

Two CVAs and How They Feel About...

MEL DEL MONTE AND DON PATTERSON WERE among the first group of ten volunteer administrators to be certified by AVA in the 1980 pilot program administered by AVA and the Adelphi University Center on Volunteerism. I interviewed both in their respective offices where Patterson has served in his current position for about five years and Del Monte for over two.

It is obvious from their remarks that the certification experience has affected them in many ways: They have a deeper feeling for their individual roles as volunteer administrators—on both the personal and public levels—and they have gained a keen insight on the current status and future potential of their profession. The experience seems to have inspired in them a sense of the need to connect with other colleagues to communicate the professional self-development that is unique in performance-based certification.

Throughout the nine-month pilot, Patterson, Del Monte and other participants communicated on many occasions, exchanging notes on each other's progress, but also on what Patterson described as "the different things we could do because of certification." For example, Patterson and his two Virginia colleagues in the pilot group—Rena Dudley, director of volunteers, Central Virginia Legal Aid, Richmond, and Mary Lillie, director of volunteers, Children's Hospital of the King's Daughters, Richmond, became members of a state "cluster" group of volunteer administrators. In three years the group has grown to 30 members who meet quarterly to discuss mutual concerns and share ideas.

Today, Patterson and Del Monte are active in sharing the experience of the certification process and helping in its



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administration. Del Monte serves on the AVA Certification Committee as well as the Certification Assessment Panel, and Patterson is on the AVA Region IV Certification Committee, which encompasses the states of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and West Virginia.

Also, in the past year Patterson completed an internship with the Center for Volunteer Development at Virginia Polytechnic Institute (VPI) to develop a model college curriculum for volunteer administrators. Working with representatives of the Virginia Division of Volunteerism, the Richmond VAC and Red Cross, Patterson developed the courses based on his own experience and the AVA guidelines for certification. He was pleased to report very recently that the Virginia community college system approved three of the eight courses—Introduction to Volunteer Administration, Volunteer Program Management I and II—and that the J. Sargent Reynolds Community College in Richmond will begin offering the introductory course in January.

—Brenda Hanlon

Volunteer Administration as a Career

Patterson: It's common knowledge there's a rapid turnover in our field. Why? Because there are not enough formal educational or on-the-job training programs to show volunteer administrators exactly what they can do and to help them understand the magnitude of their position.

Volunteer administrators are extremely creative. They have lots of fine ideas, but when they try to implement 15 or 20 different ideas at one time, they burn themselves out. On my job, I was developing programs right and left, but was not really conscious that each required a different plan, policies and procedures. I was just doing. I thought I was a pretty good administrator until Geneva Austin, administrator of the Richmond Nursing Home, said, "Write these programs up; let's see what you have going." I found out I had about nine different programs going!

Other volunteer administrators having problems should do the same. Then they wouldn't feel that they're in a bind. Many times you hear them say, "I can't handle this job. They're not paying me enough. I'm going to leave." They should know



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that when they first come into the field, they have to plan, organize and write, so volunteers and staff can see what's going on. It eliminates a lot of hassles.

Many volunteer directors will keep all of their plans in their heads. Then if they leave the field, they don't pass on what they have learned in the process of administering a program. If a problem comes up, we're stuck. I had to learn my position on the job—that we must develop and maintain policies and procedures for our volunteers so they know exactly what's expected of them. I previously worked with a private drug program where we had no formal guidelines for volunteers. I developed certain skills, but technical management experience I received right here.

The experience I've gained at the Richmond Nursing Home has been vital to my learning about my role as a volunteer administrator. It's made me see the need of pulling everyone together as a team. Those who leave the field early are really missing the chance for development.

Del Monte: I came to Red Cross because my twins had just started college and I was looking for a full-time paid job. I chose the job as administrative assistant to the chairman of volunteers of the Nassau County Chapter in New York because it represented a challenge to me. I approached it with a "show-me" attitude because of some negative experiences I had as a child with "Lady Bountiful"-type volunteers, who were totally insensitive. But as I worked with the volunteer chairman, she personally demonstrated how a well-trained, motivated volunteer could affect changes. As a result, I gained professional growth experience that allowed a job to become a career, and a personal growth experience that became a commitment to volunteerism.

When my children were growing up I worked in the community, helping establish public libraries, that kind of thing. I didn't know I was a volunteer, though. I was doing it because it was in my community and I cared enough about it to get involved. It was only when I became a volunteer administrator that I began to see what good, organized volunteer programs can do for the individual and the community.

I learned a valuable lesson very early. During my second week at Red Cross, I answered a call from a school teacher who was about to retire. She wanted to know what kinds of volunteer opportunities we could offer her. In my eagerness, I said, "Oh, we use volunteers as case workers, we use volunteers in our blood programs, we use volunteers in our day nursery at the family court. . . ." She stopped me cold and said, "Young lady, I am an English teacher, and I want to tell

you, you do not use people, you involve them. You *use* things!"

As I began to meet other volunteer administrators, I began to see there were those who used volunteers, shuffling them around like cards, and those who involved them. I realized that the latter had a professional attitude about what they were doing.

