

# 2010 Collin County Lone Star Salute Nominees



**April 2010**

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*Pictured from Left to Right are LLS Volunteers Mary Ann Roush, Jane Sackett, Virginia Gilleland and Sarah Thorn. LLS Volunteers not pictured include Laurie Barnett, Mona Melwani, Valerie Ray, Diane Teng and trainees Kathleen Engle, Amethyst Mendek and Sheila Knight.*

## Library Links with Seniors Opens a Treasure Chest of Memories

Walt Disney once said there was more treasure in books “than in all the pirate’s loot on Treasure Island!” For the seniors who benefit from the Library Links with Seniors (LLS) award winning program, treasure is not only found in the pages of the books read to them by this team of volunteers, but within the volunteers themselves.

“Our volunteers are an outstanding and dedicated group who make a difference in the lives of all the seniors they visit,” said Senior Public Services Librarian Susan Rhoads, the program’s Coordinator. “Approximately 100 seniors at ten Plano care home facilities enjoy LLS programs on a monthly basis. In addition to our current team of eight volunteers, we have three persons in training.”

Never judging a book by its cover especially holds true when examining the LLS program. Jane Sackett, LLS volunteer explains that, “At first glance, the literature-based programming seems like a simple reading activity between volunteers and participants. Beneath the pages, however, lies the program’s primary goals, stimulating residents’ thought processes and encouraging them to share memories and experiences.” Ms. Sackett continues, “Each volunteer decides on a theme and chooses the library materials that will entertain and stimulate discussion with the residents of their care homes.”

“Sharing treasured memories is most meaningful since residents often do not have close friendships within the care home,” said Ms. Rhoads. “Participation in the discussions on common topics and sharing experiences helps them become better acquainted.”

Volunteers present 30 to 60-minute programs that include poetry and short stories. Among other subjects, volunteers have spurred interest and sharing with “Minnie Pearl” programs, dressing up in character complete with Minnie’s trademark hat and price tag. “The care home residents are extremely grateful for the opportunity to connect with books, readings and each other,” said Ms. Rhoads. “Participants express heartfelt appreciation for each of the volunteers, as do we.”



## Tanis Roelofs Goes Green for Volunteering “Rookie Volunteer of the Year”

When the desire to volunteer strikes there’s often no stopping it! Just ask Deb Bliss, who serves as the Sustainability Volunteer Coordinator on a multitude of Live Green in Plano (LGIP) initiatives.

“When Tanis Roelofs mentioned she was about to retire and was ready to get involved in volunteering, we had no idea how involved!” Ms. Bliss said. “Once she completed our 12-hour Live Green in Plano volunteer training, she jumped into every posted sustainability and environmental volunteer opportunity activity. In just one year, Tanis has clocked in 70 volunteer hours.”

Let’s take a look at some of the projects this environmental wonder has undertaken. She first got her feet wet by working at the 2009 Live Green Expo not only educating attendees on the ease and value of shopping environmentally, but also by loading trucks and serving as a Zero Waste Leader. She organized and implemented a community clean-up and aided Plano’s water quality by labeling hundreds of storm drains with a “no dumping” reminder. She not only recruited a number of her friends in the labeling project, but her enthusiasm coaxed them into joining the next Live Green in Plano volunteer training series.

Tanis helped score Plano’s Litter Index, a tool that allows quick and reliable visual assessment of types of litter. She wrote articles for the departmental environmental newsletter and assisted with adult trainings. She also serves at monthly meetings as a LGIP Advisory Board member and makes presentations to students on a variety of topics.

“Whether attending her church or substituting at a private school, Tanis looks for opportunities to promote recycling and the LGIP concepts,” said Ms. Bliss. “She is an energetic and passionate spokesperson for our department’s mission and an inspiration to our staff!”



*“Tanis (pictured) is an energetic and passionate spokesperson for the environment and an inspiration to our staff!” Deb Bliss, Sustainability Volunteer Coordinator*



## Way To Go Again!

Kathi Cavanagh was nominated and won the National Animal Control Association’s Diane Lane Memorial Award. This award is given to a volunteer in an animal welfare-related field who demonstrates exceptional dedication and performs outstanding work far and beyond the requirements of his/her volunteer position. If you will remember the last newsletter, Kathi won the Best Animal Shelter Volunteer in the State of Texas and now has been recognized as the Best Animal Shelter Volunteer in the Nation!

