AmeriCorps Senior Programs in Two Counties

Across the United States, volunteers age 55+ provide service to their local community through the AmeriCorps Senior Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). In Wisconsin, an estimated 7,800 RSVP volunteers helped in their community over the last year.

RSVP of Waukesha County is a program of Eras Senior Network, with 250 RSVP volunteers helping students in two Waukesha County public school districts. “This program pairs thousands of Americans with organization such as Eras to help make changes in their communities,” says Sandi Ammerman, director of Eras’ Waukesha County RSVP. “Volunteering helps individuals share purpose and meaning in their lives and helps keep them active both physically and mentally in their communities.”

Eras began operating a new RSVP in Milwaukee County in April 2020. Due to the onset of the pandemic, the program got off to a slow start, but by March 2021, 45 RSVP volunteers were helping older adults in Milwaukee County. The program aims to recruit and place 250 RSVP volunteers by March 2023, including volunteer drivers, and volunteers helping with new programs for Medicare counseling and presentations about frauds and scams.

The Waukesha County program involves the Waukesha and Menomonee Falls School Districts; volunteers read with students individually and in small groups, help students with math and participate in a pen pal program. There are many ways for RSVP Volunteers to become involved.

“Anyone who is enthusiastic and would enjoy speaking with students from kindergarten through high school,” says Ammerman. “We have a whole variety of people involved with the schools. Readers Café volunteers engage with elementary students to read over their lunch and recess break. The program is designed to encourage students’ interest in reading, while developing comprehension and social skills. Pen Pal volunteers are matched up with an elementary student in their area. Letters are exchanged once a month throughout the school year, starting in November. The program ends with a party, where volunteers and students meet for the first time (scheduled in May or June).”

In addition, Waukesha County RSVP volunteers assist with the annual Heritage Fair for 3-5th graders in partnership with the Waukesha County Historical Society & Museum, says Ammerman. “This is a one-two day opportunity twice a year where RSVP volunteers help with students on field trips which mirror the curriculum of what they are learning at that time for local and state history,” she explains. Waukesha County school RSVP programs will be finalized in August after being evaluated for COVID-related concerns.

The Milwaukee team, led by Amera Schaefer, is looking at engaging more 55+ adults to build the program that assists older adults. Milwaukee’s RSVP program involves three facets: helping adults 60+ with transportation to medical appointments, the grocery store and food pantries; placing weekly wellness calls to older adults; and assisting with outdoor chores such as snow removal, raking and spring cleanups.

In addition, RSVP volunteers also are trained to educate older adults on scams and frauds and helping them learn about the Medicare system and ways to afford premiums, co-pays and prescription drugs. Volunteers are paired with Milwaukee County’s Division on Aging for training and then matched with clients 1:1 or assigned to provide presentations to small groups.

Ammerman says the RSVP program is unique in that instead of having adults 55+ receiving assistance, they are actively furnishing assistance to others. “The benefits of volunteering are being studied,” she says. “This program pairs thousands of senior volunteers with organizations such as Eras to make changes in communities across the country. Volunteers in our program choose how, where and when they want to serve with commitments ranging from a few hours to 40 hours a week.”

RSVP Milwaukee County: (414) 488-6500
RSVP Waukesha County: (262) 549-3348
Client Spotlight

At 92 years old, Gloria was a busy woman. The Greenfield resident drove regularly, golfed, bowled and attended events. She cut her own lawn, shoveled snow, and tended her garden. Then came a traffic accident which resulted in a painful back injury and made her decide to give up driving.

Gloria knew about Eras Senior Network from her church, St. Mary’s Faith Community in Hales Corners and became a client. Fast forward five years and Gloria is now 97 years old and a regular client of Eras. She’s a woman of many words and laughter but when asked about her experience with Eras, she gets quiet and simply says, “It’s been fabulous. Because of their help, I can stay in my house. I don’t have to think about moving.”

