

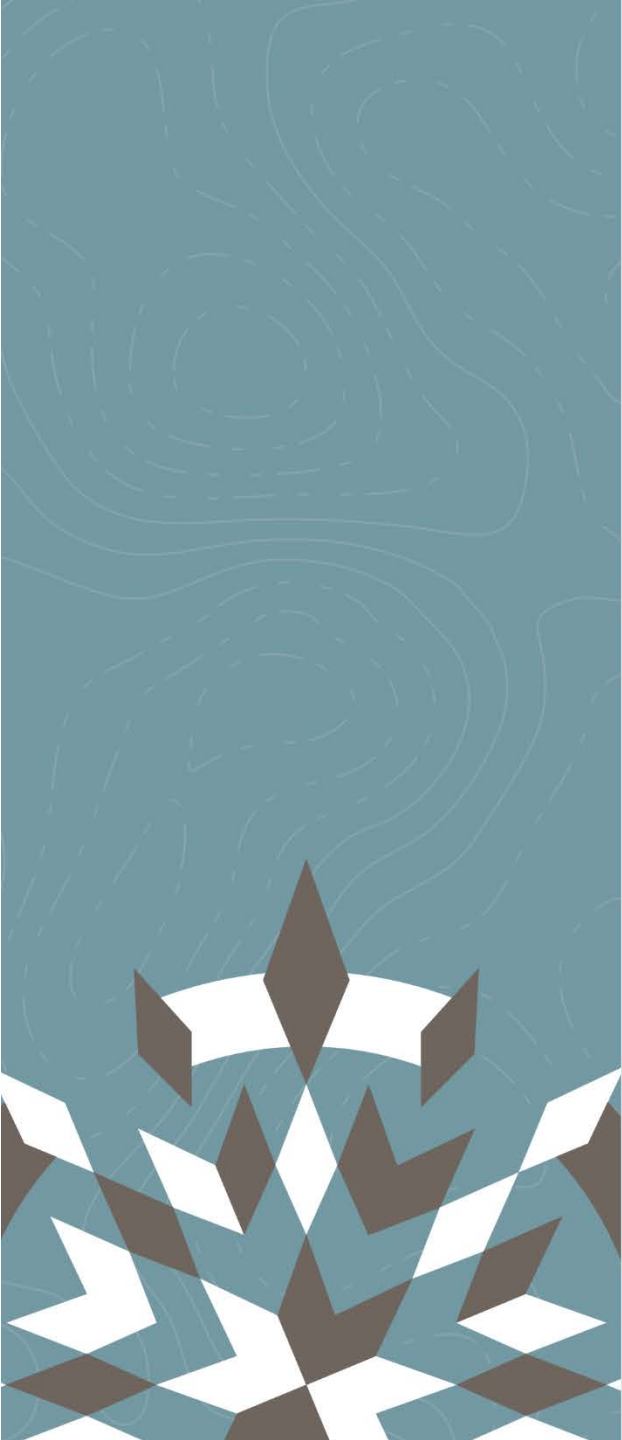
# TRAIL FORUM 2019

*Advancing the  
Carolina Thread Trail*

## **HARNESSING THE POWER OF VOLUNTEERS**

Vanessa Covington, Engagement and Volunteer Manager – Carolina Thread Trail

Karen Howard, Volunteer Services/Commemorative Events – Mecklenburg County Parks & Recreation



# VOLUNTEERS MAKE COMMUNITY

Vanessa Covington

Engagement and Volunteer Manager

Carolina Thread Trail & Catawba Lands Conservancy









## PROGRAM VOLUNTEERS

- Types
  - Community volunteers
  - Corporate and special groups
  - 500 annual volunteers
  - Thread Trail Ambassadors - 80
  - Trail Masters — 120
- Workdays: 17 public, 17 private, 8 TM
- Outreach events: 60+
- Special events: 3
- Outdoor Programs: 30+



# RECRUITMENT

- Outreach events
- Workdays
- Programs
- Trail managers
- eNews
- Social media
- Companies' social responsibility programs
  - Lunch-and-learns
  - Fairs
  - Internal volunteer website





# COMMUNICATION & REGISTRATION

- Public Workdays and Special Events
  - eNews
  - Social media
  - Registration on our site via CERVIS
- Private Workdays
  - By request
  - Liaison manages recruitment and RSVP list
- Special volunteer groups (TTA & TM)
  - Monthly email
  - Registration on our site via CERVIS with their unique login







# VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

- Event details and reminder emails
- On-site
  - Event plan
  - Project materials prep plus amenities
  - Check-in
  - Welcome and orientation
  - Introductions
  - Plan for the workday
  - Safety talk
  - Management and demonstrations
  - Pictures and video
  - Lunch and chat
- Event follow up thank you





# RISK MANAGEMENT

- Event communication
- Volunteer waiver
- Safety talk and request for information
- Activity restrictions
  - Power tools
  - Weather
  - Type of projects











# VOLUNTEER PROGRAM PARTNERSHIPS



- Charlotte-Mecklenburg Storm Water Services
- Partner land trusts (6)
  - Trail construction or maintenance
- Municipal Park and Recreation
  - Workday promotion
  - Co-hosting a workday
  - Volunteer groups
  - Trail Master support
  - Tool support







# Harnessing the Power of Volunteers

Volunteers Make Community Happen!

*Karen B. Howard, LRT/CTRS*

*Volunteer Coordinator - Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation Dept.*

*December 5, 2019*



# What is “COMMUNITY”?



## Definition of *COMMUNITY*

- 1 : a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common.
  - 2 : a group of people living together in one place, especially one practicing common ownership.
  - 3 : a particular area or place considered together with its inhabitants.
- > **A feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests and goals.**

From <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/community>



# Volunteers Make Community Happen

- WHY VOLUNTEERS?
- Harnessing the Power of Volunteers in Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation
- How the MCPRD volunteer program works
- Harnessing Partnerships
- Challenges
- Successes
- Looking to the future...what's next?





# Why Volunteers?

- Mutual needs
  - Agency/Organization/Department
  - The Community/Neighborhood
- Expand workforce without increased cost
- Agencies' investment in community
- Individuals giving back
  - Utilizing talents, abilities and skills!





# Harnessing the Power of Volunteers

- Department-wide
- Natural Resources
- TRAILS!





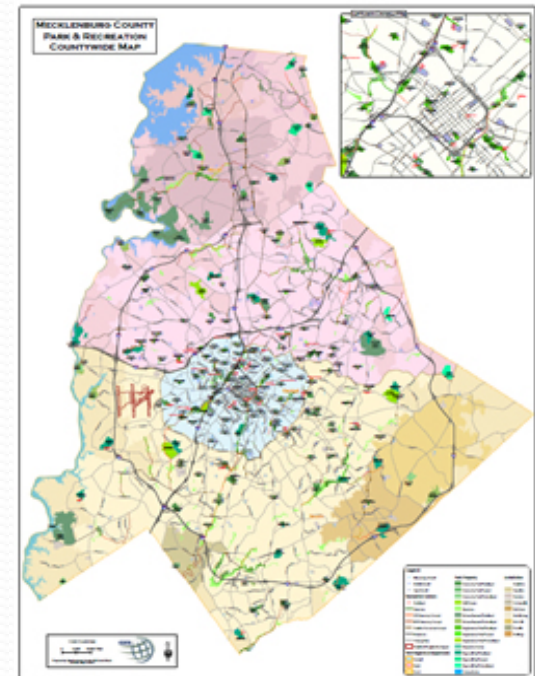
# Harnessing the Power of Volunteers

- Department-wide
  - Advisory Councils
  - Community Service
  - Occupational Course of Study
  - On-Going/Registered Volunteers
  - **Projects and Events**



# Advisory Councils

- Current Advisory Councils – minimum of 9 members:
  - North Park Region
  - Central Park Region
  - South Park Region
  - Athletics
  - Aquatics
  - Golf
  - **Greenways/Trails**
  - Senior Citizens
  - Stewardship
  - Mecklenburg County Cooperative Extension





# Community Service

- Court-ordered
- Must enroll in Volunteer system
- Background check, etc.
- Specific placement



# Occupational Course of Study

- High school students
- Exceptional Children's classes
- HIGH number of Volunteer hours!



# On-Going/Registered Volunteers

- Coaches
- Tutors/Mentors
- Program assistants
- Advisory Council members
- **Project Captains**





# Projects and Events

- **Greenways/Trails:** Groups for projects:
  - Corporate/Business groups
  - Community/Neighborhood groups
  - Students – colleges/universities
    - General: Community service hours
    - Specific curriculum: Biology, Environmental Education
  - Scout groups
  - Church groups, etc.



# Natural Resources

- Natural Resources/Nature Preserves Volunteers
  - Animal Care
  - Visitor Services
  - Administrative
  - Grounds care
  - Docent
  - Citizen Science





# TRAILS >>>

- Construction – new trails
- Construction – rehab of older trails
- Upkeep – LOTS of invasive removal!
- General – limb removal, cleanup, etc.