Share Your Thoughts by emailing us at [VolunteersInPlano@plano.gov](mailto:VolunteersInPlano@plano.gov)

## Detail and Data Suits Karen Suiter to a Tee!

An eye for detail, data cleanup of 23,000 addresses, outreach to 200 major Plano employers, and researching 5,200 addresses for the U. S. Census Bureau is a massive project that “suits” volunteer Karen Suiter to a tee!

Community Services Supervisor, Grisenia Matos, can’t find enough adjectives to describe the benefits received from Ms. Suiter’s involvement in aiding the Planning Department with facilitation of the U. S. 2010 Census. “I learned about Karen through another City employee who was raving about his volunteer. He said she was computer savvy, detail oriented, accurate and conscientious when working on his project. I decided to contact Robin Popik, Volunteer Resources Supervisor, to inquire about her availability.”

In addition to finding a top-notch professional, Ms. Matos also found an individual with a positive attitude and friendly smile, who not only discussed the challenges of the projects, but also provided some solutions to the challenges encountered.

“We provided the U. S. Census Bureau a list of 104,000 residential addresses in late 2008, which they canvassed during the summer of 2009,” said Steve Sims, Senior Planner. “The Census Bureau rejected or didn’t accept 5,200 addresses. Then they gave us (the City) 30 days to verify the information and get it back to them. Karen helped identify 1,300 homes for the Census Bureau to reconsider.”



*“Without Karen I would not have been able to complete the project as effectively in the timeframe I was given. She is a one-of-a-kind volunteer and definitely the best volunteer I have ever had.” Grisenia Matos, Community Services Supervisor*

## *Karen Suiter - continued*

“In addition to the work I did for Mr. Sims, I also worked on data cleanup of 23,000 addresses, researched contact information on the Internet of major Plano employers and contacted company officials to encourage them to distribute information about the Census 2010 to their employees,” said Ms. Suiter. “Then I e-mailed information, sent mailers and documented my progress daily so we could track what was being accomplished.” “Community participation in the Census ensures Plano is represented accurately for a share of over \$400 billion in federal funding distributed through Census-based programming,” explains Mr. Sims.

“I later learned that Karen had a number of years as an administrative assistant for a Fortune 500 company and it was apparent many of the skills she learned there applied to the job at hand,” said Ms. Matos. “Without Karen I would not have been able to complete the project in the time we were given. She is a one-of-a-kind volunteer and definitely the best volunteer I have ever had.”



## **Mogana Vasikaran Arrives at the Right Place at the Right Time**

For thousands of Plano citizens and visitors, the City of Plano Web site is an important portal for news about municipal services, programming and community events. During the summer of 2009 the City was preparing to launch a new version of the site with updated features, a new look and easier access to information.

It was during this time that Mogana Vasikaran contacted the Volunteer Resource Group looking for a new volunteer opportunity. Her timing couldn't have been more perfect. The Web Design Services two member team was maintaining the existing site while endeavoring to roll out the new site in a timely manner.

Mogana was no stranger to volunteerism. She had previously volunteered with the Library's Small Talk program, helping foreign-language adults practice conversational English. “After taking a break from work and volunteering to care for my children, I found myself eager to go back once they entered school,” explained Mogana.



*Members of the Web Design Services team include (left to right) Lillian Tse and Mogana Vasikaran. “Mogana’s intelligence, talent and attention to detail transformed what could have been a very hectic time into a true joy for our team,” said Webmaster Melissa Peachey.*

“Launching a new web site for the City was a huge task,” said the City’s Webmaster Melissa Peachey. “Mogana’s experience was the perfect example of having a volunteer in the right place for the right project at the right time. She contributed greatly to the successful launch not only by helping update the web site, but also helping with the coding and style sheet implementation across the new site.”

The City of Plano web site includes more than 2,500 pages of information and links to vital municipal information. More than 400,000 persons have accessed the site since the new design was launched. Since the new City web site launched, Mogana has continued to help update department web pages and has become an integral part of the Web Design Services team.