Patterson: I will always be in this profession. It's in its infancy stage right now, but there is so much that can be done. I've observed that different levels of volunteer administrators have evolved. Those with zero to three years' experience tend to communicate with those on their own level; and those with more experience hang out together. When I talk about program planning, it is based on five years of experience. The understanding is different. You have gaps because of these different levels. Certification and the educational process will help eliminate them.

Del Monte: The profession is still in infancy—it's been developing for about ten years. What has happened in that period is analogous to the medical profession. For example, we can liken volunteer administrators to the practitioners in medicine, the doctors and nurses. We can liken voluntary agencies and institutions to the places of medical practice, the hospitals and clinics. We can liken the centers on volunteerism and the academic offerings of volunteer management programs to the medical research labs and the schools of medicine and nursing. If we do that, we can then see that the practitioners need the hospitals or agencies to practice their professions, and they need the labs and teaching facilities to learn the state of the art. Each part is dependent on the other in order to make sure that we give good service to our constituents. This is why a professional association is needed, so we can communicate with each other and enthuse each other and develop ethics and standards. Certification is a logical step in our development.

Participation in the Certification Pilot Program

Patterson: When I first took this job five years ago, I wanted to link up with other volunteer administrators. So first I contacted the local VAC. Then I knew I had to link up with a

professional organization. So I joined AVA and a year later became a VOLUNTEER Associate.

When AVA did its mailing to East Coast members, inviting them to participate in its pilot certification program, I had been considering certification through the Certificate in Volunteer Management Program in Boulder. After talking with Rhoda White, who was on the AVA Certification Committee, I knew that I wanted to go to the one-day orientation at Adelphi, even if I couldn't get in the program. I was the last one to be accepted.

Del Monte: At the invitational meeting, Sarah Jane [Rehnberg, AVA president then] made an inspiring presentation. I told her later she made me want to go out and carry a placard for the "cause." She was saying everything—she was enunciating, sensing, recognizing what was needed to make volunteering the vital, effective force it always has been in American society but could be even more so if only taken more seriously.

The Value of Certification

Del Monte: Demonstrating and documenting our competencies was one of the most interesting experiences I ever went through. I spent nights and weekends writing drafts. I thought about it on the bus going to and from work. One thing the process does is help you see your own personal growth—where you started and what the experiences were that contributed to that personal growth.

It was a challenging experience, a reflective one and a "stretching" one. I now have a better sense of purpose, of direction for myself, my work, my profession and volunteerism in general.

Patterson: It was a priceless educational experience. It made me more aware of volunteerism. I didn't feel as isolated anymore—it tied me in with the entire field. Before I had to read until things came together. It also helped tie volunteering in with my supervisory administrative position. I had to write these things down as a public administrative employee, but I would ask, is this really necessary as a *volunteer* administrator? (Volunteer administrators always say, "We're too busy; we don't have time to write.")

Also, the process enhanced my working relationship with my supervisor. She made me give her a timetable for completing various parts of my portfolio. So we tied certification in with our regular meetings with each other. If I knew certification was on the agenda, I couldn't slouch; I had to have it ready.

Del Monte: The marvelous thing about this program is that it is performance-based. It doesn't matter whether you are degreed or how many academic honors you may have earned or how many continuing education courses you have attended. While these are important in preparing you for the field, earning the CVA designation means demonstrating that you are competently putting into practice what you have learned, how you have done it and why you have done it. It is

the only certification program of its type among professional associations.

Patterson: Certification is a contribution to our profession. For any field you need qualifications, guidelines, standards. AVA certification is an endorsement of a person working in the field, who has all the knowledge and skills and is doing an acceptable job. That is very important. It also works hand in hand with academic credentialing, which will prepare a person to work in the field. Just like an attorney—you go to law school, then you take the bar.

Del Monte: This performance-based assessment has as its ultimate goal better service to the community. The professional development of competent, committed volunteer administrators helps insure the involvement and development of effective volunteers and the management of viable volunteer programs.

The Future of the Profession

Patterson: I can't see us going in any other direction but toward professionalizing. Certification is bringing all this into focus. Once you go through the process, an awareness sets in. Volunteer administrators will start realizing their potential. Everyone around you will be going through the same thing, and you start drawing on that power. Certification will start to snowball.

Del Monte: As I said before, we need to be taken more seriously. We need to be recognized as professionals, as competent in our fields, that we are unique. Unique in the sense that we are working with unique human resources—individuals who have chosen to come to us to work for their communities. We need our research centers and academicians to explore this uniqueness, to help us discover its greater potential.

Patterson: The volunteer administrator has to emerge. Everybody is soon going to realize there's a market out there. Schools will begin opening doors. It's really just getting started. Before, educators didn't know how to train us. They had very little concept of what volunteer administration is, so the courses were a turn-off for us and not cost-effective for the institution. But now we're getting volunteer administrators with experience *and* with academic backgrounds, who can teach these classes, make them interesting and help solve our problems.

Del Monte: I'm excited by what I am doing and what I see happening in the field today. Volunteerism and the professionalizing of volunteer administrators, whether volunteer or salaried, are having an impact on society's planners, on its colleges and universities, on its workplace, on government and even on those agencies and institutions in which volunteers once may have been taken for granted. Hopefully, no longer again will we have to hear, "I'm just a volunteer." ♥