



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VOLUNTEERS PLAY CRUCIAL ROLE IN CONQUERING COVID-19

Uniontown, PA – Retirees. Health care workers. Members of a religious community. They come from diverse backgrounds, but these volunteers and many others are united in a common cause: to do what they can, in whatever way they can, to mitigate the spread of one of the deadliest viruses in history.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the chief health concern across the nation for more than a year, but the advent of vaccines could mean the end of the battle against this deadly virus is near. Now, the focus is on getting those vaccines to the public in a quick and efficient manner.

The Fayette County Vaccine Taskforce has stepped up to organize those efforts locally, working to help residents receive shots as soon as possible.

Volunteers have been a crucial part of this stage of the battle, whether they are manning call centers to schedule vaccination appointments or coming out of retirement to help administer shots.

“They are completely important,” said Highlands Hospital Director of Pharmacy Matthew Mascia during a vaccine clinic at Pleasant Valley Masonic Center in Bullsken Township in March. “Without the volunteers, it doesn’t work. Right now, the hospital is not staffed to do this kind of extra outreach. We absolutely rely on all of the volunteers. There are five of us from the hospital here today. The rest are all people who decided to come help us and volunteer their time. It really is the volunteers putting the long days in.”

Among those volunteers was Robin Brooks, a retired registered nurse

“It’s important that everyone gets the vaccine, and I had time now that I’m retired,” Brooks said. “It’s important that we do this, that we try to help get this virus under control.”

Highlands Hospital Pharmacy Coordinator Jodie Menear said helping out at vaccine clinics is sometimes part of her job, but at other times, she turns up to volunteer.

“I think this is really helping to control this pandemic,” she said. “I feel like I’m really helping every time. It’s important.”

Still other volunteers, like Mary Saylor, are private citizens who just want to do something.

“My granddaughter is a nurse, and she asked me if I’d volunteer,” Saylor said, adding that she also volunteers with the Red Cross, Salvation Army, and “anybody else that needs it.”

Sonna Domer and Bernee Coffin are two of the volunteers working the call center at the WVU Medicine Uniontown Hospital clinic held in the former Burlington Coat Factory space in the Uniontown Mall.

Domer is a member of Spring Valley, a Bruderhof community in Farmington. She said she is one of five members of the community who turned out to help.

Domer said she enjoys volunteering, and in the case of the pandemic, doing so was an easy choice.

“People are dying,” she said. “Five hundred and fifty thousand people are dying.”

Domer said manning the phones at the call center and hearing people’s stories has given her insight into their pain, their grief, and their day-to-day struggles.

“People are losing their families, not to mention their jobs,” she said. “They are having to homeschool and teach their kids at home.”

Coffin said she also does volunteer work at a hospital and a senior center and is helping out at the clinic and call center “however I can, with the phone lines or disinfecting or whatever they need me for.”

Coffin said the work she and the other volunteers is doing is “very important. It’s vital to this whole thing.”

County officials and their staff members also have been involved in the volunteer effort. Officials and staffers from the county commissioners’ offices, as well as the offices of state senators and representatives, have manned the phones, done paperwork, or helped keep the vaccine clinics clean and sterile – whatever was needed.

Many around the area felt they owed volunteers a debt of gratitude – and a few rewards. Numerous local businesses and private individuals donated toward the volunteer effort, some providing meals and snacks, and others donating funds to pay for those meals and other items the volunteers may need.

Among the donors was Columbia Gas of Pennsylvania. Communication specialist Corrine Brewer said the company recently partnered with the Leadership Washington County program for its Feed the Fight Campaign.

“We were given kind of an opportunity to do the same thing in Fayette County,” she said. “We connected with the Fayette Chamber of Commerce, and they offered up the vaccine clinic as a way to use some of those funds.”

The funds went toward providing meals for volunteers staffing the vaccine clinic. Brewer said the company’s local employees really like to get involved and help the community, something they haven’t been able to do in person because of the virus. So, they were more than happy to do something to benefit the volunteers.

“The volunteers helping with the vaccine clinic, the frontline workers, the nurses – they’re all vital to helping everything get back to normal,” Brewer said.

Chip Giannetti of Phil Giannetti Motors in Brownsville was inspired to do something to thank volunteers as well.

“I was so overwhelmed by the organization and the process that it was just fantastic,” he said. “It made me proud to be from Fayette County.”

So, Giannetti provided doughnuts for the volunteers as a token of his support.

“I didn’t know what else to do,” he said. “I’m not used to Fayette County knocking it out of the ballpark like that, and they definitely did. It’s a really, really sweet thing to be able to participate in.”

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.FayetteCountyPA.org.

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