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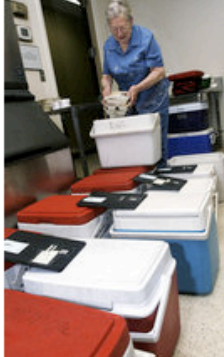
# TULSA WORLD

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## Finding good help: People find volunteering can be an advantage for everyone.



Peg Rinaldi, 76, a Meals on Wheels volunteer since 1998, packs food trays into coolers for other volunteers to deliver to clients. Meals on Wheels is among the agencies benefiting from extra volunteers as the economy makes jobs scarce. SHERRY BROWN/Tulsa World



By SARA PLUMMER World Staff Writer  
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When Monica Johnson graduated in December with a master's degree in mass communications, it was time to go to work. But no one was hiring.

"I've been searching for a job, and it was a little disheartening," she said. So she thought, "I might as well make better use of my time."

So she took her skills and applied them elsewhere.

Johnson began volunteering at Hospitality House doing marketing and social networking for the nonprofit agency that provides families of hospital patients with a free place to stay while their loved one is receiving care.

"It's a great mission to be a home away from home for families in a medical crisis. It's special to see those families and how Hospitality House takes care of them," she said.

Other agencies also are seeing additional volunteers as Tulsa's unemployment rate continues to rise. The Oklahoma Employment Security Commission reported Wednesday that the Tulsa metro area's unemployment rate is around 6.3 percent, an almost five-year high.

Becky Mann recently found herself without a job and decided to fill her days volunteering as well as job searching.

"It's been in the back of my mind for a while. I didn't have anything to do for 40 hours a week. My time could be put to better use," Mann said, so she began volunteering at Catholic Charities in its Immigration and Refugee Services program.

"It's still new to me," she said. "I have a purpose for getting up instead of just making a pot of coffee."

Brenda Michael-Haggard, the executive director of Volunteer Central of Greater Tulsa, said that volunteering is a good way for people who find themselves unemployed to spend their time.

"Volunteers are, at their base, more social and spend less extended time in front of the television," Michael-Haggard said, adding that people get mental and physical benefits from interacting with others.

"Being part of something bigger than you are you already find yourself in a better place."

Meals on Wheels and Catholic Charities are benefitting from the additional volunteers, who are in turn using their knowledge or gaining new skills that could benefit in the job search, officials said.

That's something that Johnson has experienced.

"It's letting me do what I studied in school," she said. "It's been very positive. Searching for a job can be disheartening, and it's nice to be able to come and apply those skills that I have."

For Mann, doing data entry and working in an office is helping her keep her skills current.

"When you've been laid off for any length of time, you get back and ask, 'How do you do that again?'," she said. "It feeds a spiritual need, also. Helping out the needy — that's what we're here for, to help our brothers."

Volunteering obviously benefits the nonprofit agency as well.

"Having Monica here has been a lifesaver for me. We're a small nonprofit and rely so heavily on volunteers," said Toni Moore, Hospitality House's president and CEO. "Marketing always gets put on the back burner."

It's not only helped Hospitality House, but the volunteer as well, Moore said.

"A social service agency can tap something in them they never knew about," Michael-Haggard said, and sometimes the organization hires the volunteer when they realize how dependable, punctual and passionate the volunteer is about the work.

Volunteering benefits the agency, the agency's clients and the volunteer, she said.

"It's a three-way win. Actually, a four-way win: The community overall wins."

### **Interested in volunteering?**

Volunteer Central of Greater Tulsa can be reached at 44 -1888 or [tulsaworld.com/volunteercentral](http://tulsaworld.com/volunteercentral).

Staff members will help match potential volunteers with available positions.

To search for volunteer opportunities on your own, go to [tulsaworld.com/1800volunteer](http://tulsaworld.com/1800volunteer).

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