

by Tony Wadsworth and Evelyn Alemanni

Value of CIB VOLUNTEERS

to a Municipality



Millet Town Hall + Museum

Author Sherry Anderson put it succinctly when she said, “Volunteers don’t get paid, not because they’re worthless, but because they’re priceless.” But, the Town of Millet has managed to put a price on what volunteers and their efforts mean to this small town.

Millet has participated in the Communities in Bloom awards program for more than 20 years. The leader of the local efforts, Carol Sadorosney, does such an outstanding job of recordkeeping for the group that the documents are maintained at

the local museum! Carol’s passion for all things Millet is contagious. She is a person you can’t say “no” to. Visitors to Millet marvel at the results of her efforts. There are so many flowers on the front and sides of the town hall that it could be mistaken for a garden center. Directly across the street is a series of landscaped beds with a variety of themes, all cared for by volunteers. Thanks to collaboration between the town and its volunteers, Millet has won national competition three times. “Priceless” indeed.

Not only are her volunteers valued, they are recognized at an annual appreciation dinner. Special awards

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While some municipalities may have implemented more than others with respect to accountability and transparency, it is essential to always be looking for areas to improve.



are given for years of service and some of the people have been volunteering with the Millet CiB effort for 20 years. It's not just years of service that are tracked, but total volunteer hours. These volunteers help with planning and planting, weeding and mulching, and much more.

Volunteer Worth

So, what are Millet's volunteer efforts worth? Often, organizations use a simple wage replacement calculation. Volunteer hours are multiplied by an hourly rate. This is the economic value of volunteering.

But, because it doesn't show the impact of the volunteer work, it gives an incomplete picture. Volunteers offer enormous contributions of time, talents, and skills. Communities are healthier and more cohesive through active citizen engagement. People receive important services from volunteers, and through volunteering others gain experi-

ence, improve their employment and education options, and have a greater sense of belonging and wellbeing.

"Monetizing" volunteering poses challenges. Many would argue that the essential value of the act of volunteering is far greater than any monetary value that might be attached to volunteer time and effort.¹

To get some idea at this value, however, the town's has 14 employees; seven of these deal with management, legislative, enforcement, and clerical matters, and the other seven are tasked with public works and parks and recreation duties.

In the spring/summer months (April to October), three parks and recreation full-time personnel maintain the parks, trees, lawns, flowerbeds, outdoor sports facilities, and nature trails. During these same months, volunteer members of the local Communities In Bloom Committee supplement the work done by parks and rec in tidying the existing beds, weeding, planting new flowers/shrubs/trees, plus one or two specific one-off projects each year.

Quantitative Breakdown

Over the past 20 years, the numbers of volunteers have grown steadily, and their total work output is now estimated at 3,100 hours in the spring/summer season.

The following analysis can be drawn from the above numbers:

based on the town's average wage (\$25.00/hour), volunteers contribute the equivalent of \$77,500 to the town's wellbeing.

the town would need to increase its tax rate by four percent per annum in order to hire the equivalent number of parks and recreation employees to perform the same work done by the CIB volunteers;

the numbers of parks and recreation employees would need to increase by three full time employees (or 100 percent) during the spring/summer seasonal months to perform the same work done by CIB volunteers;

the town's total annual payroll would increase by five percent if it had to hire the additional staff required to perform the work of the CIB volunteers.

¹ Discussion Paper: Attaching Economic Value to Volunteer Contribution by Volunteer Canada. See, <www.volunteer.ca>.

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Current fiscal realities, and the public's perception of spending mean that annual tax increases have – for a considerable number of years – had to be kept as low as possible every year. Many councils are struggling to get by with a tax increase of no more than one or two percent because any higher increase in taxes often results in a public outcry that the council is either “overspending” or being “irresponsible and uncaring” in how they spend taxpayers/residents’ money. Therefore, in any municipality, even if volunteer time represents only one or two percent of the total taxes otherwise required by the municipality, this is still a significant contribution that warrants being quantified in this fashion. In Millet’s case – operating with a small population of 2,000 residents and, therefore, small annual budget – this contribution from volunteers can be even more striking.

The Town of Millet budgets \$15,000 for its CiB-related activities. When volunteers give back \$77,500 in their time contributions, that represents a stunning 516 percent return on investment. The contributions of local businesses have not been included in this calculation, but it’s easy to see why the collaboration between all sectors as outlined in the CiB program is an excellent means to enhance quality of life in any community.

Volunteers Make the Town Go Round

With volunteers’ work tallying to thousands of hours each year. This time and effort not only needs to be recognized, it needs to be celebrated. And, this

kind of analysis needs to be conducted more frequently by municipalities. Besides quantitatively measuring their importance to municipal officials and administration, is also shows citizens the importance of their works. **MW**

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