

Virtual Volunteering Project

The Human Side of the Internet: Fan-Based Online Groups Use the Internet to Make a Difference

by Jayne Cravens, Virtual Volunteering Project Manager

There are hundreds -- thousands? -- of online communities for people who want to share information and excitement about a particular television show, movie, sports team, celebrity or literary genre. And just as offline communities and groups will often "pass the hat" for a good cause, these Internet-based fan groups often end up engaging together online or in person to improve their communities or to generate funds for a nonprofit organization. They aren't directed by any formal organization to engage in philanthropy; these fans engage in these activities on their own, much to the delight of the charities that benefit.

Here are some examples, and comments from members regarding how and why their philanthropic activities got started, and what makes them successful:

- **X-Files Fans** (also known as **Philes**)

Fans of this show engage in a multitude of philanthropic activities:

- The fans who maintain the official [Gillian Anderson Web site \(GAWS\)](#) put together an online auction each May to raise money for Neurofibromatosis, Inc. a charity with which Anderson is affiliated (neurofibromatosis is a genetic disorder of the nervous system, one of the most common in the United States). In 1998, they raised \$24,000.
- The Order of the Blessed St. Scully the Enigmatic (OBSSE) encouraged its fans to hold an "[OBSSE Scully Marathon](#)": participants gathered copies of the XF episodes that have been selected for the Marathon by OBSSE, and ask family, friends, coworkers, and "fellow X-phile fanatics" to donate \$1 or more to Neurofibromatosis, Inc. for every episode they watched in succession. In May 1999, they raised more than \$5,000.
- When, "Stacey," a long-time and popular member of the newsgroup for the "X-Files", alt.tv.x-files (atxf), died in the Fall of 1998, several newsgroup members donated money to charities or held special events in her honor to raise money for charities. Sarah Aalderink, one of those event organizers, says she met Stacey through the newsgroup and considered her a close friend.

"She and I had many things in common and often spoke in e-mail about our respective children," Aalderink said. "When she died suddenly, it left a large void, not only in my life but in many lives. Many of us cried on each other's shoulders, via AIM. When I learned that Stacey's family had chosen a charity (Lifepath Hospice) to receive memorial contributions, I offered, through a post to atxf, to gather donations together, consolidating the information, and pass the information and contributions along to Lifepath Hospice, forwarding a letter to Stacey's family as well. Once I had received all donations, I catalogued them in a letter to Lifepath Hospice. I then notified all contributors, via e-mail, that I had received their contribution, and totaled the donation, letting them know how much we donated as a group. 14 people participated. I also received approximately 30 e-mails thanking me for organizing this but saying that they preferred to donate separately. I'm certain more donations than that were made because atxf is a very large group. This was done strictly via newsgroups and e-mail. In fact, e-mail didn't really enter into the picture until the donations started coming in."

Aalderink recommends that any fan-based philanthropic group have a "chairman" who is well-recognized within the online community to lead online philanthropic activities. "USENET users can be suspicious people, with reason. Scams, spam, and trolls abound. It is very important to *know* and be known by the group or groups that you will solicit. Soliciting for memorial contributions for Stacey on a newsgroup like alt.tv.x-files worked because Stacey was known on that group and I'm known on that group. I could have solicited on other groups that Stacey posted to but I wouldn't have expected any response, as *I* became the unknown in that equation."

Aalderink also emphasized that reporting back to the group is vital, and that a personal thank you and summary should also be sent to each person who contributes. "Sending out a mass notification (sending to one person with 'carbon copies' to everyone else) is just plain rude. It takes a little more time to write individual e-mails but you are more likely to get a repeat donation the next time around."

She added: "It is important to have a recognized spokesperson or a rallying point. For the OBSSE and GAWS auctions and donations, Gillian Anderson is the 'spokesperson.' For my project, Stacey was the rallying point, a sort of spokesperson. She was much loved and is still missed. Having a recognized spokesperson or rallying point will inspire more people to participate. I still wear my 'For Stacey' button around town and to sci-fi events. I know that one of the X-Files writers is using Stacey's name in an upcoming episode. It's this sort of pride and loyalty that a good or appropriate spokesperson can inspire."