And that is so beneficial for Gloria because her house is her home – she has lived there since 1950. She and her husband built the house shortly after he returned home from World War II and raised her family there. She has lived alone since her husband died 21 years ago.

Gloria receives many services from Eras. For the past two years, the same Eras volunteer takes Gloria to the grocery store every Wednesday. And when that volunteer is out of town, another volunteer drives her to the store.

Gloria also gets rides to all her medical appointments which she jokingly refers to as her “social life.” And then every three months, she gets a ride to the beauty shop to get her hair cut. “All I have to do is give them a 5- or 6-day notice and I can have a ride arranged,” she says.

While Gloria now has a hired lawn service for her one-acre property and scheduled snow removal, she receives Eras’ help for fall raking and spring yard clean up. Last fall, a group of students from Mount Mary College helped rake all the leaves on her property. “The students were so happy to help me, and I was so happy to have them here to help,” she says.

Gloria says giving up driving was difficult. She says she was a good driver but was afraid of other drivers and afraid her reflexes had slowed down. She keeps active at home with her daily housework and tending to her flower garden. She enjoys cooking as well.

Gloria believes she would have to move if it were not for Eras. For that, she says she is grateful. “It was difficult for me to give up my car but when I joined the program, it was like God answered all my prayers. I have met so many wonderful people through Eras. They are all so generous, kind and thoughtful.”

Auction Items Needed for Tapestry

Donations are requested for the silent auction at this year’s Tapestry Event on September 30th. All funds raised at the event support Eras Senior Network’s programs in Waukesha County and Milwaukee County. Due to the pandemic, this year’s program will once again be virtual.

Items popular at past silent auctions have included:
- Restaurant/fast food gift cards
- Museum memberships
- State or Local Park Memberships
- Popular gadgets (air fryer, stand mixers, Apple Watch, Dyson)
- Gift cards for future travel (Airbnb, Southwest Airlines)
- Original craft and art items (paintings, photography, quilts)
- Jewelry
- Certificates for golf rounds/golf accessories (clubs, bags)
- Tickets or box seats to a future sporting event or show
- Exercise/yoga classes or spa treatments
- Patio sets for garden, deck, or porch
- Hotel stays
- Sports/theater tickets
- Vacation cabin/condo rentals
- Power Tools
- Culinary Experience (Chef-made meal for 8, exclusive tour of restaurant with dinner)
- Unique Experience (Hunting or fishing with a pro, backstage tour, celebrity meet and greet)

Donations are due by September 9th, 2021. Contact Becca if you would like to make a donation or if you have any questions: (262) 522-2409 or Becca.Snow@Eras.org.

The live stream event will include the silent auction, live music, wine and beer pull, a Call to Care and entertaining breakout activities appropriate for all ages. Please visit Eras.org to register and for more information.
Milwaukee County RSVP Recruitment Efforts

Volunteers 55+ are being recruited for Eras Senior Network’s Milwaukee County RSVP program, from approximately 150 Milwaukee County congregations to help clients in two new ways: instruct them on affordable options within the Medicare system and educate fellow seniors on ways to prevent frauds and scams.

The new programming adds to Eras’ current RSVP work in helping older adults with transportation, food delivery and companionship.

Eras is seeking to recruit 40 volunteers to work with Medicare Patrol and 10 volunteers to work with S.T.O.P. Frauds and Scams. Volunteers will be working 1:1 with clients and will be providing presentations to small groups.

“With the Wisconsin Senior Medicare Patrol, we are offering an opportunity for seniors to increase awareness and access of existing programs to better support families in learning how to afford Medicare premiums, co-pays, and afford prescription drugs,” says Amera Schaefer, director of Eras’ Milwaukee County RSVP Program. “And with S.T.O.P Scams and Frauds, we want to be on the forefront of education to empower seniors with the necessary knowledge to prevent them from becoming a victim.”

While volunteer applications are being handled through Eras, approved volunteers for the two programs will be assigned to the Milwaukee County Division on Aging for training and assignments.

