

The Driftwood, September 2009

SSI Foundation at work in the community by Pat Burkette

On Salt Spring, volunteering isn't a way to fill time, it's a way of life. To help preserve that way of life, the Salt Spring Island Foundation gave a third grant this year to the island's volunteer gateway—Volunteer Salt Spring. Via a website, www.volunteersaltspring.com, Volunteer Salt Spring matches individuals with island organizations that list both urgent needs and new opportunities.

Bob Rush, who was instrumental in forming Volunteer Salt Spring, says that he would continually read about organizations looking for volunteers in the Driftwood, and began thinking about the need for a central volunteer clearinghouse. "I thought if we had a central place where they could go, we could match volunteers with organizations." But Rush and the group of like-minded people who joined him in setting up Volunteer Salt Spring soon realized having an office downtown was out of the question, and Volunteer Salt Spring's virtual office was born. Turns out that's a perfect fit for all of us folks who love to google, chat and shop online.

Volunteer Salt Spring lists all kinds of volunteer needs online, from side-walkers for the Salt Spring Therapeutic Riding Association to an acquisitions co-ordinator for the 2009 ArtSpring Treasure Fair. Another mandate is educating volunteers and volunteer organizations on the many aspects of volunteering.

For Rush, who has a long volunteer service record himself, including a fifteen-year term as Salt Spring Island Foundation chair, Volunteer Salt Spring is a vital link in the community. "I feel that the island runs on volunteers. We wouldn't have nearly the quality of life that we do without volunteers."

Gloria McEachern, who co-ordinates volunteers for Salt Spring Island Community Services(SSICS) programs and Volunteer Salt Spring, couldn't agree more. "We have an incredible pool of very gifted people on Salt Spring," says McEachern.

She's had plenty of first hand experience with volunteers rising to the occasion at SSICS. At the Food Bank, which has also received support from the Foundation, volunteers began noticing that recipients weren't waiting to eat until they got home with their bag of food.

"We saw that people who came to the Food Bank were pulling out the broccoli and eating it raw right then and there." Out of that was born the "Let's Do Brunch" program, so that recipients could be fed, and still go home with a bag of food.

McEachern would like to see more people using the Volunteer Salt Spring website to take the volunteer plunge, and she wastes no opportunity to encourage some toe dipping. As our interview about the Salt Spring Foundation's assistance to volunteering on Salt Spring came to a close, she admitted she'd been waiting to ask if this writer would like to volunteer.