

FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS

Arsht Center recruiting volunteers — many have found longtime friends in volunteering



BY CHRISTINA MAYO
christinamayo@gmail.com

Welcome in the New Year, and the new decade, by getting involved in your community as a volunteer.

Volunteering, health experts agree, can help you make friends, learn new skills, advance your career, and feel happier and healthier. It can temper anxiety, stress, and anger, and help with self-confidence and sense of purpose.

This column tries to share information on new volunteer groups and projects, as well as those that have been around for years.

At the Arsht Center, organizers are gearing up to meet the latest group of performance-loving volunteers who want to join in to discover how their skills can contribute.

Anyone who is interested can attend the upcoming New Volunteer Orientation 3-5 p.m., Jan. 12, Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, 1300 Biscayne Blvd., Miami. It is free.

“Our volunteers play a pivotal role in the Arsht Center’s success and truly embody the diversity of our community,” said Nicole Smith, Arsht Center manager of volunteer and internship services.

“They range in age from 18-95, represent nearly 30



SERGI ALEXANDER Eyeworks Production

Volunteers help distribute backpacks at the AileyCamp Miami Reunion event at the Ziff Ballet Opera House Peacock Foundation Studio Miami.

different countries, speak more than 20 different languages, and typify various professional backgrounds.”

One is Lourdes Hernandez, the longest-serving volunteer, who started in October 2005 and was a volunteer before the Center opened in 2006. She has logged 7,816 hours and has photos of herself wearing a hard hat while the Center was being constructed.

Vivian Deval is about to mark 10 years at the Center. Her daughter received a scholarship to study art in college, and she wanted to give back with her time equal to what her daughter earned with the scholarship. She recently logged 2,000 hours.

Ruth Schnapper, 95, said that volunteering at the Arsht Center keeps her alive. She has volunteered for 12 years, having started when she was 83.

Married couple Marilyn and Herb Cohen have been volunteering for 13 years



Eneida Yanes, Elizabeth Tsiris, Villagers’ past president Beverly Loftus, and Maria Costa at The Villagers’ Holiday House Tour in Pinecrest on Dec. 7.

and have both donated 1,000 hours. They are in their 70s and drive from West Palm Beach on the weekends to help out.

One of the youngest volunteers is Sara Zajic, who also is Explorer Coordinator in Education at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden. She said that “being able to give back in even a small way to the arts community that raised her is a privilege, an honor, and one of the most fun things she’s ever done.”

And Sondra Walsh was a long-time patron of the Arsht Center along with her husband. They were season subscribers to the Jazz Roots and Broadway series. But when he passed away, she never intended to come back since the memories were too painful.

A friend of a friend recommended that Walsh become a volunteer as a way to heal. She wasn’t convinced, but the volunteer coordinator supported her along the way. The first

group of ushers she met at the Center were all widows. She found community again.

Learn more at www.arshtcenter.org/about-us/volunteer/.

VILLAGERS’ SUCCESS

The Villagers’ Annual House Tour was fun for hundreds of guests who turned out Dec. 7 to visit five distinctive homes in Pinecrest. The Villagers raised \$30,000 for local historic preservation, and scholarships for students studying preservation, at their successful event.

The theme was “Inside Out – A South Florida Lifestyle” and it showcased how to creatively bring the outdoors in.

“I am thankful for the community support for this tour, including every person who bought a ticket and the homeowners who participated,” Villager Susan Medina said.

“I wore two hats this year, as a Villager and homeowner of one of the tour homes. I know it’s a big decision to open up your home, but it was a wonderful experience.”

The Villagers, founded in 1966, have sponsored area house tours for more than 30 years. Learn more at www.thevillagersinc.org.

ASTRONOMY FOR ALL AGES

Go outside and look up. This time of year we can see some amazing things in our sky.

Volunteers in the long-established group Southern Cross Astronomers want to

share their knowledge and viewing telescopes with you.

Everyone is invited to attend one or both of the two free January events that will teach you how to buy and use a telescope, and how to observe a comet.

The telescope workshop will be at 7:30-9 p.m., Jan. 11, Bill Sadowski Park & Nature Center, Southwest 176 Street/79th Avenue in Palmetto Bay. It will take place rain or shine.

You can bring your new telescope if you received one as a holiday gift, attend for a recap on how to use one, or get purchasing advice. The astronomers will assemble, align and adjust equipment.

The “To Catch A Comet” program is at 8 p.m., Jan. 17, Florida International University Physics Lecture Hall CP-145, on the main campus at 11200 SW Eighth St.

The evening includes refreshments and discussions. Weather permitting, there will be a rooftop Star Party at the Stocker AstroScience Observatory. You might even see the dim Comet 2I/Borisov that was recently closest to Earth.

Park in the campus garage, west side of Southwest 109th Avenue/Southwest Eighth Street, in faculty or visitors spaces, and follow the SCAS signs.

If these dates don’t work, you can always check out the astronomers at their observatory gatherings. They meet dusk to 10 p.m., Saturdays, at Bill Sadowski Park.

Call 305-661-1375 for the latest information, or visit www.scas.org.

If you have news for this column, write to ChristinaMMayo@gmail.com.