“Simply put, Mogana’s intelligence, talent and attention to detail transformed what could have been a very hectic time into a true joy for our team,” said Ms. Peachey. “Mogana is an invaluable asset to the City of Plano and to all of its citizens.”



## **15 Year Old Taylor Schrody is Already Making a Difference One Person at a Time**



*“Taylor’s contribution has not only been in the number of hours she has donated, but also through her ability to work with persons of all ages and skill levels in a patient, cheerful and professional manner.” Addy Hjarpe, Therapeutic Recreation Coordinator.*

The Therapeutic Recreation (TR) program was created specifically for individuals with special needs, but it is the work of dedicated volunteers such as Taylor Schrody that enable the programs to help so many people.

“Taylor signed on as a volunteer in January 2009,” said Addy Hjarpe, Therapeutic Recreation Coordinator. “Her contribution has not only been in the 275 hours she has donated this past year, but through her dedication, empathy and friendship that she shows our participants. Her ability to work with persons of all ages and skill levels is extraordinary. Her cheerful and professional manner helps the individuals enjoy the program experience even more.”

### *Taylor Schrody - continued*

Ms. Schrody's ability to be aware of and to understand participant needs is an enormous asset, enabling her to work in a broad range of therapeutic programs. She dedicates part of her time each month to the caregiver's respite program, Kids Night Out, which focuses on children ages six months to ten years old. She also helps at dances for participants' ages 15 to 25+ where they hone their social skills within an energetic and fun-filled environment. During the summer months, Taylor works at Kid Kapers, a camp specifically designed for children ages four to ten years with special needs, and Friendship Camp for those 15 years and older. Her caring dedication has also enabled participants with special needs to enroll in regular recreation classes by providing assistance to them during the classes.

You'll find Ms. Schrody helping staff at special events, holiday dances, proms and the annual Very Special Arts Festival, which attracts thousands of participants to this one-day children's creative event. "Taylor's dedication to our programming and the participants greatly impacts staff's ability to continue to provide and expand our programming," said Ms. Hjarpe. "She makes such a difference through the respite she helps provide to caregivers of special needs children and adults by her involvement and friendship with our participants and through helping us create a rewarding and safe environment for them." Staff is so impressed with her abilities that everyone is excited to work with her.



### **Plano Treasury Department Finds a Treasure in Mildred Cabrera**



*"Mildred is very bright with a professional manner and has been a blessing to the Treasury Department," said Treasury Analyst II, Brianna Alvarado. "She has helped me with delinquent sales tax projects that we reported to the State and in gathering information for our hotel/motel audit. Her attention to detail has helped maintain spreadsheets and is an extra set of eyes when reviewing data for any type of errors. She does so much; I don't think I could list it all."*

Since February 2009 the City's Treasury Department has benefitted from the skills and enthusiasm of volunteer extraordinaire, Mildred Cabrera (pictured far left with City Treasurer Myra Conklin). An energetic Economics major, Mildred initially helped the department tackle a sales tax project before moving on to assist with other assignments. In addition to helping complete projects on time, her work has identified potential revenues for the City from delinquencies and other sources.

So far, Mildred has donated 250 hours, enabling staff to do more with less. "We receive a huge sales tax file each year and try to identify companies that possibly aren't paying or reporting taxes to the State's Comptroller's office," said the City's Treasurer, Myra Conklin. "Mildred helped us identify those companies. She also locates persons who have unclaimed property under \$100 (checks issued by the City), providing them with forms so new checks can be issued which aids in account reconciliation. She has worked on hotel/motel occupancy taxes, reviewing tax returns and exemptions as well as clarifying discrepancies with the respective entities." Ms. Cabrera says her internship in Finance has given her real life experience, a chance to learn about City government and a way to acquire new skills.

Ms. Cabrera has certainly gained the respect of her co-workers, being cited for her strong work ethic, desire to learn and providing ideas on the projects she undertakes. "Mildred is very enthusiastic and treats every task as a new learning experience," said Ms. Conklin. "She takes the time to read the rules and regulations that apply to most of what we do and takes a very strong interest in not only her assignments, but also in how they relate to the overall performance of our department."

