

Park Views for Ashland Daily Tidings

August 2020

Volunteer in Parks and become a VIP!

By Sulaiman Shelton, APRC Volunteer & Special Event Coordinator

I remember my first time in North Mountain Park, I was planting trees along the banks of Beach Creek. It was restoration work with my class, we had come to do our part in reclaiming the 40-acre floodplain. I remember the land was wild, few paths to traverse, and mud around my ankles. Wielding shovels my small class planted the first few trees into the wet soil. It was 2000, and Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission (APRC) had only been involved with the land since 1997. It was my first experience volunteering with Parks and Rec, and a full decade before the Volunteer in Parks (VIP) Program would be launched.

I remember walking up the Bike Path to the Nature Center in 2018 as I arrived for an interview for a Lead Instructor position with Parks and Rec. It was spring and the Pollinator Gardens were in bloom. The “conk-a-reee” call of a Red-winged Blackbird carried from the lush riparian zone along Beach Creek. The mature willows and cattails alive with darting and swooping birds. I had moved back to Ashland a few months earlier after seven years away.

After almost two years at the Nature Center I am seven months into my new role as the Volunteer and Event Coordinator for APRC. Back in March, I found myself working alongside a group of 4th and 5th graders, battling blackberries along a section of creek in Clay Street Park. I felt I had come full circle.

I am thrilled to be home and involved in this community again. I am astounded by the enthusiasm and commitment of Ashland’s volunteers and all they give to Parks and Recreation. I am full of gratitude to Lori Ainsworth who built this position from the ground up over the past 10 years. I am excited to continue all that Lori created, and eager to see the program continue to grow and thrive.

In 2019 the community of Ashland gave over 12,000 hours of volunteer time to support events, classes, park maintenance, restoration work and our senior population. Over 1,500 individual volunteers came out last year alone. This year will look different. Needless to say, the last five months have not been what any of us anticipated, and they have been a challenge for the APRC team. With six of our full-time employees being laid off, and a hiring freeze on seasonal support for the spring, staff have been working harder than ever to keep up.

Volunteer opportunities have changed dramatically since March, but the need for the community’s support has not. Without the events that usually occur in spring like the Rogue Valley Bike Swap, and with volunteer opportunities such as school programs at North Mountain Park being cancelled, 2020 has required being flexible and adapting. While many of our volunteer opportunities were put on hold for this year, here are some ways you can still get involved!

Every Wednesday morning at North Mountain Park volunteers are needed to care for the stunning demonstration gardens outside the Nature Center. Have fun gardening in a physically distanced group or come out on your own. Tools and friendly training are provided. Whether you are a lifelong gardener, or someone who is looking to learn, there is an opportunity for everyone.

A great way to help keep our parks functional and beautiful is joining in on maintenance work groups. These “work parties” are organized on a semi-regular basis and rotate among our parks. No experience

is necessary, and tools and refreshments are provided. You can join an email list that will send you the park, project and time so you stay up to date on volunteer opportunities. Groups numbers are limited, and physical distancing is practiced.

Interested in volunteering but feel more comfortable working solo? We are looking for volunteers to tackle projects across our park system. From fix-it projects, weeding and pruning, to small carpentry projects there are always things to be done to improve our lovely parks! You can make your own hours. If you feel like you have something to bring to the table, please don't hesitate to contact me with ideas.

While this year has been a challenge, I am confident that the VIP Program will continue to rebound and create lasting change within this community. Please reach out with any questions or interests, sulaiman.shelton@ashland.or.us, 541.552.2264. For more information, and a full list of opportunities, visit ashland.or.us/volunteer.