Urban Park Management Seminar Series

Volunteer Management: Running a Successful Horticulture Volunteer Program

March 3, 2016
Volunteer Department

Who are we?

Central Park Conservancy’s Volunteer Department assigns and works with over 350 volunteers year round.

We have been managing volunteers since almost the inception of the Central Park Conservancy, 1983.

- The Central Park’s Conservancy’s first formalized Volunteer Program was called **L.I.V.E.**

  “Learning and Involvement for Volunteers in the Environment”
Volunteer Programs

What are they?

• Gardener’s Assistant Volunteers
  ✓ Assist Zone Gardeners throughout the Park

• Volunteer Teams
  ✓ Such as the Saturday Green Team, the Paint Team, the Snow Team,
    the Seasonal Green Team, the Wednesday Green Team,
    Section 9 Green Team and Thursday Afternoon Teams

• Day in The Dirt Program
  ✓ Group volunteer sessions with companies. Generally this
    is a one-time session which lasts for up to three hours. The work done
    is seasonally based but can include bench painting.
Gardener’s Assistant Volunteers

Gardener’s Assistant volunteers assist zone gardeners weekly in their zones. The volunteers help maintain the Park landscapes. The volunteers report one day weekly to their assigned Zone Gardener. Gardeners generally work with volunteers one day weekly on either Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday, for three hours, from 9:00 am - 12:00 pm. We have approximately 214 active Gardener Assistant volunteers assisting Zone Gardeners throughout the Park.

What do these volunteers do?

• Weed invasive/aggressive plants
• Deadhead and cutback plants
• Plant bulbs, annuals, shrubs and trees
• Water plants
• Rake leaves
• Sweep pathways
• Remove snow from pathways and playgrounds

Central Park Volunteers:

• Don’t work alone
• Don’t operate vehicles
• Don’t operate power tools
Want to Volunteer?

How did they hear of us?
• Web site
• Word of mouth
• Visually - we are seen in the Park working with groups
• Signage - we display signage informing the public
• Other not-for-profit organizations refer applicants to us

Interested in joining the Gardener’s Assistant Volunteer Program?
• Through our website, you fill out an application and submit it electronically
• Make an appointment for an interview
Applicants need to be interviewed. The interview aids in determining who could be an appropriate candidate for this program.

**Interview Process:**
- Conducted twice monthly
- Current volunteers are conducting the interviews

**Topics discussed:**
- Brief history of Central Park Conservancy
- Commitment to this program
- Brief explanation of the Zone Management System
- Explanation of the seasonal tasks performed
- Seasonal weather conditions
- Communications with staff
- Availability to attend an Orientation and a three week training
STEP 2 - Three Step Process (Interview, Orientation, and Training)

**Orientation:**
- Conducted monthly by Volunteer Department
- History of Central Park
- History and Mission of the Central Park Conservancy
- CPC Core Values
- Different Volunteer Opportunities
- **Topics discussed:**
  - Job Descriptions
  - Commitment
  - Safety
  - Training
  - Inclement Weather Conditions
  - Liability Waivers are reviewed, completed and signed
New Trainees

The final step - **STEP 3**: 3-week training
This training helps us further evaluate the prospective volunteer and gives the applicant a better idea of what to expect as a Gardener’s Assistant.

**New Gardener’s Assistant Volunteer Training:**

- **Volunteer Handbook** is reviewed
- **Training Booklet** is reviewed focusing on tools and SAFETY.
- **Weed Booklet** is reviewed
  - Specific attention is given to the identification of poison ivy, (SAFETY issue)
- Commitment and communication is reiterated
- Inclement Weather Conditions
- Conduct seasonal projects like weeding, raking and mulching.
- Database training is provided
Graduation!

The volunteer has successfully completed the 3-Step process and will be assigned to a Zone Gardener.

**Coordinate Placement for the Volunteer:**

- **Communication is key in this process:**
  - Inform and seek approval from Section Supervisor and Zone Gardener
  - Confirm start date for the new volunteer and Zone Gardener
  - Send placement email to the new volunteer
  - Initiate communication between the new volunteer and Zone Gardener
  - Follow up with the Gardener’s Assistant volunteer and Zone Gardener regularly
Prospective Volunteers

What if a prospective volunteer doesn’t successfully complete the new volunteer training?