A side project that has saved staff an enormous amount of time has been to facilitate the consolidation of records into a central area, requiring reconfiguring of office space as well as moving files. Besides assisting in the physical move, she has turned her attention to sorting through a multitude of records, sorting files and removing duplicate materials to further enhance records retrieval. In addition to attending college and volunteering with the City, Ms. Cabrera also works as an interpreter in human resources for a private business.

"I have really enjoyed being part of the City and especially enjoy seeing how I can apply what I have learned in school to real work experience," said Ms. Cabrera. "I will be graduating soon and my work here has provided me with a window into the public sector I would not have otherwise been able to experience. I find working in a municipal environment to be very rewarding. I feel it is an arena where you can really make an impact."





### Clay Randall Made a Difference in the Environment

For the City of Plano the October 24, 2009 Make a Difference Day certainly lived up to its name, thanks in no small part to the initiative of Clay Randall, Collin County SIFE Advisor and Professor of Economics.

“In September 2009 Clay called me and asked if I knew of any community projects suitable for a large number of his students,” said Plano’s Environmental Education Coordinator Casey Eckert. “I was coordinating the City’s first community-wide creek cleanup and invited Clay to meet with me to discuss the possibilities of his group joining in.”

It was a meeting that made a difference and then some. Mr. Randall enthusiastically enlisted over 100 college students to participate in the creek cleanup. There were two components of the cleanup: 1) testing the water in over 23 creeks and 2) counting and listing the number of over 40 targeted litter items. Besides helping to spearhead his own student project, Mr. Randall took the initiative to take things a step farther, recruiting one of his students to take the results from the creek water tests and the litter recording sheets and tabulate those results in prepared spreadsheets. The savings in staff time was invaluable as they were presented with completed tabulations from the day’s event. “Clay’s leadership and passionate enthusiasm for this project resulted not only in a very successful event, but in a pivotal role in both the cleanup and data tabulation,” said Ms. Eckert. “He truly demonstrated how one person can Make A Difference!”

Mr. Randall’s involvement in Make a Difference Day is a perfect example of how volunteering can be a one-time, one-day project.



### Quote of the Month

“The Joy of Unselfish Giving  
Time is not measured by years that you live, but by the deeds that you do and the joy that you give.  
And each day as it comes brings a chance to each one, to love to the fullest leaving nothing undone.  
That would brighten the life or lighten the load, of some weary traveler, lost on life’s road.  
So what does it matter how long we may live, If as long as we live we unselfishly give.”  
~Helen Steiner Rice

### Choosing the Right Animal for your Family Makes all the Difference

There comes a time for most families to add a four-legged friend to the household, a decision that should not be taken lightly. That’s where Melissa Sherman comes in.

Melissa is a former Plano Animal Services employee who returned as a volunteer in February 2009 and the Plano Animal Shelter staff couldn’t be happier. Kathi Cavanagh, Animal Shelter Volunteer Coordinator says, “Melissa’s main volunteer focus is assisting people in finding the right dog or cat to add to their family. She trains and supports new volunteers and also translates for Spanish speaking visitors.”

“Her professional experience and calming demeanor lets her share information and ask questions of our patrons that help them select the best pet for their lifestyle,” continues Ms. Cavanagh. “She explains how to choose between those breeds good with children or with persons living alone, and the difference between finding a new best friend or finding the best watch dog. She then aids patrons in choosing the pet at the shelter that best meets their needs.”

In the 286 hours she donated in 2009, Melissa provided routine care to the animals in the shelter nearly every Saturday. If you come in, you will find her cleaning cages, bathing animals or leading a group of dog walkers at the Plano Dog Park. In addition, she has taken home sick and/or orphaned kittens that needed special attention until they were able to be returned for adoption.

In addition to the care and comfort she directly provides to the animals, Melissa is always available to help visitors, staff and fellow volunteers. By her gift of time and talent Melissa had made a positive difference in the lives of many people and animals in Plano. Says Animal Shelter Manager Jamie Cantrell, “Her experience and animal handling skills have been a great asset to the shelter.”



