Recognition is key to keeping volunteers happy

VOLUNTEER EDMONTON.COM

National Volunteer Week is dedicated to recognizing the amazing contributions of volunteers across the country.

From April 27 to May 3, organizations and communities will be holding events and celebrations as a way to say thanks to the volunteers who make our communities a better place to live.

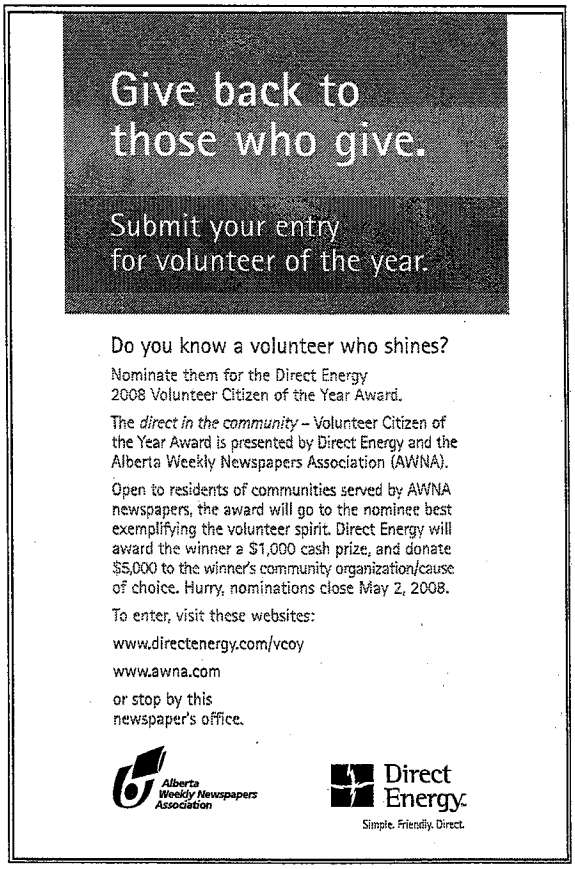
Research has shown that recognition supports organizational goals by increasing productivity, volunteer retention and morale. Volunteers who are rewarded for their success and feel like a valued member of the organization are more likely to stay. For organizations, happy volunteers pay off in the long run.

According to Volunteer Canada, recognition programs need to "match" the recognition to the volunteer. Depending on a volunteer's motivation, appropriate recognition should come in the form of praise, affiliation, and power and influence. For example, a volunteer seeking individual recognition for their accomplishments may prefer public acknowledgement, whereas a volunteer who enjoys a taking on a leadership role might appreciate a special title or increased involvement and responsibility in the organization.

Recognition could also depend on the size of the organization, says Sook-Yin Burwash, a volunteer co-ordinator for The Support Network. For organizations that offer short-term volunteer work – like summer festivals – recognition might come in the form of free goodies or admission to the big wrap-up party once the event is over. For organizations that depend on long-term volunteers like The Support Network, Burwash believes that recognition must go beyond pins and plaques.

She acknowledges that small gifts and prizes from time to time are important, especially when celebrating birthdays or milestones, but suggests organizations need to find out what volunteers value more. "We have a much younger demographic of volunteers and so what we've noticed is that they prefer social interaction and activities."

Whatever your approach, having good, solid volunteer management practices year-round will keep volunteers at your organization. "At the very least volunteers must always know and understand how their work helps the organization meet its vision and mission."

To find out how you can become a volunteer, visit www.volunteeredmonton.com and click on "I Want to Volunteer." To learn more about National Volunteer Week and how you can celebrate the volunteers in your life, visit www.volunteer.ca/nvw.

For more information or suggestions for story ideas please contact Evelyn Pham, communications co-ordinator, at epham@volunteeredmonton, call 732-6655 or check out our website at www.volunteeredmonton-.com. Volunteer Edmonton is a program of The Support Network.