



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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A Thriving Example of “Leaderful” Action

Gayle Conelly Manchin, Vice President
West Virginia State Board of Education

Gayle Conelly Manchin is the wife of United States Senator Joe Manchin and served as West Virginia’s first lady from 2005 to 2010, while her husband was Governor.

Mrs. Manchin, a native of Raleigh County, West Virginia, received her bachelor’s degree in language arts and education and a master’s degree in reading from West Virginia University. She also holds a second master’s degree in educational technology leadership from Salem International University.

She taught in Marion County schools and at Fairmont State University and was the director of the college’s first Community Service Learning Program. While living in Marion County, she was active in community advocacy and was involved with AmeriCorps projects and America’s Promise for many years.

Mrs. Manchin was appointed to the State Board of Education in 2007 to serve a nine-year term ending in 2015. She was elected vice president in 2011. She is a partner on the West Virginia Partnership to Promote Community Well Being Commission, serves as the nominating chairwoman of The Education Alliance, is a past president of the Vandalia Rotary Club of Charleston and is president-elect of the National Association of State Boards of Education, the Black Diamond Girl Scout Council and the Children’s Trust Fund.

Many years ago, while attending a state volunteerism conference, I was captivated by a speaker defining leadership. It was his opinion that real leadership seems to imply one person directing the ship while, in reality, a truly successful venture does not and cannot rely on one person. Rather, vision, growth and success comes from the ability to reveal and encourage each person’s individual strengths, working collaboratively to direct a course of action and passion, whether at a local, state, or global endeavor – thereby creating and defining a “LEADERFUL” community which is both sustaining and fulfilling. It is about empowering individuals on both sides of the table, strengthening communities through inclusion, and growing our state with families that enjoy a better quality of life. If there has been one coalescing factor in my life, which has been my mantra, it is without exception this philosophy.

Therefore, in 2006, while a commissioner on the Commission for National and Community



Three Volunteer West Virginia staff members take a break from a park beautification project on Charleston, West Virginia’s West Side



Service (now Volunteer West Virginia), I was approached by Sam Cipoletti of Verizon West Virginia, with an idea of forming a statewide Business Volunteer Council, to promote corporate community involvement at the local level, using examples of businesses within the region who make volunteerism a priority.

This was, and continues to be, a time when many businesses are being forced to cut costs at all levels, including philanthropic giving. Now businesses are stepping up to use volunteerism as a means to fulfill community needs when financial contributions aren’t always feasible. To have an impact in this day and age, volunteerism is becoming a part of a total business strategy, deeply rooted in a company’s value system. If workplace volunteerism success is based on the measure of activity – the number of projects, the number of hours, or the number of volunteers – does it really make an impact? Are goals being set and met? Are the same projects being done all the time because it makes the company feel good, or are positive and sustainable changes being made in the community?

The West Virginia Business Volunteer Council (BVC) helps West Virginia businesses answer these questions by providing networking opportunities, training materials and online resources to help companies learn best practices in business volunteerism strategy – again through the examples and models of many organizations. Under Volunteer West Virginia, the BVC has become a national model for coordinated statewide business volunteer



*Left: AmeriCorps members from the Communities Helping Communities program take a break from a service project in Huntington
Right: Representatives from Enterprise Rent-A-Car receive a business volunteerism award from BVC steering committee member Sam Cipoletti and Governor Earl Ray Tomblin*

programs. The membership organization, which is open to private sector entities – including businesses, associations, labor organizations and professionals – encourages and promotes private sector involvement through volunteerism.

While there are about 78 corporate volunteer councils in the country that are local or regional in scope, West Virginia has been leading the way in developing a statewide approach. Just a year after its establishment, the BVC was recognized nationally by the National Points of Light Foundation with a Corporate Volunteer Council Fast Track Award for its outstanding volunteer efforts. Partners in West Virginia come from all sectors of the state, represent businesses of all sizes and incorporate many different models of implementation within their locality. What they share in common is the ability to affect the community social issues at the corporate level through human resources at the local level.

Statewide support, through Volunteer West Virginia, has included a web-based survey to business executives, two webinars for business representatives to start a conversation and peer network around employee volunteering, three consecutive *Business Volunteering Institutes* at the state volunteer conference, a peer mentoring program in which BVC members connect with other statewide businesses similar to their own who need help, and a short

promotional video (*The Business of Caring*) that features statewide business leaders telling why they invest in employee volunteer programs, and explaining the benefits of those programs to their business. Statewide service projects, such as a food drive on September 11 – the new National Day of Service – also are annual priorities of the BVC.

Obviously, the benefits are deep and far-reaching from this very dramatic endeavor:

- the **business community** gains a higher visibility with its mission and values, a deeper understanding of the community and its needs, and the opportunity to share information with volunteer groups while gaining access to effective practices;
- the **community** gains new capacity of human resources to nonprofits through employee volunteers becoming motivated ambassadors to the rest of the community, and ultimately making communities better places to live and work for all citizens;
- the **employees** gain new skills and knowledge, a defined fulfillment through a work/life balance, which may well enhance job performance and work satisfaction. It is a win-win for all involved and certainly becomes a marketing tool for attracting new businesses to a community alive with cooperation and success.

I truly believe the BVC is a living, thriving example of “leaderful” action at its finest, and I am so proud of West Virginia for being that model at a national level. For more information about the BVC, visit www.volunteerwv.org. 