteers to handle this very thing? Why aren't they mobilized as an integral part of the disaster response effort? One other thought I would offer. I remember reading a brief article in the newspaper (my local one) about a year and a half after the bombing in Oklahoma. It was a report on a



debriefing/evaluation forum held to look back on and learn from the disaster response initiative to that event. The key message in the article I refer to is what they learned about volunteer mobilization, and in particular, the problems created by the in-flooding of too many volunteers, and the complexities of getting the right volunteers in the right jobs in the middle of a crisis situation. I think there is a huge amount that can be learned from these experiences; we are missing an important opportunity if we don't do this. We learn what we can, and then, in this instance, hope we never have to apply the new knowledge. All best wishes from a Canadian neighbor.

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