

WILLAMALANE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

a case study

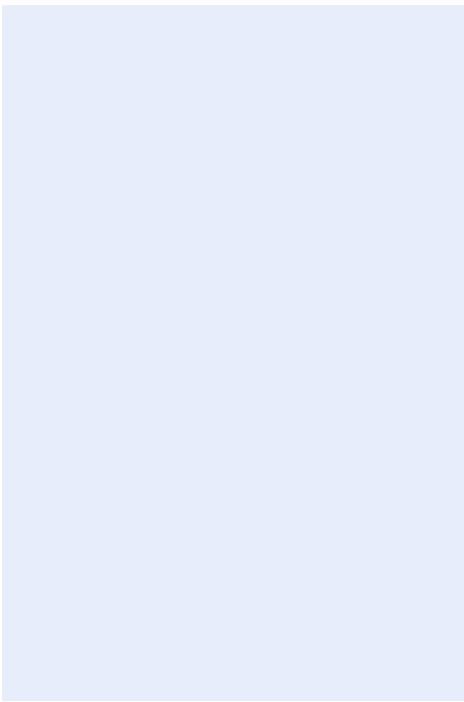
VISIT US ONLINE

Willamalane Volunteer Program:

willamalane.galaxydigital.com

Galaxy Digital Volunteer
Management Software:

galaxydigital.com



ABOUT the ORGANIZATION

Willamalane Park and Recreation District

Springfield, Oregon

Established in 1944, Willamalane Park and Recreation District is a vital force for the community of Springfield, Oregon, and the surrounding areas. A separate tax district governed by an elected board of directors and managed by a district superintendent, Willamalane oversees five recreation facilities and 46 parks and natural areas covering over 1,500 acres. It also features multiple waterfront areas, hiking and biking trails, sports fields, boat landings, playgrounds, and community gardens.

The District's five facilities run 20 or more programs on any given day and hold up to 16 special events throughout the year, including the MEGGA Easter Egg Hunt, the Turkey Stuffer 5K, the Haunted Hayride, and various summer festivals. Annually, Willamalane Park and Recreation District serves 1.8 million park patrons--or about 5,000 people per day.

the FIGURES

- + 46 parks | 1,500 acres
- + 20 programs per day
- + 5,000 patrons per day

Hundreds of volunteers from a wide demographic help with a variety of projects, including ivy and weed removal, trail maintenance, and litter clean-up. Volunteers also serve at Willamalane's Adult Activity Centers, gift shops, and galleries, and as many as 60-80 volunteers per event help to support various festivals and other events throughout the year.

GOALS

Even though the District has an active pool of volunteers, District Volunteer Coordinator Mavis Sanchez-Scholes is looking to increase its volunteer pool to several thousand, in the form of individuals, groups, and corporate business partners. Sanchez-Scholes also wants to integrate more minority groups, seniors, and people with disabilities into Willamalane's volunteer force. Ultimately, she'd like the District's volunteer program to be "perceived as one of the most inclusive" programs in the area, and "a leading innovator of volunteers and volunteer work projects" in Lane County.

CHALLENGES

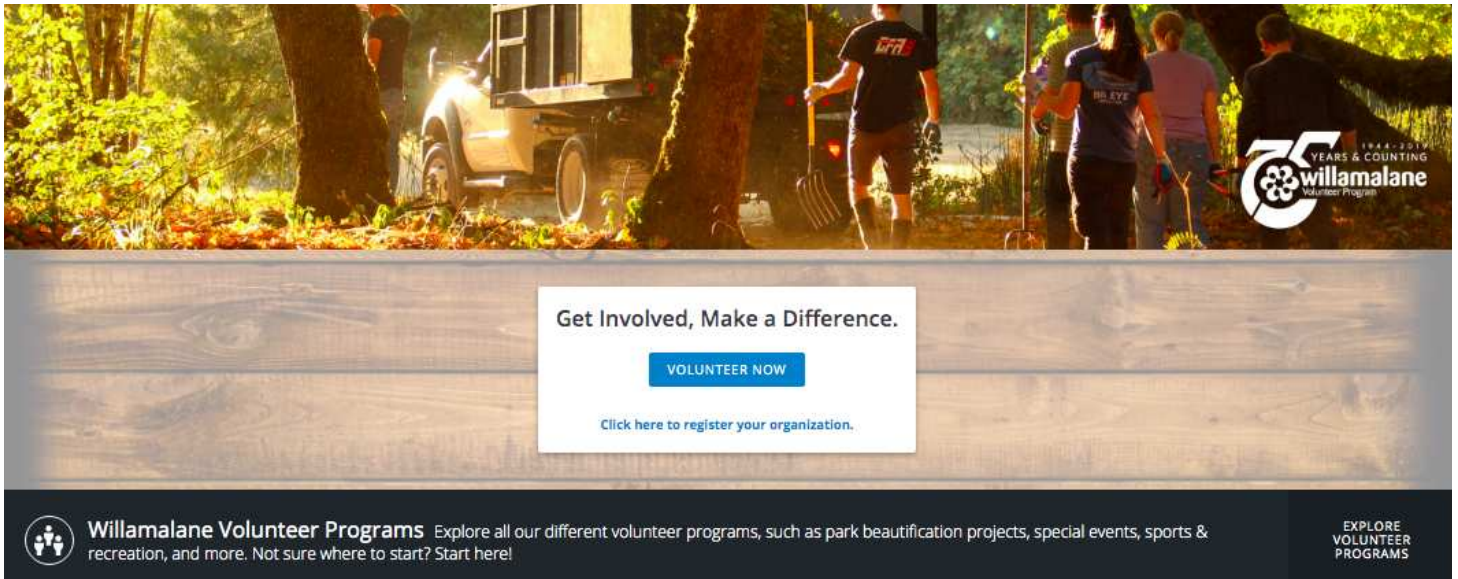
When Sanchez-Scholes joined the District in 2017, the volunteer program was using a slow, inefficient system to recruit and manage volunteers. It was a very traditional process, she explained: "You could only inquire about volunteer services if the volunteer coordinator was on site"—typically between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. on weekdays. In addition, paperwork slowed things down; it took time to meet volunteers to fill out and approve forms and waivers, send in information for background checks, and then keep track of all the associated papers. "I had a stack of volunteer applications," said Sanchez-Scholes. "It was post-it notes and paper before." As the sole volunteer coordinator, she was responsible for keeping track of hundreds of volunteers, including court-appointed volunteers, at Willamalane's multiple facilities. "Volunteers were leaving the District because we weren't responding in the appropriate time," she recalled. "Paperwork was lost, and ... there was really no easy way to document who was interested in different departments."



