

Become a VIP, Volunteer in Parks, “It’s the Natural Thing to Do”

By Lori Ainsworth, APRC Volunteer & Event Coordinator

Do you have the urge to meet new people while helping keep Ashland’s parks herbicide-free? Or maybe you’d prefer trying your hand at teaching an outdoor class to 3rd graders? Or how about serving lunch to seniors or hosting an information table at the front of Lithia Park?

Last year over 1,400 volunteers donated more than 15,000 hours of time and expertise in every division of Ashland Parks & Recreation Commission (APRC). The time, energy and support our volunteers provide every day through our “Volunteer in Parks” (VIP) program is amazing, appreciated and essential.

Our wonderful volunteers help keep our parks herbicide-free and allow APRC to offer a diversity of community programs. Volunteering is not only beneficial for us, it’s also good for you. Besides offering social benefits, volunteering can actually lower mortality rates, increase functional abilities and decrease depression as we age! Are you ready to sign up now? Check out this link for further information about the benefits of volunteering: (<https://www.nationalservice.gov/serve/benefits-volunteering>).

At Ashland Parks & Recreation, we offer a variety of volunteer opportunities to fit all ages, interests and schedules. Here are some options to consider:

Adopt-A-Park Program: Local businesses, school groups, service groups and individuals pick a park to “adopt” and agree to maintain *their* park a minimum of four times a year. APRC provides the guidance, tools and materials, then recognizes organizational commitments with signs and publicity in our thrice-yearly Recreation *PlayGuides*.

Park Cleanups: Individuals come out for weekend “work parties” to spruce up parks that may not be adopted or need extra TLC. This is a great way for all ages to “give back” and for middle and high school students to earn community service hours toward graduation.

Nature Center Education Instructors: Volunteer instructors are trained by our Nature Center staff to teach outdoor *hands-on* classes to elementary-aged school groups. If you love kids or have wondered if teaching was something you’d like to explore, consider volunteering as an instructor.

Nature Center Drop-in Gardening: The Nature Center offers a variety of public demonstration gardens that depend on volunteer labor to maintain. Every Wednesday morning, volunteers are encouraged to “drop-in” for an hour or so of weeding, friendship and fun.

Senior Center Food & Friends Program: The Ashland Senior Center offers on-site lunches, as well as homebound lunch deliveries, Monday - Friday through the Rogue Valley Council of Government’s Food & Friends / Meals on Wheels Program. This lunch program always needs volunteer servers and drivers, 18 years and older.

Senior Center Classes and Services: If you have a skill you’d like to share with Seniors, either as a one-time presentation or an ongoing class, contact us! Currently we have volunteers teaching an art class, Tai-chi, Somatics and yoga; the possibilities are wide open.

Youth Conservation Corps (YCC): YCC offers youth, grades 8-12, the opportunity to earn 25 hours of community service in only four days by maintaining trails, removing invasive species and working in riparian restoration areas on APRC properties during three summer sessions.

Lithia Park Host: Volunteers, ages 16 and older, staff an information table at the front of Lithia Park during the busy summer season. After a quick training, Lithia Park Hosts hand out park and trail maps and answer general park-related questions.

Ice Rink Host: No skating ability needed! Our seasonal Ashland Rotary Centennial Ice Rink is a popular venue for locals and visitors alike. Volunteer Ice Rink Hosts are always needed to help manage the crowds and assist staff with scheduled school groups.

The Ashland Community Bike Swap, Ashland World Music Festival and **The Bear Creek Salmon Festival** are popular *annual* one-day events that require large numbers of volunteers assisting for just a few hours. Perfect for those wanting to get involved but not on a regular basis.

Volunteers are important to us and so is showing our gratitude with numerous volunteer appreciation events throughout the year. We believe in our APRC motto: "Fun, it's in our Nature!"

If you'd like to become a VIP, Volunteer in Parks, visit www.ashland.or.us/volunteer or contact Lori Ainsworth, Volunteer Coordinator, APRC at 541-552-2264, lori.ainsworth@ashland.or.us