

Association for Volunteer Administration Distinguished Member Service Award Acceptance Speech

October 24, 1991

Nancy Jane Barker

At the 1991 International Conference on Volunteer Administration, Nancy Jane Barker was presented with AVA's Distinguished Member Service Award. An active AVA member since 1969, Nancy has held several different positions in the organization, including 1979 Conference Chair and serving as the President from 1981-83. Those were busy times for AVA—the Certification Program, The Journal of Volunteer Administration, the affiliate program and the awards program all have roots to her tenure.

Nancy has also influenced volunteerism in her home state of Texas in which she served for many years as the state Director of Volunteer Services for the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation. The Texas Senate recognized her service with a commendation. Many of her efforts have been dedicated to the professional development of volunteer administrators, establishing career ladders within her state government that serve as models throughout the country.

At the beginning of my career, I had the good fortune to read a book by Harriet H. Naylor, *Volunteers Today: Finding, Training and Working with Them*. It was practical and relevant. It became my Bible and it started me on the right track.

Hat was always at our conferences. Again, I had the good fortune to attend her late-night meetings for state directors. And there I learned what being a Volunteer Director was all about. I sought her counsel by phone and letter many times. I'd like to think she would be pleased that I am receiving the Harriet Naylor Distinguished Member Service Award. As for me, I am thrilled to the depths of my soul.

My professional career has been devoted to upgrading the volunteer administrator. I'm always asked why my emphasis has been on the staff instead of the volunteer. I believe in the value of the volunteer and that volunteer deserves professional staff trained in volunteer administration. In the state of Texas classification system, the title of the positions in the Volunteer Services career ladder are under "Director, Volunteer Services." Through the years there have been requests to change the title to "Director, Community Resource Development" or "Community Relations" because it sounds more important. For over twenty years I held to the title "Director, Volunteer Services" to make the word *volunteer* important.

My philosophy has always been, and Texans have heard this many times, that to have a productive volunteer program there must be a full-time, adequately paid, qualified Volunteer Administrator. I have been a paid volunteer administrator since 1968. I have been a professional in the field of volunteer administration since 1974.

The third Commissioner I worked for came from a state where there was no volunteer component in the agency. As head of the largest state agency employer in Texas, he looked at the organizational chart and wondered why one of the seven people reporting

to him was a volunteer person. He called me in and informed me that only professionals reported directly to him. Well, I empowered myself and my profession and asked: "What is your definition of a professional?" He answered: "There are five criteria and all have to be in place." These were:

1. A degree from an accredited University. (Yes, Sir, I have a BBA from the University of Texas.)
2. A national professional association. (Yes, Sir, I belong to the American Association of Volunteer Services Coordinators.)
3. There must be a Code of Ethics for the field. (Yes, Sir, we have one.)
4. There must be an accepted Journal. (Yes, Sir, we have one.)
5. There must be credentials. (Yes, Sir, I am a Certified Volunteer Coordinator.)

"Well, then, you are a professional and I will treat you as a professional." The best part of this story is my next pay check reflected a two group salary increase! I said thank you, God, for my professional association!

What I told the Commissioner was all true. I did however think, AAVSC is an organization only for Volunteer Coordinators in psychiatric hospitals. There needs to be an association open to all volunteer managers in a variety of settings, one that is inclusive, not exclusive. The Journal, *Volunteer Administration*, was a magazine published in conjunction with two other groups. In fact our annual conference was sponsored by the three groups. We need our own conference and our own Journal. The certification, CVC, was given for attending so many hours of workshops. We need a certification that validates our skills. That's what I thought. And so did many of you. And it came true.

During this time, I began asking myself what can I do to have a professional association like I think it should be and what contribution can I make to my profession?

Two things we want from our professional association are enhanced status for career leadership and more financial resources allocated in support of volunteer programs. Both these things happened to me and equally important to me is the relationships with you that developed through the years. I treasure these friendships.

A special word of appreciation to Martha Martin. Martha, I appreciate you!

Here is what we have now:

AVA provides the professional publication, *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*, that addresses the variety inherent in our field.

AVA offers the field of volunteer administration its only internationally recognized professional credential, C.V.A. (Certified in Volunteer Administration) based on an assessment of demonstrated performance against a set of prescribed competencies and standards.

We have gotten into the formal education system with courses and a few colleges offering degrees.

There are established guidelines and standards to evaluate volunteer programs.

AVA members testify at congressional hearings.

No one says to me anymore: "Yes, you direct volunteers, but what do you do in your paid job?"

No one says anymore that "volunteers are free! Why do we need a budget?"

AVA is the only generic organization open to the full scope of volunteerism.

Our International Conference on Volunteer Administration is a continuing education event. Networking is in place. One way I utilized the network: every time there was a new Commissioner of TDMHMR (and I have worked under six), I called many of the AVA members in his previous state so I had a profile on him when he came, and it helped.

All this is to say the ground work has been laid, the trappings are in place, the band wagon has arrived, and we are on it.

Leaders of volunteers are confronted on a daily basis with the need to remain current in their skills and knowledge. Motivating without the reward of funds is one unique skill we have to offer. Not everyone can do your job. Volunteer programs and volunteer administrators are gaining credibility and no longer are the icing on the cake but the meat and

potatoes of an organization. It is time for us to be on a par with other professions. How do we do this?

What if Volunteer Director positions stated "CVA preferred"? What if it stated "CVA required"? My daughter has a Masters of Science in Social Work and has applied for three social work positions. Each place gave her a paper stating: "Texas State Law Chapter 50 requires anyone who is identified to the public as a Social Worker to be certified under the laws and regulations of that state." What if that happened in the field of Volunteer Administration?

The Director of Volunteers at the Texas Department of Health called me a few weeks ago. She said: "Everyone on my floor has some letters after their name. Administration has told me I need some credentials. What do I do?" The same week the Director of our Volunteer Center called and said, "the Board is considering increasing my salary but I need credentials." I see my dream come true! CVA is translated into status and respect and more money.

What if in state and national legislation AVA got sponsors for bills putting forth our issues and lobbied to get our package passed? I wish for AVA to lead and be proactive.

What if a degree in volunteer administration was offered to all accredited universities?

What if AVA offered a mentor to each new volunteer administrator entering the field?

What if agency credentialing had a section for a volunteer program set by AVA? Mental Health and Mental Retardation facilities that became Joint Commission for Accreditation of Hospital Organization (JCAHO) or Intermediate Care Facility for Mentally Retarded (ICFMR) approved must adhere to criteria for a volunteer program. AVA needs to be writing those standards and they should include not only staff and volunteers but also materials, equipment, money, information, community support, and an index to reflect all the non-dollar sources.

What if instead of studying only what impact population, economic trends, etc. has on volunteering, the study would include what impact volunteerism has on demographics? There is serious research on the effect volunteering has on one's health.

What if AVA offered group rates in health, life and disability insurance? Many of my friends work in small non-profits where there is no insurance.

What if job connections could be made easy with regional job banks?

What if our AVA Conference was held in England?

These are my dreams. What are your dreams for AVA and what are we doing about it? Let's share our dreams so we can prudently discuss, plan, and implement. I wish for each of you that AVA will mean so much to you as it does to me.