

Volunteerism made easy

Written by Dick Mason, The Observer January 18, 2012 09:51 pm



COALITION COORDINATOR ROBIN WORTMAN provides information for Dana Reid, left, of La Grande as she visits the Union County Safe Communities Coalition table during Tuesday evening's Volunteer Link at the La Grande Middle School. CHRIS BAXTER / The Observer

Fair provides 'one-stop shopping' for those seeking to serve community

La Grande Middle School was a sea of opportunity late Tuesday afternoon for those looking to extend a hand of assistance to our community.

The LMS commons was the site of Volunteer Link, an annual fair at which public and private sector organizations provide information to people looking for opportunities to help their community. More than 40 agencies were represented at Tuesday's Volunteer Link event.

"This is one-stop shopping for volunteers," said David Still, a volunteer for Habitat for Humanity.

Still said there is an increasing need for volunteers today. He noted that the government is less able to provide services for people today due to tight budgets, creating a greater need for volunteers.

He also noted that as the population ages, it is more important than ever that people step forward and lend a helping hand.

The opportunities to help others are seemingly limitless.

"There is always more need than there are people available," Still said.

Needs that people could easily identify with the help of the Volunteer Link event. The event looked much like a job fair, with recruiters staffing tables throughout the commons, dispensing information about their organizations.

"This gives so many different opportunities to those who want to make a difference," Robin Wortman, coalition coordinator for the Union County Safe Communities Coalition, said Tuesday afternoon.

La Grande City Councilor Jerry Sebestyen, who also worked at the Volunteer Link fair, echoed a similar sentiment.

"This is a great venue for people who want to help," Sebestyen said.

Sebestyen worked at a station at which people were sought to fill about a dozen vacancies on five city of La Grande commissions and one advisory committee. He said many people do not think they are qualified to serve on commissions and advisory committees when, in fact, they are. He said that everyone has something to offer.

"We need all the skills volunteers can bring," Sebestyen said.

He said they should not feel intimidated about serving on boards and commissions, stressing that excellent training is provided.

The many community service opportunities via Volunteer Link included those for helping homeless dogs and cats at the animal shelter, which is operated by the Blue Mountain Humane Association. Lisa Morgan, its administrative coordinator, stressed that people have a wide variety of opportunities to help at the animal shelter.

This includes everything from coming in and spending time with dogs and cats to taking photographs. The pictures appear on Facebook, on posters and in publications to help find owners for the homeless pets.

Training sessions for animal shelter volunteers are conducted each month.

This was the third annual Volunteer Link Fair, which is always conducted the day following Martin Luther King Jr. Day. The event has grown significantly since its first year, when about 30 private and public sector agencies participated.

