

WTNS Radio OSU Extension Update for October 11, 2021
Healthy People. Healthy Finances. Healthy Relationships.

On today's OSU Extension update for Healthy People, Healthy Finances, & Healthy Relationships we'll talk about the importance of volunteering, and as always, look at some upcoming programs from OSU Extension.

The fairgrounds is quiet once again without the sights, smells, and sounds of animals, concessions, rides, and fairgoers. It was another great Coshocton County Fair. The week seems to fly by each year. I am grateful for several slow walks through the barns and buildings leading to many conversations with new and old friends.

This year was our first year to volunteer in the River View Music Boosters food stand. It brought back memories of working there as a band member long ago, back when the Athletic Boosters were also part of the stand. Can you remember the old "U-shaped" design, where the students would take your order from the middle and then bring your food out to you? I worked with volunteers this year who have worked in that stand every year since before I was in high school. I'm sure the same is true for Ridgewood and Coshocton as well.

The more fairs I experience, the clearer it is to me how valuable our volunteers are. They are serving as fair board members, encouraging 4-H members and scouts, frying up mini-donuts, running the Jr. Fair Auction, and sharing their passion for model trains. These amazing people give their time and energy to the causes and people they believe in. Of course, volunteers come in all shapes and sizes and ages, but older adults have more time to volunteer after retirement.

Many research studies have shown the positive health benefits of volunteering. One study showed that older adults who did not volunteer reported significantly worse health than their volunteering counterparts. Marieke Van Willigen of East Carolina University found that no matter how volunteering is measured, it is positively associated with life satisfaction and perceived health among older adults. It is not simply that volunteers are the types of people who are more satisfied with their lives and healthier in the first place. Also, older volunteers experience greater psychological benefits for each hour that they contribute than younger volunteers do.

A more recent article by Hayley Guiney in 2019 suggests that volunteering in the community could help reduce age-related cognitive decline. This is because volunteering encompasses cognitive, social, and physical activity, all of which have been shown to have positive links with cognitive functioning in older adulthood.

A few years ago, a dozen midwestern states conducted a survey with 4-H volunteers. The respondents indicated that there are certainly individual benefits, but also public benefits to volunteering. Ninety-two percent said that volunteering with 4-H makes communities stronger, and 78 percent felt that it increases civic involvement. On average, 4-H volunteers in this region contribute 9 hours per month- that's over 100 hours per year- investing in youth development.

These past 18 months have been anything but normal. One huge change has been the ability for many people to volunteer like they used to. Changes in school policies and other organization safety measures have greatly impacted opportunities to volunteer. Since we know this is important for both volunteer mental and physical health, as well as community health, what are we to do?

Even if you are not able to get out, look for ways to help. Sometimes organizations could use assistance with paperwork that could be done from home. Or there may be small projects that could be completed in environments with social distancing. I encourage you to seek ways to continue to stay connected to our community – for your whole health. You can get ideas from United Way of Coshocton County at 740-622-4567.

In the words of Dr. Seuss, “Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.”

This year's Fall Foliage and Farm Tour will be October 16 and 17. Also, I will be teaching a Holiday Jams and Jellies Class at Clary Gardens on Thursday, November 4. We'll be making some uniquely flavored jams and jellies, perfect for Christmas gifts- including Pomegranate Jelly, Carrot Cake Jam, and Low-Sugar Apple Pie Jam. You can find registration information on our website, coshocton.osu.edu.

In closing, at OSU Extension, we are proud to work for Coshocton County to help educate and improve our families, farms, and businesses. Please feel free to contact OSU Extension for more information at 740-622-2265 or visit our website at coshocton.osu.edu. Make it a healthy day!