

## ABSTRACT

*This article records some peaks and valleys of our quest for a professional identity. The author, in her fourth decade as a professional in volunteer administration, shares some personal experiences and reflections and weaves them with excerpts from past issues of The Journal of Volunteer Administration.<sup>1</sup> As a tribute to colleagues who have contributed to the weeding and watering of our professional growth, the article augments quotes from the past with comments from colleagues of 1999. It is the author's hope that these seasoned snaps and fresh focuses will help readers to appreciate where we are today and challenge us to develop a superior portrait of our profession beyond 2000.*

# Developing as a Profession Snaps from the Past with a Fresh Focus for 2000

by Guest Editor  
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## Introduction

The year was 1967—historically hohum, aside from the world's first human heart transplant, the emergence of the microwave oven and the movie "The Graduate," for me it was a hallmark year. Nineteen sixty-seven marked my entrance into the profession of volunteer administration—at its embryonic stage. A sprinkling of courses (mainly for directors of volunteers in healthcare) was offered in Canada and the USA, a few booklets and newsletters were available—Harriet Naylor was just writing one of the first books for our profession, *Volunteers Today: Finding, Training and Working with Them*, and one could call colleagues at rates much costlier than today's long distance bargains! As Saskatchewan's only full time salaried coordinator of volunteer services in healthcare, I was a fledgling professional in a lonely field.

As a registered nurse, I had experienced the commitment and the camaraderie aligned with being part of a profession. I knew and appreciated the distinctives that can be applied to any profession, such as: standards of practice upheld by a code of ethics; a unique body

of knowledge supported by research and publication; identification with "same field" colleagues; and regulation of the membership by professional peers. When someone asked me what I did, it was easy to be identified as a professional simply by responding that I was a registered nurse.

## Nomenclature

The title, "Coordinator of Volunteer Services", was the first professional obstacle that I tripped over in 1967. Surprisingly, my continuing 33-year professional career—in volunteer administration, services, resources, management and consulting—still finds me tripping over titles. Experience has taught me the value of verbal somersaults such as, "... think of me as the human resources or personnel manager for unsalaried staff." While I am not "hung up" on titles, I sometimes ponder our continuing need to explain who we are by comparing or paralleling with other professions. Is nomenclature a reason why our development as a profession has been such a struggle—or is our name just an annoying blip on the much larger screen of our professional development?

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A review of literature specific to the evolution of volunteer administration as an identified field of professional practice recognizes nomenclature as a major factor in our professional quest. In 1983, Sarah Jane Rehnberg submitted a paper to the University of Pittsburgh specific to a certification program for administrators of volunteers. Rehnberg said, "The process of establishing an occupational group as an acknowledged field of social practice is neither an easy nor a unique undertaking" (1983). It was not until 1976 that the Division of Classification, United States Department of Labor, accepted volunteer administrators as professional managers in its Dictionary of Occupational Titles. This status of professional inclusion was cited by Ellis and Noyes in their 1978 book, *By the People: A History of Americans as Volunteers*:

*Another major development in volunteerism is the recent concept of it as a distinct field; even the word "volunteerism" is evidence of this new focus. There is now an ever-growing body of knowledge and expertise about volunteers which is transmitted and expanded by academic courses and a variety of associations. Leadership of volunteers, increasingly handled by salaried directors of volunteers, has even gained the status of inclusion in the latest Directory of Occupational Titles. Research into the nature and scope of volunteering has become more sophisticated, and new articles and books appear continuously (Ellis & Noyes, 1990).*

### Distinctives

Our quest for the professional distinctive of a unique body of volunteer administration knowledge, supported by research and publication, was supported by *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*. In January 1983, Founding Editor Susan J. Ellis wrote, "The Journal documents the development of our field of volunteer administration and is therefore part of

making our profession credible." Writing in *AVA Update* (1983), Ellis enthusiastically promoted the goal of placing *The Journal* "in the library of every major university in the country."