Schaefer says individuals who enjoy teaching, giving community presentations, and guiding individuals would be good for these positions. “It’s different from driving where those volunteer opportunities have the option to be more episodic,” she says. “These roles will require a bigger commitment. We want to make sure volunteers understand the training to potentially conduct one-on-one counseling and realize they will be out and about in the community supporting seniors.”

Schaefer says presentations will likely be scheduled at locations where seniors congregate such as senior centers, houses of worship, libraries, and community centers.

Schaefer notes that while many individuals think they are familiar with Medicare offerings and know how to avoid scams, the adage of “You don’t know what you don’t know” is true.

For Medicare, Schaefer says, substantial information from television, telephone, mail, and email can be confusing. “It is often difficult and overwhelming for individuals to sift through this information even if they have families supporting them. They need a clear support system to guide them through what could be a very messy and difficult process so they can take advantage of the services they deserve.”

Schaefer believes the two new offerings will help seniors better manage their independent living needs and keep them safer. “Eras is focused on recruiting more volunteers to fulfill these needs,” she says. “We don’t want to be the best kept secret in Milwaukee County. We want to make sure everyone knows who we are and make sure they know how to contact us if need be.”

Holiday Giving Donations

Once again, Eras Senior Network is partnering with the community to furnish holiday gifts to some of our seniors and adults with disability who are on fixed incomes in Milwaukee County and Waukesha County. Recipients of these gifts must have shown a demonstrated need.

If you or your workplace would like to donate toward this program, we would be pleased to have you part of this campaign. We are unsure right now whether we will be providing these gifts to clients in-person or through the mail due to COVID precautions.

Our goal is to help up to 900 clients each receive gifts of postage stamps and gift cards totaling $50. Please help us in that effort. Our wish list includes $10 packs of Forever postage stamps, $10 Walgreens gift cards, $10 Pick and Save gift cards, and $10 Walmart gift cards. Gift card receipts need to be included with each gift card.

Last year’s donations were met with gratitude from clients. Joan, a 2020 Holiday Giving recipient said: “I just checked my mail, and I got your surprise package in an envelope with a beautiful card and the gift cards. I want to say thank you. I was floored. I was just absolutely floored. [...] That came from a lot of planning, a lot of donations, and a lot of kind, sincere people that care a lot about others. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

Unwrapped donations can be dropped off or mailed by December 13th, 2021 to:

Eras Senior Network
Attn: Becca Snow
2607 N Grandview Boulevard, Suite 150
Waukesha, WI 53188

(or)

Eras Senior Network
c/o YWCA
Attn: Vanessa Harris
1915 N Doctor MLK Drive
Milwaukee, WI 53212

Questions? Contact Becca at:
(262) 522-2409 | Becca.Snow@Eras.org
Volunteers Needed for Annual Fall Yard Cleanup

Volunteers are needed for the annual fall yard cleanup at client homes throughout Milwaukee and Waukesha Counties. Cleanups involve raking leaves and trimming bushes to prepare for winter. Volunteers can include families, friend groups, scout groups, faith groups or school groups. In most cases, volunteers would have to bring their own rakes, clipping shears and bags but sometimes clients have equipment at their homes.

Cleanups will be scheduled in early fall once leaves begin falling.

To volunteer in Milwaukee County, contact:
VolunteerMilwaukee@Eras.org
(414) 488-6500

To volunteer in Waukesha County, contact:
VolunteerWaukesha@Eras.org
(262) 549-3348

It’s never too early to start thinking about Santa! Eras Senior Network’s 5K Santa Run & Walk through the streets of downtown Waukesha is scheduled for Sunday, December 5th. Registration information will be coming closer to the event date but sponsorship opportunities are available now. If your company is interested in sponsoring the event, please contact Heather Uzowulu at (262) 522-2404 or Heather.Uzowulu@Eras.org.