

the VIP Insider

City of Plano Employee Turns Volunteer

by Robin Popik

A few years ago I started noticing retired city employees coming back to volunteer. Many employees couldn't understand why? But it was obvious to Joan Shopoff. After 28 years as an exemplary city employee and a Supervisor of over 500 annual volunteers, Joan Shopoff retired and signed up as a VIP. Nominated by her peers in 2009 as Employee of the Year, Joan was cited as the primary example of what a dedicated city employee is all about.

Joan first began her career as a part-time employee in February 1982, but her talent for networking, her innovative ideas and her enthusiasm moved her into a full-time status. The growth of Plano's Therapeutic Recreation (TR) programs is a direct reflection of the compassion, creativity and hands-on teamwork she exemplifies. "Joan has consistently been an example of the professional excellence embodied by the Employee of the Year award, and her tireless efforts for the betterment of our community have made our City's recreation program for persons with special needs second to none in the nation," said City Manager Thomas Muehlenbeck.



Under Joan's leadership, Plano's Therapeutic Recreation programming has garnered respect from programs throughout the region and nation, growing from two programs to over 35 programs in each session. Joan networked community resources continually to collaborate on programs allowing more families to be reached and served better. "I hope to continue to touch lives and be a services to persons of various mental and physical abilities through the development of new therapeutic programs," says Joan.

She directed the annual Very Special Arts Festival reaching over 2,500 children of all abilities and providing them an outlet for arts, music and self-expression. With the TR team, Joan developed a continuing education program for her special customers so they may continue their educational efforts beyond high school in order to keep academic skills sharp. Joan feels it's important not only to watch, but also to help these programs grow as she joins the already very active TR volunteer team.

Amy Fortenberry, Director of Parks and Recreation, said "Joan's support of an extensive volunteer team is legendary. Joan worked with interns and volunteers in the field of recreation and went above and beyond in planning and making sure every experience was special not only for the participants, but also for the volunteers. The programming she develops provides not only fun and unique recreational opportunities for the participants, but also provides much needed respite for families and caregivers."

Before leaving for retirement in June, Joan signed up with VIP to carry on the work she loves. By joining her team as a volunteer, Joan will continue to stay connected to the program she worked so hard to build and be a part of a team that makes a difference. Joan is not alone in this endeavor and wishes to invite all those City of Plano employees turned volunteer to send her an e-mail at jshopoff@gmail.com, so they can connect.