

My First Year as Volunteer Coordinator

Kenneth Nalley, Park Naturalist/Volunteer Coordinator

My first anniversary at the Fort Worth Nature Center has arrived. How quickly that time has flown. Shortly after I started, I found out I would be adding volunteer coordinator to my title. Volunteering is near and dear to my heart, so I was ecstatic about facilitating volunteers in my new role.

Reflecting on my first year, one of my favorite things about being in this position is being able to meet with hopeful individuals who are eager to give their time. I get to learn what inspires them and why the Nature Center is special to them. I have met with interested volunteers from all different age groups and backgrounds. One group to which I especially relate is the students currently studying to work in this field. Their passion for nature is tangible, and their desire to make a positive impact reminds me of where I was just a few short years ago. I enjoy being able to share what I have learned as well as the path that I have taken to secure my dream job. Volunteering is always at the top of that list, so I let them know they are in the right place to further their careers.

Another aspect of the position that I have enjoyed is discovering how important volunteers are to what we do at the Nature Center. With a small staff of 15, we rely on volunteer support on many fronts. For example, during Canoe Fest, we can expect to have anywhere from 100 to 150 guests attend if it is a beautiful day. Our weekend naturalist relies on the assistance of a dedicated group of rock star volunteers, who consistently show up each month. Another example is our outstanding group



Kenneth (right) and a group of award-winning volunteers at February's Hands & Hearts celebration. FWNC&R Staff Photo.

of docents, who assist with guided hikes. Most of these hikes are with elementary school groups ranging in size from 40 to 100 kids. Without assistance from our docents, we would not be able to handle groups that large. I cannot express how appreciative I am for the volunteers who dedicate their time to helping the Nature Center thrive.

We celebrated our volunteers and their contributions at our Hands & Hearts volunteer appreciation event at the end of February. This event is important for the staff to celebrate, acknowledge, and reward our volunteers. I would like to thank Always Good Catering for catering our event with delicious food and drinks and amazing service. I would also like to thank City of Fort Worth District 7 Councilman Dennis Shingleton for attending and showing his appreciation to our volunteers and their hard work.

It is an exciting time to be working at the Nature Center. Our attendance continues to increase month after month as more people discover the beauty of Fort Worth's "hidden gem." I look forward to continuing to work alongside the best of humanity, bringing new volunteers into the fold along the way.



Kenneth awards Patsy Leach with a pin signifying more than 500 hours of volunteer effort. FWNC&R Staff Photo.