To meet the goal of recruiting a greater number and variety of volunteers in the future, the District needed a more efficient system for recruiting volunteers, and a better way to manage the volunteers they had.

Willamalane Parks & Recreation District needed a more efficient system for recruiting and managing volunteers.

SOLUTION



SOFTWARE PRIORITIES



COST-EFFECTIVE



CUSTOMER SERVICE



VOLUNTEER CHECK-IN



HOURS TRACKING

VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE FOR ENGAGED COMMUNITIES

"I knew that we needed to change our operating system to match our volunteer demographic and our volunteer , and to strengthen our customer-service techniques," said Sanchez-Scholes. After considering several other tools on the market, the District decided to adopt Get Connected by Galaxy Digital.

Willamalane had looked for several benefits in a new software. For one, it needed be affordable. It also needed to provide an effective way to track volunteer hours, along with an easy way for volunteers to check in to various opportunities.

Finally, the system needed to help the program provide better customer service to its volunteers. With these elements, Sanchez-Scholes knew that Willamalane could improve its volunteer recruitment, better manage its current volunteers, and grow its volunteer pool overall.

In Get Connected, Willamalane's volunteer program found an affordable system that immediately began helping it save money, work more efficiently, recruit more volunteers, and serve their existing volunteers more effectively.

RESULTS

Since going live with Get Connected in January 2018, Willamalane increased its pool of registered volunteers from 150 to 550 (and counting!). The District has also improved its cost-savings and become more successful with ongoing volunteer engagement. The Board of Directors are “over the moon” about the new system, Sanchez-Scholes reported. In fact, she said, “It’s slightly overwhelming, too, to see how valuable this has been, not just for myself but for department supervisors and coordinators. [They] just love the immediate impact that they see, virtually, online, and how it’s serving our volunteers as well.” Volunteer feedback—particularly from high-school students, families, and seniors—has also been encouraging. Read on for details on just how Willamalane has used Get Connected’s simple technology improve their community through better volunteer recruiting and management.

TIME & MONEY SAVED

Any new software comes with a learning curve. Despite having to learn a whole new system, Sanchez-Scholes was able to build their Get Connected site quickly with just a little help from her Galaxy Digital friends. Building a site “is a lot to undertake if you don’t have any experience in developing something like this,” said Sanchez-Scholes. “The tutorials, the videos, the fast communication ... made me feel secure in what I was doing.” She was delighted at how smoothly Willamalane was able to launch the site, and how quickly the community could begin using it.

Once the system was up and running, the community began to see results. “[The Board of Directors] loves to see the impact value showcased on each and every volunteer’s profile,” said Sanchez-Scholes. Since 2011, the District has saved over a million dollars in volunteer support. With Get Connected dashboard, profiles, résumés, and reports, everyone from the Board of Directors to the individual volunteer can see the financial impact that volunteerism is having on the community. Being able to show these numbers helps to prove the value of a volunteer program, said Sanchez-Scholes. “A volunteer program needs structure and development and assistance.” Being able to show the savings helps build the case for needed funding and resources.