Melissa Sherman



## Jill Young Proves Law Enforcement Isn't for Rookies

In the area of law enforcement where the word “rookie” is often used for new recruits, one person who will never be called a rookie is Jill Young. A volunteer with the Plano Police Department since 2007, this seasoned veteran has logged in over 3,300 volunteer hours for the department, becoming the first volunteer to top the “1,000 hours in a one year period.” Jill also received the first ever 1,000 Hour Award Pin after logging 1,300 hours for the Plano Citizens Police Academy Alumni Association (PCPAAA). Named “Volunteer of the Year” of the PCPAAA, Jill shows no signs of slowing down.

Plano Police Chief Greg Rushing considers Jill an outstanding volunteer. “She is always willing to help, no matter how difficult the task, and always has a smile to share. We are very lucky to have her assistance. Volunteers like Jill play a vital role in the Police – Community partnership that helps keep Plano a safe place.”

A graduate of the Citizen’s Police Academy and an active member in the Alumni Association, Ms. Young was selected as one of the Academy’s first Field Training Officers, a testimony to her dedication to the department and professional standards.

As volunteer support in the Citizens Assisting Plano Police Program (CAPP), she has completed extensive training in the program and assists officers with designated, non-confrontational activities, freeing them for other work in the community. The diversity of her tasks is a strong reflection of the talents she brings to the plate in her volunteer capacity. She has manned Skywatch towers, assisted with Special Enforcement Requests (radar monitoring), driven the water truck for policemen and firemen at numerous Plano events, and for several years has been in charge of the Lost Kid’s Booth at Plano’s annual balloon festival. The list doesn’t stop there. She has worked tirelessly at events such as the Halloween Kid’s Night Out event, Boy Scout and Girl Scout Saturday, the Teddy Bear Run and countless others.

PCPAAA President Neal Katz says, “Working as a CAPP volunteer involves a good deal of contact with the public. The volunteers represent not only the Plano Police Department, but the City of Plano as a whole. Jill is always pleasant to deal with no matter what the situation and I’ve seen her not lose her cool in several instances when the citizen she was dealing with was losing theirs. She is a strong believer in education and would rather educate persons about the laws involved to prevent future violations than just hand out a citation with no explanation. Having a more educated public is a benefit for all Plano citizens.”

Mr. Katz is no stranger to volunteering himself and is quick to recognize those who go over and above the established norms. “I have actively recruited Jill in several areas, as it is a known fact that someone with a work ethic such as hers can be a volunteer in any organization.”

Jill has worked alongside both volunteer and Police Officers on many occasions and they all agree, “She has always been helpful in performing tasks in an accurate and professional manner and is always friendly to both fellow volunteers and the citizens she deals with,” says Mr. Katz.



## Litter Education as Easy as 1-2-3

Today, there are too many drivers who deliberately toss items from their car window. While many people clean litter from their cars in a responsible manner, far too many view their car window as a trash receptacle tossing out everything from cigarette butts to fast food containers along our landscapes. On top of this add discarded papers, assorted bags or cartons and any vehicle can quickly become a rolling litter can.

The Visible Litter Study documented the most commonly littered items:

- Cigarette Butts
- Food/Fast Food
- Nonalcoholic Cans and Bottles

“In 2006, when I learned the litter problem along our State’s roadways and highways was getting worse, I wondered how to best educate motorists about the environmental impact of litter,” said the City’s Environmental Education Coordinator Casey Eckert. “I called several driving schools about partnering with the City of Plano to heighten motorists’ awareness of the litter problem in Texas, but only Chad Henry expressed interest.”

Mr. Henry, the owner of 1-2-3 Driving School met with Ms. Eckert and recognized the impact he could have by inserting a video presentation into his State-mandated driving curriculum. “Chad heartily agreed to all aspects of our educational campaign,” said Ms. Eckert. “Through 2009, over 2,670 students have seen the video and received litter bags and stickers through his driving school program.”

The 14-minute “Messin’ With Texas” video furnished from the Texas Department of Transportation not only educates about the environmental implications of litter, but also about how litter compromises public safety and the legal and financial consequences of littering. Statistics show that over 51 billion pieces of litter land on U.S. roadways each year. Most of it, 46.6 billion pieces, is less than four inches, according to Keep America Beautiful’s 2009 National Visible Litter Survey and Litter Cost Study. That’s 6,729 items per mile. While litter continues to be a prevalent concern across the country, efforts to increase awareness are improving across the country.

