



Members of the CERT team listen as an instructor goes over search and rescue operations (left). Barb Lewis volunteers as a bingo caller for Novi Older Adult Services (right).

Find Your Passion

Many volunteers are needed in Novi – so get involved

It was the Northeast blackout in August 2003 that prompted Novi resident John MacInnis to get more involved in his community.

“We had this big power failure, and I noticed at the time the city didn’t really have an effective way of communicating with the residents,” said MacInnis. “Basically, they were relying on police officers to hand out fliers and go house to house.”

John Thomson decided to volunteer after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

“I wanted to do something for the community,” he said. “Ever since 9/11, I thought it was important to prepare the community for the possibility of a natural or manmade disaster.”

Volunteering is the way to go. Getting involved in your community not only helps out others, but is a proven way to benefit your physical health and mental attitude. A 2009 study by John Hopkins University revealed people who volunteer feel more relaxed, less stressed – and they tend to live longer.

Plus, it’s a great way to meet people with similar interests.

PREPARE YOURSELF

Did you know that Novi has a volunteer program that will sharpen your survival skills and teach you how to prepare for an emergency? It’s called CERT – or Community Emergency Response Team. Former President George W. Bush started the federal program after 9/11 so that local communities could quickly call up civilian teams to help out in an emergency. Novi’s CERT team was formed in 2006 and has 210 civilian members.

“We just graduated 14 new members,” said Ray Garbarino, the city’s emergency management coordinator and lead CERT instructor. “Basically, new members will undergo a nine-week training period – about 27 to 32 hours of training – where they’ll learn the basics in how to deal with emergencies.”

Volunteers will learn about fire safety and basic first aid. They’ll work with experts, learn search-and-rescue techniques, participate in drills, and get an inside look on how the nation deals with domestic and foreign threats.

The training is all done within Novi

– new members will meet on a Tuesday or Wednesday each week at the police or fire station, with each session lasting 2-3 hours. Garbarino keeps the team sharp by maintaining their skills with hands-on refresher courses throughout the year. He also organizes a giant field exercise each August, where members might meet at a park to learn how to respond if a tornado touches down.

“I tell everyone, even if you’re not part of the team, you’re preparing your home for a disaster,” Garbarino says about CERT. “If you have to go 72 hours without power – or you happen to come across a bad car accident – this gives you a mindset where you have control.”

But the best benefit to joining CERT is the feeling of giving back to the community. Members get to help out at parades and other community events, and they partner with the Novi Youth Council for certain activities. There’s a sense of camaraderie that develops through the training, and the satisfaction of coming together as a team.

To volunteer for CERT, visit the city’s website at cityofnovi.org and fill out an online application located in the section

on emergency preparedness. Those looking to get even more hands-on should look into the Volunteers in Public Safety (VIPS) team. Team members will enhance the safety of the community by observing and reporting incidents requiring a public safety response.



The Novi Ambassador Academy gives people a behind-the-scenes look at city operations.

READY TO READ

Whether it's logging minutes spent reading or assisting staff with children's activities, students in grades 7-12 can find ways to volunteer throughout the year at the Novi Public Library.

Teen Librarian Lindsay Fricke uses teen volunteers to help with children activities and programs that take place during the week and usually last 1-2 hours. There's also the library's summer reading program, in which teen volunteers sign up young readers and help keep track of their progress.

"Once the summer reading program gets going, they'll help children log their minutes to get towards the goal of attending a finale party for completing the program," Fricke said. "They also help give away prizes at the end of the program. Plus we get coupons from the local businesses to pass out as incentives for participating in the summer reading program."

In addition, the library offers a pair of \$500 internships each summer for eligible students in grades 9-12. Fricke said the program is sponsored through the Friends of the Library, and that students must first volunteer at the library to qualify for one of the two paid positions.

Interested in becoming a teen volunteer? Just go to the library website at novilibrary.org and fill out an online application. Or call (248) 869-7218 to find out more information.

FOREVER YOUNG

Sandra Fisher is a social services coordinator with the City of Novi Older Adult Services (OAS) Department. It's her job to coordinate volunteers with the thousands of activities held every year for older adults.

"Our volunteer opportunities are for specific programs," she said. "So people can volunteer to deliver for Meals on Wheels, or they might come in to host a particular game. It all depends on your schedule."

The first step in volunteering is to fill out an application on the city's website at cityofnovi.org. Pull down the "City Services" tab to find Older Adult Services and related fields. Volunteers need to be 18 years or older and they must provide their own transportation. Programs are held at the Novi Civic Center or Meadowbrook Activity Center.

In addition to individuals, OAS works with organizations, including the Area Agency on Aging 1-B and AARP Foundation, which trains volunteers to

provide services like Medicare counseling and tax preparation. OAS also works with educational institutions such as Madonna University to give students the opportunity to volunteer as part of their class activities.

Fisher currently works with about 150 volunteers. She said they come from a variety of

professions and backgrounds, but all have that common goal of wanting to help out others. And they want to stay involved in the community.

"We get couples who volunteer together, and individuals who just like to stay busy," she said. "Some people are just community-oriented ... they're active in their church or neighborhood or some other organization. Volunteers are really the backbone of any community."

STAYING INVOLVED

For new volunteers, MacInnis recommends joining the Novi Ambassador Academy, an eight-week program offered by the city that allows residents to learn about the inner workings of local government. Anyone interested in joining can reach out to communityrelations@cityofnovi.org.

MacInnis also serves on the city's Historical Commission and volunteers at the MSU Tollgate Education Center and Farm. Outside of Novi, he's president of the Michigan Forest Association, a volunteer organization that educates the public about proper forest management.

"Volunteering is a good way to stay involved," MacInnis says. "Especially when you're retired."

Thomson said he likes volunteering because it keeps him informed about events in Novi. In addition to CERT, he's a former member of the city's Historical Commission.

The 36-year resident and proud Vietnam veteran said a community is that much stronger when the residents are involved.

"You can't lose by getting involved," he said. "You learn something new and you're helping out other people. You can look it as a way of serving your community, and serving your own family."



Volunteers prepare food for a Meals on Wheels lunch.