"If you are looking at soliciting funds or volunteers from a newsgroup, lurk on that group for a while, learn who the regulars are and then approach one of them in e-mail. This will give you the endorsement of a regular without the commitment of years of lurking and reading. The endorsement of a regular will boost the "respectability" of your project and make it more

likely to succeed."

- **Sword and Staff**

<http://www.sword-and-staff.com/>

Made up of fans of "Xena: Warrior Princess" who "work to better the lives of people in their own communities through donations and volunteerism." In 1998, various chapters of the group raised almost \$40,000 for the Rainforest Preservation Foundation, the Arizona AIDS Walk, the Domestic Violence Center of Howard County, the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (USA), Invest In Kids Foundation (Canada), Working Wardrobes for a New Start, Snohomish County Center for Battered Women, Gilda's Club Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, and Multiple Sclerosis Foundation, among MANY others. To date, Sword and Staff activities have resulted in more than \$76,000 being donated to charitable organizations around the world.

Debbie Cassetta, President of Sword and Staff, says profits from local fan festivals are also donated to charities. "They keep us informed of their activities, and supply us with copies of acknowledgment letters from the charities they support." "We also use the internet to request that fans send donations of items that we will use in charity auctions. Without the type of access to fans that the internet provides, most of what we do would be impossible. It's always a pleasant surprise to open the mail and find autographed items that fans generously contribute. Our auctions are possible because cast, fans and fan clubs donate merchandise to Sword and Staff. I am currently conducting approximately 12 online auctions a year, and each auction has between 15 and 40 items. Each of those items is donated by someone in the 'Xenaverse.'" Cassetta says fans take up charitable activities based on their own interest and availability. "One summer, a fan from Denver took it upon herself to organize a fund drive in her home city to raise money to help financially disadvantaged families buy school supplies for their children. Last September, 21 Sword and Staff members worked to clean up a 2-1/2 mile stretch of shoreline in Queens, New York as part of the International Coastal Cleanup. Another Sword and Staff member volunteers her time the 'turtle patrol' which helps to assure that newly hatched turtles make it to the ocean so they have a chance at survival. The Dutch fans are donating money to support an injured seal. The fans in Great Britain have adopted two children's hospitals, and direct their charitable activities to supporting them." Cassetta volunteers to handle all administrative business for Sword and Staff, as well as maintain its web site and conduct the auctions (which are done via e-mail). There are six international liaisons who work with her and coordinate events in their own countries. They are from the Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand (2) and Great Britain (2).

The individual international liaisons will coordinate fan activity around a charitable event. They'll select the charity to benefit, making sure that it is a legitimate entity. They will then work to organize the event (usually a fest, auction, or raffle) and then assure that the checks get to the appropriate charity. "Individual fans have arranged for specific auctions or other events. One recent one was an audio fan fiction auction to benefit the Rainforest Preservation Foundation that raised approximately \$4,600. The time, tapes, and voice of a fan, combined with the writing talent of the Xenaverse 'bards' made that possible. One of the amazing things about Xena fandom is the talent of it's 'bards', writers who produce quality fan fiction that has taken hold of the imagination of fans like nothing I've seen in the past. A recent call for donations of stories by these bards, met with a great response, and the resulting auction raised nearly \$5,000 to help combat child abuse." Sword and Staff was started in May of 1996, shortly after the first New York City Xenafest. "The NYC Fest Committee (I was the treasurer of the committee) raised \$4,500 for charity. We intended to donate it to a NYC-based charity that states it mission as providing care for abandoned children afflicted with AIDS. When I approached the charity representative, I was told in no uncertain terms that they would not accept our money. Thinking they misunderstood what I was saying, I stated plainly, 'I don't think you understand. I want to donate money to your organization.' The response I received was, 'You don't understand me. We don't want your money.' He didn't want to be associated with a bunch of Amazons." "I found that by using the internet to discuss the rejection of the donation and the often negative image that XWP fans had, I was able to channel fan energy, as well as my own, to positive pursuits. The result of that is that in two years S&S has evolved into a very positive organization. It has and continues to help a growing number of worthwhile charities, and in the process has given fans bound by a common set of ideals a focus for their energies. We took a bad situation (refusal of a donation) and turned it into a very positive force in the Xenaverse and the world at large. The generosity of Xena fans is unparalleled in my experience. It's a pleasure to be associated with them." When asked what would be the one or two most important pieces of advice she would offer to someone who wanted to organize a group like hers, Cassetta replied, "Visit a psychiatrist and stock up on Zantac or Roloids. (grin). Seriously, my advice would be to love what you're doing. Know also that it will consume a large portion of your free time, so be aware of your other life commitments before you take on such an activity. It takes a lot of organizing and patience, and often an inordinate amount of time. There will always be someone who thinks they can do it better, so be prepared for some negative criticism. It comes with the territory. Keep your goals in mind, be open to suggestions and constructive criticism, accept help when you need it, but don't let someone else's agenda distract you from your organization's goals. And finally, if you're doing this for recognition for yourself or as a means to be recognized by someone else, then find something else to get involved in. This is not what this is about.

