

Event looking to connect volunteers with nonprofits

BY JOHN TOWNES

An upcoming event will spotlight opportunities for older Berkshire residents to participate in community life as volunteers.

“Don’t Just Stand There – Volunteer!” will take place on Nov. 15 from 1 to 3:30 p.m. at Saint James Place, 352 Main St. in Great Barrington. It is free to the public.

The volunteer fair is jointly sponsored by four area organizations: Age Friendly Berkshires, the Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires, Berkshire United Way, and Osher Lifelong Learning Institute.

The event will include information tables and representatives from 30 regional nonprofits and municipalities. Attendees will be able to collect information about the volunteer needs and opportunities of these organizations. It also provides the organizations with an opportunity to meet face-to-face with prospective volunteers.

Attendees will be given a Volunteer Passport and encouraged to visit four or more volunteer stations for the chance to win door prizes. They will also receive volunteer tips and a Skills Checklist for matching personal talents, interests and values with local volunteer opportunities.

In addition, attendees will receive copies of *Giving Back*, an annual guide and directory of regional organizations and their needs for volunteers and philanthropic support, which

is published by the Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires. There will also be refreshments.

While walk-in attendees will be accepted, preregistration is requested to enable organizers to plan the event based on the anticipated attendance. A link to the registration page is available at npcberkshires.org/events/volunteer-fair/ or call 413-442-1521 ext. 16 for more information.

The volunteer fair was initiated by Age Friendly Berkshires, a coalition working to create a more livable Berkshire County for people of all ages, with a focus on the needs of an aging population (*June 2018 BT&C*). It is a member of the nationwide AARP Network of Age Friendly States and Communities and operates under the auspices of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission.

The fair is being underwritten by a \$4,000 grant to Age Friendly Berkshires from the Massachusetts AARP.

Among its other programs, Age Friendly Berkshires is promoting volunteerism as a way to help older residents stay active, healthy and engaged in community life, explained its coordinator, Peg McDonough.

“We’ve created this event to highlight the good work of local nonprofits and municipal boards and committees – all of whom need to recruit smart, active adults to help them fulfill their missions,” she said. “At the same time, doing good for one’s community is good for the body and soul of the volunteer.”

Age Friendly Berkshires invited the other three co-sponsors to participate.

“Our organization had wanted to do an event like this for long time,” said Liana Toscanini, executive director of the Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires, an organization that provides networking and support for the region’s nonprofit community (*October 2019 BT&C*). “When Age Friendly Berkshires invited us to become a co-sponsor, we jumped at the opportunity. Having four strong agencies working together provides the resources and bandwidth to do it right.”

She said there has been great deal of enthusiasm about the event. While it is being held in southern Berkshire County, organizations from throughout the Berkshires are participating.

Toscanini said that organizations quickly signed up for the \$25 tables when they were

offered. “The tables were sold out quickly,” she said.

Participating nonprofits include: AARP Massachusetts, Alzheimer’s Association, Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority, Berkshire Historical Society, Berkshire Environmental Action Team, Berkshire Natural Resources Council, Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity, Clinton Church Restoration, Community Health Programs, Dewey Memorial Hall, Entrepreneurship for All, Flying Cloud Institute, HospiceCare in the Berkshires, Jacob’s Pillow, Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center, Massachusetts Association of the Blind & Visually Impaired, MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board, Railroad Street Youth Project, Riverbrook Residence, Susan B. Anthony Birthplace Museum, Villages of the Berkshires and Volunteers in Medicine Berkshires.

Toscanini said organizers are planning to hold other fairs in Pittsfield and North Adams in early 2020. “There is obviously a real interest and need for something like this,” she said. “So there will be additional opportunities for nonprofits and potential volunteers to participate in those upcoming fairs.” ♦