

Insider
For August 12, 2009
By Kim Burger

There's been some recent hype about the Cedar Valley's national ranking among the top 20 communities of comparable size. The Cedar Falls-Waterloo area actually ranked sixth with 39.3 percent of adults engaged in volunteer activity. This is an extremely impressive standing and proves what many of us have been saying for quite some time. The Cedar Valley is a very special place and that has a great deal to do with the civic engagement of its citizens.

Why, volunteer hours devoted solely to Cedar Falls Tourism Bureau activities totaled 3,617 last year! Those hours include the gathering of welcome bags and mailings, staffing the visitor center and on-site hospitality centers, attending committee meetings and more. And these hours don't even begin to count the efforts of other tourism-related organizations like the Cedar Valley Sports and Entertainment Commission, Sturgis Falls Celebration, Cedar Basin Jazz Festival, College Hill Arts Festival, Cedar Valley Trails Festival, Iowa Irish Fest and countless others.

We have the good fortune to work with a *variety* of committed individuals, too. Students from UNI, Wartburg, Georgetown University, Iowa State and others bring fresh energy and ideas to the table in exchange for real life experiences and networking opportunities. Professionals representing hotels, attractions and local businesses provide valuable input as we embark on marketing projects, award grant money, and plan for future growth. Over one hundred retired folks comprise our Envoy Committee and help keep the Visitor Center open seven days a week. They greet visitors with a friendly smile, honest recommendations and exude the kind of genuine civic pride that creates an unforgettable first impression for our community. This is the kind of service that extends stays and supplements workforce recruitment and business development efforts.

Members of our Marketing Committee include Luann Alemao, *Luann Alemao & Associates*; Rosemary Beach, *Shalee Boyles, University Book & Supply*; Audria Butler, *Wingate Hotel by Wyndham*; Billy Buckridge, *College Square Mall*; Bridget Bryson, *Park Place Event Centre*; Nate Clayberg, *Sartori Healthcare Foundation*; Cary Darrah, *Cedar Valley Techworks*; Connie Hansen, *UNI Alumni Relations*; Lindsay Haskins, *Gallagher-Bluedorn Performing Arts Center*; Jay Koweil, *KWWL Television*; Tonya Ledvina, *Comfort Suites*; Pat Meinders, *ReMax Home Group*; Maria Murphy, *Holiday Inn University Plaza*; Gayle Pohl, *UNI*; Amber Snider; Jennifer Williams, *ME & V*; Joanne Wzontek, *Girl Scout*.

Advisory Board members include: Shalee Boyles, *University Book & Supply*; Aaron Buzza, *Waterloo Convention & Visitors Bureau*; Lynn Carter, *Bossard Industrial Products*; Amy Dutton, *Northeast Iowa Food Bank*; Julie Haler; Arlene Humble, *Humble Travel Service*; Bob Justis, *Greater Cedar Valley Chamber of Commerce*; Jeff Kurtz, *Cedar Falls Historical Society*; Maria Murphy, *Holiday Inn University Plaza*; MaraBeth Soneson, *Community Main Street*; Ward Stubbs, *Cedar Falls Human and Leisure Services Department*; Joanne Wzontek, *Girl Scouts*.

In addition to the time and talent offered to our collective success, treasures are offered up as well. In the five years since opening the Visitor Center a number of businesses and individuals have contributed to amenities to help give our community a warm and vibrant feel to it. Gale and Pat Bonsall, Bob and Rosemary Beach, Kevan Cortright, Sam Pape Interior Source, ASI Computers Inc., County Inn & Suites, Wingate Inn by Wyndham, ME & V, Cedar Falls Chamber of Commerce, Griffith Construction, Western Home Communities, Cedar Falls First Financial Services Center, Wells Fargo Bank, Community National Bank, and US Bank helped purchase Welcome Banners. Patio benches and tables have been purchased by Rosemary and Bob Beach, Fred and Juanita Rekers and family, Advanced Systems, DISTek Integration, Inc., InVision Architecture, Cedar Falls Lions Club, Veridian Credit Union, Cedar Falls Rotary Club, and Lorraine Anderson. Shade structures were donated by Custom Shade Creations of Waterloo and planters by Naomi McElhinney.

Thank you to these folks and many more for their partnership and the efforts they make to help us welcome visitors to our community.