Other Online Fan Groups Using the Internet to Engage in Philanthropy

This information is taken from the organization's Web site:

- **Barry Manilow Fan Clubs Charities**

<http://members.aol.com/garyoye/barrynet/bmnet425.htm>

garyoye@aol.com There are a large number of local Barry Manilow fan clubs both inside and outside the US, many with their own official charities. Some of the charities who have benefitted from these fans' activities: Walk for Hunger, Make a Wish Foundation, National Music Foundation, Toys for Tots, Ronald McDonald House, American Red Cross, American Cancer Society, World Wildlife Fund and Children's Miracle Network.

- **PEACE - Adrian Paul Fan Club**

<http://members.aol.com/peaceapfc/>

peaceapfc@aol.com Dedicated to the PEACE (Protect Educate Aid Children Everywhere) Fund, joining corporate America and

Hollywood to generate aid for children in need whether it be financial or educational. Founded in the Fall of 1998 by Adrian Paul, under the auspices of Athletes & Entertainers for Kids.

- **Meat Loaf UK Fan Club**
<http://members.xoom.com/MLUKFC/Contents.htm>
info@mlukfc.freemove.co.uk Holds fundraisers for the Cleft Lip & Palate Association, and use the Internet to coordinate and promote their philanthropic efforts.
- **International Fans of Shania Twain**
<http://www.shania.com/sifanwk.htm>
 Works to support the singer's favorite charities, including Second Harvest, Kids Cafes Fund, and Breakfast for Learning.
- **Christian Bale Fan Club**
<http://www.christianbale.org/cbfc.htm>
 Proceeds from the fan club are directed towards Christian's charities which include: Greenpeace, The Redwing Sanctuary, the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, and the Happy Child Mission, a school for street children in Brazil.
- **Elvis Connection**
<http://home.navisoft.com/planet/elvis.html>
cpopadiuk@aol.com Formed in 1993 with Graceland's approval. They are not a fan club, but an organization with a mandate to unite fans and raise money for charity. To date, nearly \$7,000 has been donated to charity.
- **New York Rangers Fan Club**
http://www.monmouth.com/~drogers/rangers/Team/nyr_club.html
 They raise money to help with the fight against Leukemia, Cancer, child abuse, and other charities that the RFC supports.
- **Mac Attack Pack!!! Cardinals Care**
<http://www.macattackpack.com/>
 This not-for-profit organization, formed in 1997, says it is "already one of the most successful fan clubs in the Major Leagues", with members in more than 40 states. "Cardinals Care" is an "expression of the St. Louis Cardinals' commitment to its Community. The focus of Cardinals Care is on "Team Play" and on "Giving Something Back" to the community that has supported the Cardinals through the years.
- **STARFLEET International**
<http://www.sfi.org>
 Founded by Star Trek enthusiasts in 1974, chapters (Starships) of this group "offer opportunities to have fun while you serve your community. We recognize crew members who have done extra service or distinguished themselves in service to STARFLEET. In keeping with the problem-solving themes of Star Trek, our members do more than meet and talk about the show. The crews of the Fleet are active in support of charity. We believe that time is our most valuable gift, so we donate time to help persons and charitable organizations. We conduct fundraisers and volunteer our services to help our community." Charities which STARFLEET takes part in include the Overseas Coupon Project, Stampede, and the Hershey's Chocolate Project.
- **Circle of Friends / Casey Biggs Fanclub/ AIDS**
<http://www.muohio.edu/~thomasrd/fomoh.html>
 This non-profit charity organization supports the philanthropic interests and professional activities of actor Michael O'Hare. Charities supported include House of Ruth, a shelter for battered men, women, and children; Hale House, a facility caring for children with AIDS; Gay Men's Health Crisis Center, a center providing assistance to all AIDS victims; Foundation for Community Encouragement; the Sierra Club; Muscular Dystrophy Association; and the Motion Picture and Television Fund Foundation, a support agency for anyone in the industry in financial need
- **Susan's La Femme Nikita Message Board**
<http://www.insidetheweb.com/messageboard/mbs.cgi?acct=mb66652>
 Members of this online community raised \$12,000 Canadian to benefit the Mira Foundation, which provides helper dogs to people with disabilities; the money represents one dog fully trained and ready to be assigned.
- **Virtual Volunteering Resources**
 How to find and involve volunteers working from home or work computers, online resources for volunteer managers, advice for individuals who want to volunteer virtually, etc. These pages are updated and added to each month.
- **How Your Agency Can Utilize the Virtual Volunteering Project**