**Reasons:**
- Absences
- Availability – inconsistent availability weekly
- Physical Limitations
- Special Needs

**What next:**
- Extend the training to reconfirm their commitment to this program
- Offer other options like joining a Wednesday Team or a Saturday Team
- Offer more volunteer opportunities such as:
  - Pitch In, Pick Up Program
  - Greeter Guide Program
  - Administrative/Program Support
- Rejection
Zone Management System

What is Zone Management?
The Zone Management System was implemented to ensure the Park landscapes would have skilled and dedicated staff to maintain them. Central Park is divided into 49 geographic zones. The Zone Management System provides accountability, consistency, safety and security, and clear and measurable results. Each zone is managed by a Zone Gardener or Groundskeeper. The Zones are grouped into Sections and overseen by a Supervisor. There are 9 Sections in Central Park.

Section 1 – 10 Zones       Section 8 – 9 Zones
Section 2 – 15 Zones       Section 9 – 10 Zones
Section 3 – 6 Zones        Section 10 – 1 Zone
Section 4 – 12 Zones       Section 12 – 3 woodlands
Section 5 – 8 Zones
Field Staff Working With Volunteers

How do we assist and support the field staff:
• In-house staff training - ‘Staff Handbook’ reviewed and discussed.
• Tools for the field staff are ordered twice yearly.
• Continued support in the form of instruction, guidance, advice, mediation
• Meet regularly with the Section Supervisors to discuss:
  ✓ individual volunteers
  ✓ group volunteer sessions
  ✓ site visits to determine future group projects within their section
• Communications with staff regarding:
  ✓ Appointments for new Gardener’s Assistants starting
  ✓ Coordination for group volunteer sessions
  ✓ Schedule changes during extreme weather
Opportunities Available

Additional Opportunities are offered to our current volunteers

Join or participate:
- Wednesday Team
- Saturday Team
- Seasonal Team
- Section 9 Team
- North Woods Team
- Thursday Afternoon Teams
- Paint Team (NEW)
- Snow Team (NEW)

Also offered:
- Lectures – Provided by staff, volunteers or other individuals
- Education – Provided by our staff
- Tours – Provided by our Tour Guides
- Field Trips – Other Parks, museums
- Recognition Events – Luncheons, Potlucks, Annual Reception
Relationships

**Relationships = Retention**
- Relationship between Gardener and volunteer is very important, it is what keeps volunteers coming back week after week

**Zone Management = Retention**
- By being assigned to a zone, the volunteers take pride in that zone and want to maintain it

**Social Aspect = Retention**
- Friendships are made among the volunteers

**Physical Aspect = Retention**
- Physical Exercise = People look forward to this kind of physical activity
Database/Record Keeping

What did Gardener’s Assistant volunteers do in 2015?

214 Gardener’s Assistant Volunteers provided 15,145 Hours of additional support

- Section 2: 15 Zones, 49 Volunteers, 3,649 hours
- Section 8: 9 Zones, 15 Volunteers, 1,311 hours
- Section 9: 10 Zones, 13 Volunteers, 498 hours
- Section 10: 1 Zone, 24 Volunteers, 1,922 hours

We have two ways of gathering this information:
- Hours are entered into the database by our volunteers
- Field staff records this information on a monthly timesheet submitted to us
### Volunteer Services Summary 2015

**Database Statistics:**  
January 1, 2015 – December 31, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Participants</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gardener’s Assistant Volunteers</td>
<td>15,145</td>
<td>214</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day In The Dirt</td>
<td>3,608</td>
<td>1,202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer Groups</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>733</td>
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</table>

**Total Participants:**  
20,953 Hours  
2,146 Participants
Volunteers

Who are they?

Wonderful people giving their time helping to maintain Central Park.
For more information about the seminar series and other Park-to-Park programs, please contact:

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