

Daughters of the Future



Keepers of the Past

Museum Docent Program

As a visitor walks into your museum, the first face they encounter is that of the volunteer docent. In order for the patron to have a good first impression of your establishment, the docent must be or do the following:

- The docent must be clean and well groomed.
- Wear a pleasant smiling face.
- They should stand up and walk toward the visitor extending a warm welcome.
- They must have a good understanding of the contents of the museum.
- Always be prepared to share helpful information regarding the surrounding area, restaurants, motels, and other interesting sites to visit in the area.
- Exhibit a sense of peace and calm assurance that the visitor is in good hands.
- Don't shadow the visitor, rather ask if they would enjoy a tour or would like to wander through the exhibits by themselves.
- Do not give out information, dates, names, etc., that are dubious. History is distorted by its very nature, but be sure of your facts. You might be talking to a professional historian and don't know it.

In order to attract effective volunteers you must have a program in place that offers good training so they feel confident and happy in this new experience. Have the new people work alongside the more experienced docent until they feel good about their ability to cope with questions from strangers.

Finding volunteers can be a challenge. Don't be afraid to invite everyone that crosses your path with the invitation to serve. Put a sign in the museum asking for people with an interest in history to volunteer. Put ads in your local newspaper; ask the shops if you can put a sign in their window inviting volunteers to get in touch with you. Make up a folder with information for the volunteer that will enable them to quickly learn the procedures and the historic value of the museum. Develop a form for them to fill out with personal information as you might need to get in touch with them and their family. Have periodic training seminars if necessary. Once a year honor them with a luncheon, a gift, an acknowledgement of their service.

DUP couldn't operate without volunteers. Even though it is a great service to the organization, it will be a personal blessing to them in the end. Remind them that things always went better on the trail if everyone got out of the handcart and did their share of pushing and pulling. Serving as a volunteer anywhere in the organization is a heart-felt way of honoring your own pioneer ancestors.

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