Tips on how to use this Web site, information about our offline services, and how we can help you introduce or expand virtual volunteering in your agency.

- [Virtual Volunteering Project home page](#)

Information for those who wish to quote from, copy and/or distribute the information on this Web site

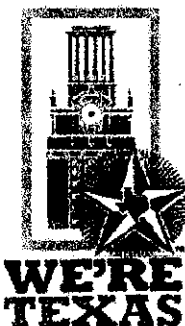
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If you do use Virtual Volunteering Project materials in your own workshop or trainings, or republish materials in your own publications, [please let us know](#), so that we can track how this information is disseminated.

part of the [Volunteerism and Community Engagement Initiatives](#)
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Servicing the Community

Effective Volunteerism

Communities are made of people and the richest resource for community change and growth are the individuals who volunteer their time to social betterment activities.

The range of skills that volunteers bring to such efforts is as infinite as mankind itself.

Scientists who bring their individual expertise to the service of community members are volunteers like no other. They bring more than spirit and intention to the task at hand. They bring a broad range of practical skills with which to remedy conflict or upsets, improve communication, resolve study problems, restore personal integrity, and even handle failure in virtually every aspect of life.

The Scientology volunteer is armed with fundamental principles -- and workable, proven solutions for their application (virtually all of which can be found in the 870-page book, *The Scientology Handbook*).

Many Scientologists have also become Volunteer Ministers for their local Churches of Scientology, providing help and compassion through simple, basic assistance to people in overcoming difficulties they may be having in life. Volunteer Ministers have also assisted in the aftermath of earthquakes, floods, fires and explosions.

Elsewhere, Volunteer Ministers work quietly to improve their communities. In Australia, Volunteer Ministers tutor aboriginal youth. In South Africa, they lecture on how to improve personal communication and study skills. And in Las Vegas, Nevada, a young girl is assisted to become more honest and ethical in life.



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TECHVOL

Helping nonprofits help themselves on the Web.

Purpose

TechVol is a completely nonprofit site that functions as a clearing house to link charitable organizations with technically skilled mentors, especially those who can help develop functional Web sites. Many small nonprofits lack the technical expertise to build and maintain a Web site yet might see tremendous benefit by having a venue through which to distribute current information. Potential viewers of a nonprofit's site include donors, volunteers, beneficiaries, and collaborators.

Post a Volunteer Opportunity

Approach

TechVol encourages volunteers to teach members within nonprofits how to build and update a site on their own. The more common alternative, namely that the volunteer takes total control of the organization's Web site, often results in a site which becomes grossly outdated, defeating the most significant advantage that the Web has over other media.