*The Journal's* articles in support of research included the survey results of "Moving Toward Professionalism: Volunteer Administrators in Pennsylvania" (Heisy & Heitmueller, 1984). At the conclusion of this article, the authors affirmed that "volunteer administrators in Pennsylvania have a tremendous amount of networking and advocacy before them, if they are to truly define and shape their own profession, assuring its maintenance by its own skilled practitioners." The introduction to this same article squarely cited a major obstacle in achieving professionalism—apathy.

### Professional Apathy

The significance of apathy came in the form of a quotation from the late Vern Lake, then Chief of Volunteer Services in the Minnesota Department of Public Welfare, within his article, "Beyond Professionalism" (1982). Lake pointed out that volunteer administrators "feel they deserve to be recognized as a profession among the professions. Yet, it is not always clear as to what kind of recognition is sought. Progress has been made, but we are still far from being recognized as a profession among the professions. The possibility has not even occurred to some. To others, it lacks urgency, even interest" (Lake, 1982).

### Professional Pride

Pleasingly, the pendulum of professional disinterest has swung toward professional pride during the decades since Lake penned his words. In an AVA Survey on Employer Recognition, researcher Joanne Patton wrote, "There is reason for celebration in the field of volunteer administration, because its members are finally beginning to see themselves as professionals!" (1990).

It was equally encouraging for this

writer to review opinions and projections, written in September 1999 by colleagues in the profession (in response to an AVA questionnaire) reflecting pride and confidence in our profession. Nancy Macduff wrote that "building respect for the profession of [the] volunteer administrator" needs to be a major focus in the millennium. Jeanne Bradner affirmed, "Volunteer administration is understood by boards and management as a demanding profession that requires specific professional competencies and ethical principles." The challenges that most resonated with me came from three colleagues who "said it like it is:" Gerald Pannozzo, CVA, asserted, "The profession needs to come out of the closet;" author Sue Vineyard avowed, "We must become better advocates and 'horn-blowers' for our profession;" and Carol Friedland declared, "AVA speaks for the profession and should speak with a loud voice. We must get over our reticence, our natural inclination to put our own needs last."

Friedland's statement was a stark reminder that the onus is on us, the members of the profession, to profile and proclaim our profession. We do a great job of profiling and proclaiming volunteers and programs—and I will be the first to applaud the value and virtues of volunteers and their astounding accomplishments. As professionals in volunteer administration, we must be in the business of supporting volunteerism worldwide. But in championing the causes of volunteerism, has the profession of volunteer administration been relegated to the rumble seat? We must become much more intentional about professional awareness. What about including a special celebration for the profession of volunteer administration during National Volunteer Week?

The aforementioned challenge was my anemic suggestion. It pales in comparison to Nan Hawthorne's announcement as it appears, during the writing of this article, on the internet: "ANNOUNCING: The First Ever International Volunteer

Program Managers Appreciation Day! December 5, 1999." Yes, a self-appointed steering committee of volunteerism practitioners are proclaiming a day for us. Celebrations are planned, including a scheduled cyber-party. While this copy of *The Journal* will be distributed after VPM Day, I salute the steering committee and encourage readers to surf the net for updates and reports—beginning with the web site <http://www.nonprofitspace.org/vpm-day/>.

### Hallmarks

Pardon my leap from the eighties to high-tech happenings. Now I must return to 1985 when the named profession of volunteer administration was achieving significant professional hallmarks. AVA's printed code of ethics and standards of practice statements challenged professionals to "live it." The professional goals of credentialing, monitoring and recognition of the members by the members had become a reality. An awards program was enjoying success. A performance-based certification program was in its third year—the professional credential of Certified in Volunteer Administration (CVA) was achievable.

