

Presidents' Summit for America's Future

Thoughts on the Presidents' Summit

Carol Todd

For those who attended the Presidents' Summit for America's Future in Philadelphia, it certainly was a weekend to remember. I came away excited, exhausted, and feeling validated. There can be no doubt that the presence of such an array of stars—President Bill Clinton and General Colin Powell, Oprah Winfrey and Winton Marsalis, corporate executives and governors from approximately 30 states—energized and sparked a pervading enthusiasm and “can-do” atmosphere that was truly exciting. The hours were long, the crowds huge, the arrangements not uniformly successful.

I came back to Vermont with the impression that the work of those who have volunteered over the years in the traditional sense—who have taught Sunday school, worked in Red Cross blood banks, taught prisoners how to get their high school equivalency diplomas, and, yes, even baked cookies for the parent-teacher association—was recognized and honored for what it is: the glue that holds this country together; imperfect as it may be, the stuff of which our American way of life is made. This bipartisan extravaganza recognized what volunteer managers and grassroots volunteers have known all along: Ultimately the solutions to social problems are up to individuals and local efforts. It was heartening to read the Promise Book in which corporations pledged support for volunteer initiatives. Good for them, and thanks! Volunteer work needs all the help

it can get. Thanks, also, to governmental support through AmeriCorps, VISTA, Foster Grandparents and the like, for stipended volunteerism has a valued place in today's society.

Yet with all the hoopla and positive reinforcement, there was one big void. Although I applauded the emphasis on the five fundamental resources for young people (mentoring, protecting, nurturing, teaching, and service), and was pleased by the work done in small groups by our Vermont state delegation, I was amazed and saddened that there was not one word said or even one reference made to the importance of effective management or thoughtful organization of the work of volunteers. I was distressed by the lack of awareness of the need for the most basic training, supervision, or recognition of those who will carry out the mandates of the Summit. I believe AVA lost an opportunity for promotion of its *raison d'être*. Too bad.

If the goals of the Summit are to be realized, the fundamental truth AVA stands for—that volunteers deserve and require leadership and support—must become basic to the efforts of the ambitious initiative set in motion in Philadelphia. My earnest hope is that, through the efforts of AVA, the principles of effective management will guide the work of all Americans who strive to make life better by taking personal responsibility for society's problems.

Since moving to Vermont 15 years ago, *Carol Todd* has devoted her energies to promoting effective volunteerism in her state and beyond. She founded Vermonters in Volunteer Administration which assists volunteer managers with a supportive network, established the Norwich University Center for Volunteer Administration that offers a university-based credential in the field of volunteer management, and was a founding member of the Governor's Commission on Volunteers and the Vermont Commission on National and Community Service. In addition, she has served on numerous local and national boards and committees. She was awarded the Harriet Naylor Distinguished Service Award by the Association for Volunteer Administration in 1993.