See also this [page](#) that lists resources for setting up a page on your own.

Hardware Initiative

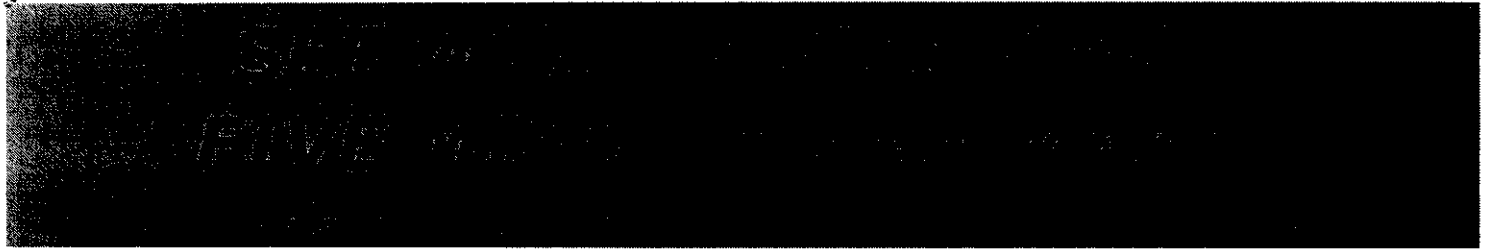
On top of linking nonprofits with Web volunteers, TechVol now endeavors to provide a medium through which individuals and corporations can donate slightly obsolete computer hardware. 501[c][3] nonprofit organizations are particularly attractive to donors in this regard. In the US, donations to 501[c][3] charities are tax-deductible. The interested viewer might look at the precise definitions of the law at [26 USC Sec. 501](#) (to see what types of organizations qualify) and [26 USC Sec. 170](#) (to see what deductions qualify), but should keep in mind that this material is directed towards legal experts.

[Post Equipment for Donation](#) || [Request Equipment for a Charity](#)

[List Equipment Posted for Donation](#) || [List Requests for Equipment](#)

You may send requests for either equipment or volunteer time to admin@techvol.org.

Hey New York,



Voluntech.org is a group of technical volunteers who use their spare time and expertise for serving non-profit and community service organizations. Our goal is to help community organizations in the New York City area take advantage of the latest computer and communications technologies so that they can operate at their peak effectiveness. We achieve this goal by:

1. Helping community organizations better understand their technology needs.
2. Volunteering for specific, short term projects that will leave the organizations better able to serve their communities.

Got computer skills? Want to help? We invite you to...

[Find Out What's
Happening!](#)

[Spread the word!](#)

[Be A Part of the
Solution!](#)

[See where you
in!](#)

Know an organizations that could use some help?

[See what we can do for
you!](#)

The following organizations are currently seeking computer/technical volunteers through Voluntech.org. Each name links to a full description of the organization and the projects they currently have available.

Team Tech

- [Team Tech Computer Instruction](#)
- [Team Tech, Americorps Volunteer Mentoring](#)

Casa (Court Appointed Special Advocates)

- [Novell Networking](#)
- [E-mail Consultation](#)
- [Website Consultation](#)
- [dBase Transfer](#)

Change For Kids, Inc.

- [Weeksville Kindergarten Computer Instruction](#)

Columbia University Head Start

- [Book Buddies / Companeros de Libros](#)
- [Getting on Track](#)

Digital Clubhouse

- [Mentoring](#)
- [Systems Support](#)

Digital Democracy

- [Web Site Design Help](#)
- [Graphic Design](#)

English Speaking Union

- [Membership Database Extension](#)
- [Macintosh System Consulting](#)

ELMCOR Youth and Adult Services

- [ELMCOR Windows NT Network Consulting](#)
- [ELMCOR Windows / MS Office Training](#)
- [ELMCOR Windows NT Workstation Support](#)

Forest Hills Community House

- [Community Computer Classes](#)
- [Open Access Supervisors](#)