EASIER RECRUITMENT

Before adopting Get Connected, Willamalane was limited in its resources for connecting volunteers with community needs. With a single volunteer coordinator at a single location for a limited time, volunteer sign-ups were slow. With easy online signups through Get Connected, Willamalane saw rapid growth in their volunteer pool, and their posted opportunities attracted volunteers from all over. “I would come in and there were 28 replies to an event coming up three months in advance,” said Sanchez-Scholes. “And there’s interest in the community at large, not only from Springfield but also adjacent to us, Eugene or Junction City. We’re attracting populations, both rural and urban, that we have never attracted before.”

RESULTS

For Sanchez-Scholes, it was also important to ensure that Get Connected was accessible throughout the District. She wanted to “[make] sure that volunteers who were maybe not technologically savvy were able to access a computer or have one at a facility, so we placed systems in each and every facility in order for volunteers to access that as well.” With computers available at Willamalane’s Adult Activity Center, it’s easy for older people to find volunteer opportunities that match their skills and passions. Get Connected has also helped to recruit the younger demographic, since “it’s easy for them to log in online, go on their phone, get integrated in our system.”

MORE EFFICIENT VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

Keeping up with hundreds of volunteers is no small task, and Willamalane needed a way to manage its volunteers more efficiently, from matching them with needs to tracking their hours. “I really wanted volunteers to be able to access their information not have to go through me,” said Sanchez-Scholes. Previously she was “having to go individually or in a mass email, sending out a generic email about volunteer opportunities.” With Get Connected, volunteers can find a list of needs that are curated with their interests in mind, and they’re automatically notified of new opportunities that match their interests.

Since launching Get Connected in early 2018, Willamalane has *more than tripled* its volunteer pool.

Managing volunteers on-site has also become easier with Get Connected's Volunteer Check-in, “You can only imagine when you have 80 volunteers lined up by 6:30 in the morning for an event, and having them sign in individually on a paper document or signing a volunteer application on the spot if I haven’t seen them before.” Having a simple check-in process with “a modern design” has proven “valuable,” said Sanchez-Scholes, “both for myself and the key points of contact that serve those events.” Because Community Connect automatically tracks hours for volunteers who use check-in, time is saved all around, freeing up the volunteer coordinator for the larger tasks of building the program and reaching new volunteers.

LASTING VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

Get Connected made it easier keep Willamalane’s existing volunteers engaged. Auto-mated notifications—confirmations, reminders, and notices of upcoming opportunities—remind community members of the volunteer program and the important work it is doing. “It’s wonderful,” said Sanchez-Scholes, “because before we had such a large pool of episodic volunteers in comparison to ongoing volunteers. You know, [there are] the one-time volunteers that want to come forward and say, ‘Hey, I helped’ with a single volunteer opportunity. Now they’re fed the notifications and are saying, ‘Well, I never gave thought to helping with this other event, but sure, sign me up.’ And from that moment, we’re able to keep them interested for future events.”

RESULTS

Get Connected has helped to engage volunteers from teens all the way up to the seniors who visit Willamalane's Adult Activity Center. "The volunteer résumé was a really big seller for our community service high school students and college students," explained Sanchez-Scholes. "It allows them to have direct access to showcase to their advisor" the volunteer work they've done, and it helps those who are "looking for job possibilities." Seniors enjoy accessing Get Connected at the Adult Activity Center, where they can see the impact of their volunteerism. "They get excited," said Sanchez-Scholes. "They want to see how many hours they've already accrued, they want to see the opportunities listed, they print it out." Tools like these—the volunteer résumé, the community impact stats on each volunteer's dashboard, and easy access to more opportunities—keep volunteers interested, and it keeps them coming back.

BEYOND GET CONNECTED

Get Connected is just one factor in the District's efforts to improve its resources and the surrounding community through volunteerism. Willamalane goes the extra mile to show appreciation to their volunteers. "I think it's pretty powerful [for volunteers] when our superintendent comes out and shakes their hand early in the morning," said Sanchez-Scholes. "[Volunteers] see how much value they have for us. The superintendent makes sure that he's there at every single event that he can be there for, which is really empowering."

Willamalane also provides catered lunches and breakfasts at many volunteer events. "Volunteers are donating five six, even eight-hour shifts for a given event, so the least we can do is offer them a catered meal," said Sanchez-Scholes.

Willamalane also places value on family volunteering. Sanchez-Scholes believes "it is really valuable [to] allow kids to volunteer alongside their parents". Parents don't have the "barriers" of figuring out what to do with the kids when they volunteer, said Sanchez-Scholes, and "they're able to showcase leadership skills alongside their seven-, eight-, or nine-year old at a park work party or at an event."

In the end, so much of Willamalane's volunteer program is about bringing people together to improve their community, and doing it in a affordable, efficient, simple way that reassures the Board of Directors of its effectiveness and sustainably engages volunteers of all demographics. "I think volunteers feel pride," said Sanchez-Scholes. "They can say, 'maybe I'm unemployed or maybe I want to give back to my community. This is how I'm doing this: by serving in the parks, by serving in a certain program.' At the end of the day the volunteers say, 'you know, I did something to better myself and the community.'"

Get Connected
by galaxy digital