In the 1986-87 issue of *The Journal*, newly certified members reflected on the profession through the publication of their "Philosophy of Volunteerism" essays. I am proud to be among these early CVA's and still cherish my letter of congratulations from Winifred L. Brown, an avid advocate of the certification program. Connie Skillingsstad, CVA, penned, "The professional volunteer administrator must commit him or herself to learning that body of knowledge that exists for the profession and to developing skills." Kathleen M. Curtis, CVA, wrote, "As a professional in volunteer administration, I believe that part of my role is to understand volunteer motivation and keep updated on societal changes which affect the volunteer force."

It was intriguing for this author to note that this same issue affirmed the "role ref-

erence" made by Curtis through an article advocating new roles for the profession. The article was written by the late Dr. Eva Schindler-Rainman. It was entitled, "New Roles for the Profession to 'Make a Difference'" (1986-87). Schindler-Rainman identified a number of dynamics that have pushed the profession of volunteer administration to the forefront and listed competencies that must be claimed by volunteer administrators who want to be members of this "new, exciting, and coming-of-age profession." She asserted that professionals in volunteer administration need to manage issues such as multiculturalism, diversity, power and influence (1986-87).

### **Empowerment**

Two years later, "Empowering a Profession: What's in Our Name?" was published (Scheier, 1988). Scheier said, "For volunteer administration today the number one challenge is to empower the profession." Empowerment was echoed by Susan Ellis in her published Association for Volunteer Administration Distinguished Member Service Award Acceptance Speech (1989-90).

Many of us vividly remember Ellis's eloquent delivery of that speech in Washington, D.C.: "...the debate continues as to whether or not volunteer administration is, in fact, a profession. I'd have to answer, 'Not yet.'" Ellis went on to say that a profession is an identity one assumes as a result of education, experience and commitment. "It is not a job; it is a career ... ours is an emerging profession," Ellis concluded.

The importance of professional spokespersons to champion the "emerging profession" was re-echoed by Joanne Patton, reporting on AVA's Survey on Employer Recognition (1990). After carefully defining the terms profession and professional, Patton acknowledged, "Far more articulate in chronicling the growth of professional attitudes, performance and ambitions within the volunteer administration community have been the

field's own distinguished spokespersons." Patton then went on to list colleagues, many who are mentioned in this issue, beginning with the late Harriet Naylor, one of our profession's true pioneers.

Among the recipients of AVA's Distinguished Member Service Award, established in 1981 in honour of Harriet Naylor, was Laura Lee M. Geraghty. Geraghty's acceptance speech cited four qualities needed by professional volunteer leaders: competence, conviction, courage and compassion. Geraghty also emphasized the career and life-long dimensions of volunteer administration (as opposed to its being job-related) when she asserted, "The field of volunteerism is part of who and what I am" (1993).

### **Growth**

This field of volunteerism was creatively explored by Ivan H. Scheier in "Creating Careers for Volunteer Coordinators." From a lifetime of learning and experience, Scheier cautioned us, "Don't freeze the profession. I once heard a respected colleague argue for certification by saying, 'It's time to put a fence around the field.' My own view is to keep the fences down until we finish exploring the vast territory of volunteerism. We're still a young profession, so let's keep growing and diversifying" (1992).

Yes, our profession is growing. It is diversifying. Volunteer administration's unique body of knowledge has galloped through the alphabet—from abstracts, books and catalogues to university classes, videos and web sites. In response to the surge in educational resources, AVA appointed a subcommittee on volunteer administration to conduct its second survey in higher education. Reporting on the subcommittee's work, Gretchen E. Stringer, CVA, said, "We have gone from looking where we were, to where we are, to where we want to be. We have gotten enough information to show that colleges and universities are offering courses in volunteer management. We also have

information on community offerings. Our challenge is to build strong partnerships to strengthen the education foundation for the profession of volunteer administration" (1993).

