

Area Agency on Aging *Connections*

Senior volunteer opportunities are plentiful throughout the county

By Daniel Casciato
For Pittsburgh Senior News

For many seniors like Rosemary Mahalchak of Carnegie and June Woodson of Homestead, volunteering is a way to make a difference in their community.

Rosemary, 83, has volunteered at the Chartiers Senior Resource Center of LifeSpan for 12 years because she wanted to contribute her services after retiring. "I'm a people person," she said. "All of my life, I worked with the public and I wanted to continue to work with people."

Rosemary helps with office work, handling phone calls, assisting members with annual dues, filing new memberships and passing out lunches. "I really enjoy doing this," she said. "I also enjoy listening to people's problems and I'll try to help them if I can."

Karen Seibel, coordinator of Chartiers Senior Resource Center, said the center would not be able to operate without volunteers like Rosemary. "You can't do it by yourself," she said. "You need volunteers to make this work and we could always use more."

June has been volunteering with the LifeSpan center in Homestead since the fall. She helps with their home-delivered meal program. "If I can do this forever, I would," said June, 61. "I love working directly with seniors and I enjoy working in this wonderful, family-oriented environment."

She encourages other seniors to get involved in their community. "Once you give a hand and volunteer, someone will always give you one back," she said.



Chuck LeClaire/Pittsburgh Senior News

Chartiers Resource Center volunteer Rosemary Mahalchak goes over the milk order with fellow volunteer Chris Malizio.

Tom Sturgill, program director for Vintage (East Liberty), said that they are always looking for more volunteers, as well. They offer a wide range of opportunities, including teaching classes (such as photography, crafts, exercise), assisting instructors, helping out with their meal program, working at the registration desk and more. In addition, 12 seniors are elected to serve on Vintage's advisory council to give them guidance and input on the center's programs.

"Many of our volunteers also volunteer extensively with their churches, schools, AARP, hospitals and community food banks," Tom said. "They really give of themselves and it's often been said that what they get back is much greater than what they're giving."

According to Joe Barker, independent services bureau chief for the Allegheny County Department of Human Services Area Agency on Aging (ACAAA), seniors are a tremendous resource in the community. "They have so many

energies, interests and talents," said Joe. "There's so much benefit in engaging seniors in volunteer opportunities."

Beyond the centers mentioned above, here are some other programs where seniors can volunteer.

Home-delivered meals

Volunteers are always needed for the home-delivered meals program for homebound seniors. Volunteers help to package food and deliver meals. At the time of delivery, they visit seniors and check on their welfare.

Ombudsman program

An ombudsman is an advocate for nursing home and personal care home residents. Ombudsmen inform and educate seniors, service providers and the public about long-term care services and consumers' rights. An ombudsman also monitors the quality of care and services, as well as quality-of-life issues, to ensure that seniors are being provided with

appropriate care and services.

A one-day state certification training program must be completed by all Tier 1 volunteers. Volunteers are paired with staff ombudsmen, although volunteers are permitted to do independent visits.

As a Tier 2 ombudsman, volunteers can begin to investigate complaints from seniors or their caregivers. You must be a Tier 1 volunteer for at least a year and complete a three-day state certification program to advance to this level.

Senior Companions

The Senior Companion Program recruits seniors to visit homebound seniors in their homes, provide friendship and help dispel loneliness. Senior volunteers receive a small, tax-free stipend, reimbursement of transportation expenses and small lunch allowance. They also receive paid sick leave, holidays, vacation and an accident/death policy.

Senior Companions must be age 60 or older with an income limited to 125 percent of the poverty level (which is \$12,775 this year). *PSN*

For information on volunteering through the ACAA, call Senior-Line at (412) 350-5460.

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