

How does Friends of Second Marsh continue to attract volunteers? Columnist explains why the group has been successful for so many years

Clear direction is the key to have people answer the call



By: Peter Taylor

When I first volunteered to write an article about volunteering, I thought it would be a simple undertaking. After all, I have been volunteering for many years.

Then I began to think about what volunteering means. The word triggers thoughts of individuals giving of their time and/or money to benefit others. According to Google, “volunteering is the act of rendering selfless service to a cause, oftentimes for free and without coercion”.

While the intended outcome of volunteering is to assist others, my experience of volunteering is more complex than that.

In my experience as board president for Friends of Second Marsh (FSM), volunteering is amazingly rewarding to the person doing it. The people I volunteer with believe and are committed to something bigger than themselves. Our objective is to “connect people with nature”. We do this through our educational, interpretive and stewardship activities in the Oshawa Second Marsh and McLaughlin Bay Wildlife Reserve area.

FSM has a board of ten people from a variety of backgrounds. Some are retired and some are still juggling careers, families and eldercare and yet still find the time and energy to volunteer. Why? Because the contribution they make to FSM feels important to them.

Each person's driver is different. For example, one board member keeps reminding us of The Seventh Generation Principle. This principle is based on an ancient Haudenosaunee philosophy that the decisions we make today should result in a sustainable world seven generations into the future. The principle repeatedly reminds us that we have to be thinking long-term and about what we are leaving to our children, their children and their children. It is a wonderful approach that keeps us from making expedient short-term decisions.

Another board member is deeply involved in plant stewardship. This person has built a task force of volunteers from the community who are committed to dealing with the multiple non-native species of plants that threaten to overrun the native flora and fauna. These volunteers are willing to don hip waders to go into ponds or cover themselves with protective clothing and gloves to reduce the impact of such plants as non-native Phragmites, Woodland Angelica, Wild Parsnip and Cow Parsnip. Not everyone likes this type of project!

We have another board member who is in the process of working with a team to update the bylaws, policies and procedures that will give FSM the structure it needs to run smoothly as people come and go on the board.

While these are only a few examples, I have concluded that each volunteer is part of FSM for a slightly different reason. Volunteer organizations become successful because they have a clear direction that attracts talented people. The organization then allows those people to deploy their individual talents in pursuit of that mandate.

Anyone interested in volunteering? If you are, please let us know. We have plenty to do to take care of this amazing area for those who follow...