### Recognition

*The Journal of Volunteer Administration* has and continues to make a major contribution to the profession's education dimension. This special millennium issue applauds the past editors, as listed in this issue, for their appreciated contribution to our professional literature and published research. Additionally, *The Journal* consistently marketed and reported on AVA's annual international conferences. Readers were invited to "share the vision, shape the future" or to "navigate to new worlds of volunteerism." Because of the major impact AVA's annual conferences have had on our profession, readers will also find a complete listing, including host cities and themes, elsewhere in this special millennium issue.

### Changes and Challenges

Professional education and communication took a quantum leap with the remarkable developments in cyberspace. Volunteer administrators put their hard drives into over-drive, drove their computers onto the information superhighway and entered virtual life in the faxlane. The Association for Volunteer Administration launched its first web site in 1997. *The Journal's* publication of "An Internet Dialogue" followed in the fall of 1998. Editor-in-Chief Mitzi Bhavnani commented on "the provocative nature of cyberspace conversations where ideas take shape and develop in an open forum" (1998). Bhavnani's comments confirmed the projection made in 1993 by Carol Todd, Distinguished Member Service Award winner, who said, "Our field is changing, growing, challenging us to meet the demands of this year, next year and the future" (1994).

The changes and challenges resulted in new partnerships, innovative training

models, expanded outreach, and increased international activities, advocacy and awareness. Elsewhere in this special millennium issue, you will find the Association for Volunteer Administration's Statement of Inclusiveness, adopted in 1998, that articulates AVA's responsibility to promote professionalism, to educate and to learn from the international community and to work in partnership. The statement defines diversity and AVA's intention to be inclusive of all individuals. While the Statement of Inclusiveness was adopted to help guide the organization into the next millennium, it follows that we, as individuals, are responsible for reviewing and renewing our personal and professional commitment to inclusiveness.

### Beyond 2000

If we are to propel our profession of volunteer administration into the new millennium, our commitment must also transcend inclusiveness to embrace new thinking, technology and talents. Marlene Wilson, in her keynote address to the 1998 International Conference on Volunteer Administration, said, "... we have never before in history had a richer, more extravagantly luxuriant variety of cultures, talents, ages, professional skills and opportunities to truly make a difference in this field called volunteerism." (1999). Wilson's words challenged me to ask myself, "Am I truly making a difference to the exciting profession of volunteer administration?" As I pondered her challenge, I found myself reviewing, with appreciation, AVA's *Portrait of a Profession*.

*Portrait of a Profession: Volunteer Administration* is a priceless publication—a succinct synopsis that chronicles our history and profiles our professional identity. Ours is an identity created by successes and failures that have been judged by optimists, pessimists and people-in-between. The publication purposes to "...help funders, educators, policy makers and all who realize that citizens should be engaged in their communities

understand the role of and need for the volunteer administration professional" (1999).

Conclusion

The objective of this article was to record some peaks and valleys of our professional quest, to excerpt professional snaps from past issues of *The Journal* and view them against fresh focuses of our profession in 1999. The excerpts verify that AVA has propelled the profession forward—whether by push, pull or prod. The excerpts affirm that *The Journal* has recorded our professional progress. My goal was to inspire each of us to be proud of our profession today and to recommit to developing a superior portrait of our profession beyond 2000. Let's be proud to be part of the portrait. Better still, let's respond to the challenge to be its developers:

*Shaping a shared vision and mission, matching volunteer talents with satisfying assignments, guiding volunteers to success and building leadership with the volunteer corps require a developer of volunteer resources with an extraordinary combination of leadership and managerial abilities. This is the volunteer administration professional. (Portrait of a Profession: Volunteer Administration, 1999)*

ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup>Quotes from *The Journal of Volunteer Administration* used in this article reflect only the '80s and '90s. AVA took over publication of *The Journal* in 1982. Prior to that date, *The Journal* was published jointly by AVA, the Association of Voluntary Action Scholars (AVAS) and the Association for Volunteer Bureaus (AVB), beginning in the Spring of 1977.

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