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## Marking a Special Birthday

By [Susan J. Ellis](#)

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March 2007 brings Energize, Inc.'s 30th birthday! All the clichés about “where did the time go?” definitely spring to mind, as does the thought: “Boy, I must have been very young to have had the audacity to set off on this adventure!”

Milestones like this deserve celebration – such as a whole new make-over! On March 19th you're invited to the start of a virtual party when we **unveil a fresh new look for Energize and this Web site**, itself now 10 years old (which, in Internet terms, is positively ancient). We'll have a new logo, graphics, and color scheme – but be assured that all the content you value here will continue to be available. As the year progresses, we'll be introducing some new, free elements, too, including a podcast of the Hot Topic each month and some wonderful downloadable artwork. It may be our birthday, but we wanted to give you some gifts! (If you're not already a subscriber to our free monthly e-Update, this would be a great time to sign up – you'll get your personal invitation to the party and be kept informed about all the new things happening here. [Click here to sign up.](#))

One of the tasks the team at Energize set ourselves as part of the process of refreshing our image for 2007 was to re-articulate the mission statement of our company. So, here is what we stand for:

*We empower and inspire leaders of volunteers worldwide. Our specialty is creating and selecting the most relevant, innovative resources in volunteer management. We're advocates for the power of volunteers and for the recognition of the leaders who unleash it.*

### **Why These Words? What Do They Mean to Us?**

In 2002, when Energize celebrated its 25th birthday, I wrote a Hot Topic called “[The World According to Volunteer Experience](#).” Immodestly, I think it's worth a second read today. I focused then on the positives, which still vastly outweigh nagging doubts, minor irritations, and major sources of outrage. However, the single biggest issue confronting Energize as a company and my personal career has remained constant despite 30 years of continuous attempts to improve it: the pervasive ignorance of the true value of volunteers, resulting in lack of attention and resources to their support. All of us tilt daily at the windmill of stereotypes and prejudice about who volunteers, what they do and why they

do it. And, until volunteers are recognized for their vital role in society, the people who lead volunteer efforts will not be valued either.

This is why our mission statement has strong words: ***empower and inspire; unleashing the power of volunteers***. Politically and ethically, we hold volunteering as a value critical to community life, social change, and personal growth. Of course some volunteers are helpers by choice and some agencies relegate them to low-level tasks (while missing the irony of the governance authority of board volunteers at the other end of the spectrum). But the type of volunteering that we at Energize hold most dear is risk taking, acting on the front lines, standing up to those in power by questioning the status quo – all the things that volunteers are especially able to do by the very nature of their independence and courage.

Energize's way of supporting volunteers, however, is to ***serve leaders of volunteers worldwide***, both by providing ***relevant, innovative resources in volunteer management*** and by consciously bringing *recognition* of the role they play in enabling volunteers to be the most effective. That's why we are determined advocates in educating beyond the volunteer management field itself. We work to inform executives and key decision makers, as well as people in other professions who work side-by-side with volunteers daily. We also reach out to those who do not necessarily self-identify as "leaders of volunteers" but who should, from college alumni directors to emergency response officers to *pro bono* services coordinators. There are thousands of us mobilizing an incredible spectrum of community resources and we'd be stronger if we understood that we have more in common than what's different about us. For the same reason, Energize actively promotes international exchange – mindful, too, that volunteers hold the power of private citizens united by mutual causes, regardless of political and geographical boundaries.

Finally, we carefully chose the words ***creating and selecting the resources*** we provide to you. Our goal is to discover and share the excellent volunteer management materials already out there, but with few distribution mechanisms. We know that some of you still resist books in electronic format, but the ability to find gems from around the world and make them accessible to everyone is probably the biggest gift of the Internet to a small company like Energize. This Web site is *a portal* by design. We try to guide you to the best information we've found from as many different sources as possible. Only when there are gaps in what's already available do we create our own materials for the field, holding ourselves to high standards of quality. Our journal, [e-Volunteerism](#), furthers this goal by offering a forum for any colleague with something to share with others, globally.

This 30th birthday is less a commemoration than a fresh start. There's so much left to do and we want to keep doing it.