Lenox Hill Neighborhood House

- [Youth and Family Services Database Consultant](#)
- [Staff Computer Clinic](#)
- [Staff Database Seminar](#)
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- [GIS consultant](#)
- [Web page consulting](#)
- [Internet communications](#)

- [Hardware Assesment - Mobile Computer Lab](#)
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- [Project Enterprise Information System](#)
- [Fundraising Database](#)
- [Credit Card Web Transactions](#)

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- [College Counseling and Student Internship Office Systems Consultant](#)
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- [Access Client info Database](#)

- [Agency Web Site and E-Mail Consulting](#)

- [Enrollment Database](#)
- [Data Flow Analysis](#)

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- [Graphic Design](#)

- [Office Systems Advisor](#)
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11/11/97



distributed.net

The Fastest Computer on Earth

Welcome

Welcome to distributed.net - a clearing house for all things distributed.

To get started read [How To Help](#). Most of your questions will probably be addressed in our [FAQs](#) or can be answered on our [Mailing Lists](#). If you are interested in helping fund other distributed.net projects, please visit our [donations page](#).

The administrators and main personnel at distributed.net issue periodic status reports and updates, which we've termed the [State of the Net](#) address.

- [distributed.net plans](#) are online.
- Grab a desktop picture of our new [logo](#).

Currently...

Got some ideas for our next generation of clients? Submit them [here!](#)

The **RCS** contest (**RC5-64**) is now in progress.

What is Distributed.Net?

As a "loosely knit" group of computer users from all over the world, we take up challenges which require a lot of computing power. We solve these by distributing the cpu power needed over the computers of our members. That's why we are called "distributed.net". Read more about it in our [mission statement](#).

How can you participate?

It's very simple to participate in our challenges. You only need to download a small client program which contacts our servers and will process part of the current challenge. We only use the computer's idle time, so when you want to use your computer, the client will automatically use less processor time until you stop working on your computer again. For more info on downloading and running the client, look at our [How-to page](#).

What's in it for you?

There are several reasons why you should join us. First of all, our main goal is to explore the possibilities of distributed computing. Together we can learn more about this exciting new form of computing. Second, if we solve the RSA Challenges, we win \$10000! There's \$1000 or \$2000 for you if your computer is the one that finds the right key. Third, we have some nifty [statistics](#). The more keys you process, the higher you will be ranked. And of course you want to stay above your friends, right? ;)

Three victories for distributed.net so far...

Our first victory was announced at 13:25 GMT on 19-Oct-1997 indicating that we had found the correct solution for RSA Labs' RC5-32/12/7 56-bit secret-key challenge. Confirmed by RSA Labs, the key 0x532B744CC20999 presented us with the plaintext message for which we have been searching these past 250 days...

Our second victory was announced on 24-Feb-1998 confirming that we had found the correct solution for the RSA Labs' DES-II-1 56-bit secret-key challenge. The solution key was 76 9E 8C D9 F2 2F 5D EA and was found after 40 days of work.

On 19-Jan-1999 our third victory came when we submitted the solution key for the RSA Labs' DES-III 56-bit secret-key challenge. In this effort, we coordinated with the Electronic Frontier Foundation's DES Cracker dedicated hardware solution to identify the correct key in less than 24 hours.

Visit our [Press Room](#) for more information and to read the announcements.

Need more information?

If you want to learn more about our project, try the following:

- Read our [How To Help](#).
- There are several [FAQ's](#).
- We have some [Mailing lists](#) you can join.
- For our international members, you can contact your [Regional](#).

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Client Software

Search

[Search distributed.net](#)

- representative who will answer your questions in your native language.
- There are always people online on our IRC channel "#distributed" on the EFnet.
 - Just browse our site; you'll see a lot of interesting things!

How can you help distributed.net

Besides running the client, there are other things you can do to help, some of which require little or no effort on your part. Read more about them on the [How To Donate page](#).

Who's behind this project

Founded in 1997, we've grown to become a very large network of users all over the world. Most of us just run the clients, but on our [Credits page](#) you can find the people administering the network and coding the clients.

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