# Recruitment

- Monthly newsletter
- Park & Recreation website > Volunteer
- VolunteerMatch.org
- Community/School events: Job fairs, etc.
- ☹ Social media not so much...Department only

# Communication

- Email
- Phone
- IN PERSON





# Volunteer Management

- Before the Event...
  - Initial contact – Public sign-up vs. Group
  - Confirmation/reminders
  - Communication with MCPRD staff
  - Planning and equipment/materials prep
- On-Site...
  - Sign-In with Liability Waiver
  - Welcome/Introductions, Safety talk, Q&A
  - Demonstrations as needed
  - Details, details...



# Volunteer Management

- After the Event...
  - THANK YOU!
  - THANK YOU!
  - THANK YOU!
- Tracking Volunteer hours
- Staying in touch!





# Risk Management

- Liability Waiver

## **WAIVER VERBIAGE**

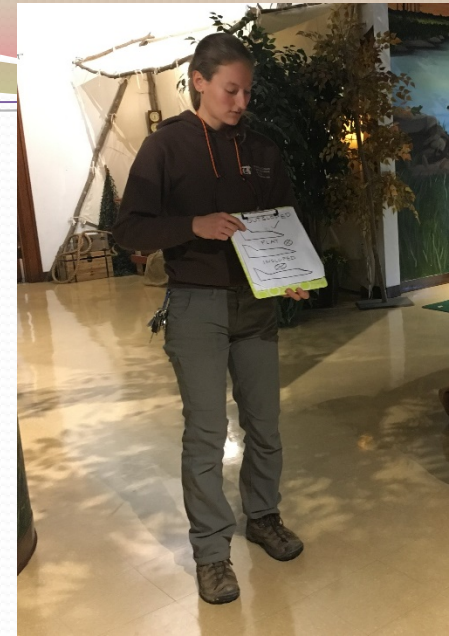
I and/or the volunteer group that I represent shall indemnify and hold harmless **Mecklenburg County**, its officers, employees and assigns from and against all claims, damages, losses or expenses arising out of participation as a volunteer. I understand that volunteer services to Mecklenburg County are to be completed without remuneration or monetary benefit of any kind. I also understand that volunteers are responsible for their own insurance (medical, automobile, liability or any other) and are not covered in any way through County Insurance. I also give my permission to use any photographs taken of me for marketing or other purposes.

**DRY READING, BUT ESSENTIAL!!!**



# Risk Management

- Safety Rules:
  - NO power tools –
    - Exceptions: string trimmer, backpack blower
  - ALWAYS inform Volunteers about essentials, and stick to them! Sturdy, closed-toe shoes; ear/eye protection; etc.
  - Age requirements –
    - General: At least 12; under 16 requires adult supervision
    - Trail construction: At least 16, under 18 requires adult supervision
  - Weather considerations – “rain or shine” BUT...
  - When in doubt, STOP and ASK QUESTIONS!





# Volunteer Appreciation

- THANK YOU – THANK YOU – THANK YOU!
  - Snacks provided at events
  - Highlights in *Volunteer News*
  - Pins for accumulated Volunteer hours
  - T-Shirts
  - Swag, giveaways...



# Harnessing Partnerships



- Charlotte-Mecklenburg Storm Water Services
- City of Charlotte/Keep Charlotte Beautiful
- Corporate groups returning regularly (examples):
  - Wells Fargo, Bank of America
  - United Scrap Metal
  - NEW: KPMG, Ally Financial
- Colleges/Universities:
  - Central Piedmont Community College
  - University of North Carolina - Charlotte





# Challenges

- SIZE of the Department!
- ONE Volunteer Coordinator
- Registration and tracking – lack of software
- Maintaining partnerships
- Matching projects to groups or individuals
- Making new connections
- Volunteer retention
- Changes within Department



# Successes

- Improved communication with MCPRD staff = more volunteer opportunities!
- Repeat volunteers AND new volunteers!
- By the numbers, for calendar year 2019 **to date**:
  - More than 6200 Volunteers
  - Over 40,500 hours
  - Value at \$25.43/hour = approximately **\$1,029,915**
    - Source: <https://independentsector.org/value-of-volunteer-time-2018/>



# What's Next?

- Increased partnerships
- Simpler and faster registration and tracking
- New Volunteer Management tools!!!



# Questions?





# Thank you for coming!

- Karen B. Howard, LRT/CTRS

*Volunteer Coordinator*

Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation Dept.

5841 Brookshire Blvd.

Charlotte, NC 28216

[Karen.Howard@MeckNC.gov](mailto:Karen.Howard@MeckNC.gov)