

## Public school volunteers build an alliance of support

A contingent of young Lithuanian leaders chose volunteerism as an area they wanted to learn more about during their recent visit to Fort Collins.

A presentation by the Poudre School District Partnership and Volunteer Program staff was of particular interest to the group. During a question-and-answer session, one visitor asked why Americans volunteer, explaining that the concept of willingly giving of your time without compensation is little-known in her country.

So, why do Americans volunteer? Perhaps it is a desire to make our communities and our world a better place. We know most people don't volunteer for the recognition, with many often

### On education

feeling uncomfortable with any type of notoriety. Even during National Volunteer Week (April 19 to 23), we frequently hear volunteers — especially school volunteers — say they receive much more than they give.

According to a recent study published in the *Journal of Gerontology*, older adults who volunteer up to 100 hours a year enjoy happier, healthier lives. The study found that 94.5 percent of adults age 60 and older volunteer, serving an average of 7.5 hours per year. Other findings showed that even modest amounts of volunteering improve an individual's well-being,

regardless of the nature of the volunteer work.

On the other end of the age spectrum, college students gain valuable real-life experiences. One said that volunteering in schools "was an opportunity to make a difference in another person's life that changed mine, too."

Volunteering in schools is mutually beneficial. In PSD, we estimate that our pool of nearly 6,000 volunteers annually donates more than 185,000 hours of time. This calculates to nearly \$3 million donated to our school when using the national industry standard of \$7.25 per hour. There is simply no way PSD could pay for the time and expertise of these volunteers.

The true worth of a volunteer's effort is in the daily minutes taking place in the lives of students.

Dunn Elementary kindergarten teacher Colleen O'Rourke related her concern about a student's preparedness for first grade. "She was learning English as a second language and needed one-on-one instruction. Thanks to a community volunteer who worked individually with this student, I have noticed the child's self-confidence increase, along with her skill level. I no longer worry about her readiness for first grade. I thank the volunteer from the bottom of my heart, and I know this child does, too!"

At Kruse Elementary, Princi-

pal Phil Frye is grateful for the volunteers who direct all enrichment programs. "These expanded opportunities for students take learning outside of the classroom," Frye said. "We are extremely fortunate at Kruse."

Laurel Principal Tommie Sue Cox is similarly thankful. "In many Laurel families both parents work, so community volunteers are an integral part of the classroom. The students/teacher ratio is lowered considerably with the help of our volunteers. They are excellent role models for our children."

Teachers appreciate these exceptional individuals who generously take time out of their busy days to connect with children.

teacher at Lopez Elementary, said, "They are reliable, knowledgeable and caring people who truly do make a difference in the lives of the children."

We want to take this opportunity during National Volunteer Week to recognize all of PSD's wonderful volunteers. They provide invaluable lessons that only interaction can teach. Students see that adults in the community are interested in what they are doing, the choices they are making and what they are striving to become.

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