## **A Word of Thanks**

This is a good time to express my enormous gratitude to the staff at Energize for their hard work and devotion to our mission. Particular thanks to our Webmaster Kristin Floyd, who has been part of

Energize for 14 years and the behind-the-scenes architect of this Web site from the beginning. I also appreciate the many colleagues with whom I work – and sometimes commiserate – regularly for being good friends well beyond our professional contacts. A sailor may have a “woman in every port”; I often note that I have a “colleague in every city”!

### **Share the Changes You’ve Seen and Your Mission**

Please celebrate our 30th birthday with us! Come back on or after the 19th and get your free art gift, sign our greeting card, and see our new look. Here’s what I’d like to know in response to this Hot Topic:

- *How long have you been in the field of volunteer management and what has been the biggest change, or biggest surprise, or most important thing you’ve learned?*
- *How would you express your personal “mission statement”? Why are you committed to this field and what do you want to accomplish in it?*

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***Submitted on 19 March 2007 by Frank Pomata, L.I. Volunteer Hall of Fame, Co-Founder  
Long Island, NY USA***

Susan - Here's a toast to the past and a wish for another 30 years of Energize, Inc fostering volunteerism, under your visionary and insightful leadership. Thanks for being a guiding light to those of us working directly with volunteers to bring programs to life! Keep it up.

***Submitted on 18 March 2007 by Hillary Roberts, PLNJ Inc., President, Keyport/NJ USA***

Happy Birthday Energize, Inc.! Congratulations to Susan and her team for being one hard-working example of how to approach and educate the profession. Energize strenghtens the authenic, diverse and often misunderstood field of volunteer management.

Before stumbling upon Energize and early in my 2nd career, I believed an all-volunteer organization had to work twice as hard as its staffed counterparts. Within the pages of Energize, I quickly learned EVERY professional working in a non profit struggles with mission challenges and strives for stamina, sustainability and like-minded support.

Energize's revised mission statement demonstrates the importance of re- thinking our agency roles; working through the "improvement plan."

Afterall, true leadership is best demonstrated by a community ENERGIZED.

***Submitted on 16 March 2007 by Jayne Cravens, United Nations Development Programme, Consultant,  
Kabul Afghanistan***

If I could sing Happy Birthday in Dari, I would. Instead...

I've been in the field of volunteer management since 1994 or so, when I was asked to create web sites for more than a dozen initiatives and thought, hmmm... I'm sure there are some college students who would love to volunteer to do this, since I don't really know how. Two of them asked if they could work from home, I said sure, and thus I was introduced to online volunteering... but two years later, when I met Susan and found out that volunteer management was an actual \*field\*, with books and workshops and associations, and that I was now in this field, I also started to realize the vital role volunteers had played in every nonprofit organization with which I had been affiliated. Susan, her team, and the resources at Energize literally, fundamentally, changed my life. Even now, when I'm focused on my other area of expertise (media and internal communications), the things I've learned from Susan and Energize affect my work.

The two most important thing I've learned since entering the field: (1) that volunteers need to be in leadership positions and critical roles in a nonprofit for that organization to truly be connected to its community and to be sustainable. (2) that most organizations are terrified of allowing volunteers to assume leadership positions and critical roles and, therefore, rarely unleash the full power of volunteers.

***Submitted on 14 March 2007 by Miriam Leslie, The Mustard Seed  
Volunteer Development Coordinator, Edmonton Canada***

I LOVE your site--thank you for all your great work! I have been "formally" in this field for the past six years with a few interruptions. I say formally because somehow when I was a pastor, I didn't realize that I was very much involved in volunteer management with our particular organization.

My career transition finally seems to be settling down and I have discovered my niche, I think, I hope! I love the people--the amazing heroes I'm privileged to meet. I love the diversity of people and also the diversity of work. I love being stretched to new capacities professionally and personally.

I wish I had a personal mission statement. Thanks for the prod on this!

I love the feeling of helping others to help others, if that makes sense!

***Submitted on 7 March 2007 anonymously from Alhambra, California***

I have been enjoying your newsletter for 7 years... bought several books...and used several of your 'hot topics' for discussion at our volunteer coordinator meetings... keep it up... please.

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PRIVACY STATEMENT

