

## **Pride of CASE V Awards**

### **4. Best Volunteer Engagement Program — AR, FD**

**Title:** GVSU Alumni Volunteer Program – “Alumni Volunteers – Growing a Greater Grand Valley”

**Institution:** Grand Valley State University

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#### **General Description:**

The GVSU Alumni Association established a managed alumni volunteer program in the summer of 2007 in recognition of the community service oriented nature of our alumni constituency (especially recent graduates – by far our largest demographic) and in an effort to creatively engage alumni during a time of shrinking budgets (i.e. community service projects are either free or require a much lower overhead cost than traditional alumni events.)

In order to grow and continuously improve the program, it was recognized that retention and recognition measures needed to be implemented. As such, a mechanism to publicly thank and recognize alumni volunteers and to cultivate further relationships with this group of committed individuals was established. We also established a volunteer retention mechanism through recognition.

An innovative theme was developed, “Alumni Volunteers – Growing a Greater Grand Valley,” around the idea that alumni volunteers are providing grassroots support and “planting seeds” for the future of GVSU by helping the institutions’ students, in the community, with Alumni Association events/programs, and other University initiatives. Marketing collateral was used to support this theme.

A unique illustration was developed and used in colorful invitations sent to all alumni volunteers for both the first (April 25, 2008) and second (April 21, 2009) annual Volunteer Celebration, held during National Volunteer Week. The theme was carried through in the menu (organic, locally grown menu items), and décor for the event, and has been used in ongoing retention efforts. Flower seed packets were ordered utilizing the graphic and given to all event attendees. Blue (school color) Forget Me Nots were chosen. Alumni volunteers were encouraged to plant the seeds which will serve as a visual reminder of the impact that the volunteers are having. Logo seed packets, along with specially crafted notes (see attached), have been sent to all first-time volunteers with the intent of facilitating volunteer retention and special recognition of first-time engagement with the association. Returning volunteers also receive thank you notes imprinted with a variation of the illustration. In addition, the graphic was carried through on flower pots which served as centerpieces for the 2008 recognition event and were used as prize drawings for attendees. It has also been used on t-shirts and hats given to alumni volunteers during a newly established week-long community service endeavor called Community Outreach Week and as prize drawings for 2009 Volunteer Celebration event attendees.

Community Outreach Week (COW) provided a unique volunteer experience available each day (March 21 – 27, 2009) for interested alumni. The Alumni Relations office coordinated daily service projects in the area, as well as put out calls to alumni to identify and lead service projects in their areas. Through individual alumni participating and club-sponsored events, projects were hosted

in the greater-Grand Rapids, MI area; Lansing, MI; Indianapolis, IN; Austin, TX; Charleston, SC; and Port Richey, FL.

**Project Goals and Objectives:**

- To offer recognition to committed alumni volunteers.
- To expose volunteers to additional events and volunteer opportunities.
- To offer incentive for further participation from volunteers.
- To build affinity amongst the volunteer group.
- To offer an enticement for recruiting alumni volunteers.
- To highlight the community and university service projects that Alumni Relations is involved in to a broader audience.
- To establish an Alumni Association leadership succession pool.
- To facilitate retention of new alumni volunteers.
- Measurables - to retain at least 40% of prior alumni volunteers and recruit 75 new alumni volunteers.

**Institutional and Advancement Goals:**

The Mission of Grand Valley State University is to “educate students to shape their lives, their professions, and their societies.”

Grand Valley’s President, Thomas J. Haas, provided remarks at the volunteer celebration which reinforced the impact of alumni volunteers on the University and in helping Grand Valley fulfill its core mission by:

1. Educating Students – Alumni serve as excellent role models and teachers for students who can relate well to individuals who were in their very same shoes, sometimes not long ago, through:
  - Providing career advice and leadership skills
  - Hiring students as interns or graduates at their companies
  - Sharing institutional history/memories
  - Offering financial assistance
  - Mentoring
  - Assuring the legacy of Grand Valley continues to increase and improve over time
  - Recruiting new and talented students to the university
  - Being legislative advocates
2. Shaping Society – Not only through their personal and professional endeavors but by the collective alumni activities they volunteer at (i.e. Habitat for Humanity, Second Harvest Gleaners, Relay for Life). It is important for the future of Grand Valley that its constituents are seen as community leaders and involved citizens for the betterment of society.

The program also helped support three strategic goals set forth in the GVSU Development Division strategic plan.

Goal: To promote the image of the university.

Objective: Communicate the image, goals and message of the University to Alumni constituents

Goal: To position the president with key constituents and stakeholder groups.

Objective: Provide the president with opportunities to meet with Alumni population.

Goal: To build greater alumni and constituent engagement through meaningful cultivation and stewardship efforts.

Objective: Engage alumni constituent base by practicing meaningful cultivation techniques

**Audience:**

The audience for the celebration event and marketing collateral is all alumni volunteers, and collateral will continue to focus on retention of new alumni volunteers in 09-10. Additional publicity of volunteer events has been facilitated to the entire alumni constituency.

**Contributing Staff:** Three professional staff members contributed to this project: One alumni relations professional staff member and two institutional marketing professional staff members. Susan Proctor is the alumni volunteer coordinator, program manager, event coordinator, and responsible for concept development. Jackie Cuppy, Art & Design Manager, was the graphic designer for the illustration. Daniel Fase, former Marketing Assistant, acted as creative team manager.

**Total Budget:** \$4,151.06

Printing (Invitations): \$184.44

Budget for Collateral Materials:

Flower Seed Packets \$305.00

Logo Flower Pots \$331.62

T-Shirts \$360.00

Hats \$270.00

Total for Collateral \$1,266.62

Event Expenses \$2,700.00

**Special Circumstances/Challenges:**

No special circumstances or challenges of note to report.

**Measurements of Effectiveness:**

160 first-time volunteers were recruited to assist with volunteer events in 2009, far exceeding the 75 person goal. A 62.7% volunteer retention rate was obtained for events, with an alumni volunteer retention rate of 59.8%, or 19.8% over goal for the year.

Overall in fiscal year 2008-2009 (July 1, 2008 – June 30, 2009), 527 unique alumni volunteers assisted with 29 events and programs and with activities including:

- Academic Major Fair (providing career advice to students)
- All-Alumni Benefit Golf Outing
- Art on the Ravine (planning committee, event speakers, art donors)
- Alumni Ambassadors (admissions assistance)
- Career Contact Bank volunteers (providing one-on-one student mentoring through Career Services)
- Alumni Focus Groups
- Freshman Move-In Day
- GradFest
- Homecoming
- Relay for Life walk
- Roundtable/Panel Discussion participants sharing career and life advice with current students
- Community Service project volunteers
- WGVU Pledge Drives
- Leadership/service on alumni boards and committees, academic and deans' advisory councils/boards, campaign committees, strategic planning committees
- Table and event hosts for president's receptions throughout the state and country, tailgaters and watch parties.
- Legislative Advocacy
- Speakers at campus leadership and educational programs