

September 30, 2020

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ELGIN insight



STRATEGIC HIGHLIGHTS



Programs Merged and Rebranded to Improve Image and Increase Participation

The City of Elgin continually searches for opportunities to supplement its lean staffing model and provide meaningful experiences to those looking to give back to their community. Volunteers are one source of assistance, and at the other end of the spectrum are community restitution workers—those with court-ordered community service. While the motivations behind the two disparate groups for assisting the City are markedly different, a new program has been developed that creates greater efficiencies in the use of these two distinct labor pools.

The City had been experiencing a steady loss of interest and participation in its volunteer and community restitution programs. By merging those programs under one reimagined and rebranded program, *Elgin Allies*, hope has been restored, thanks to new-ish Community Resource Coordinator Fred Wimms.

“New-ish” describes Fred because he has been on the job just over a year now. But Fred is by no means new to volunteering for the City of Elgin. In fact, Fred may be one of the City’s longest serving and hardest working volunteers. Fred, an artist and jack of many trades, first donated a sculpture to the City as part of the Artspace grand opening exhibit in 2011. That gesture set him up for an unexpected but welcomed role in creating what would put Elgin on the map as a Halloween destination for years to come. That’s right, Fred was asked to be part of the Nightmare on Chicago Street (NOCS) committee when the event was first being developed. His vision has helped create the experience that we all know and love (and may be a little terrified of). That first year alone, Fred volunteered nearly 1200 hours in the six weeks leading up

to the event. And year after year, Fred showed up for his city to provide a truly unique experience for participants each October.

“Creating something out of my imagination and people getting to experience it in realtime - it’s the most empowering thing for an artist,” said Fred. “When your art is a livable form that people can make memories from, it’s an achievement and a feeling that’s hard to explain.”

And while not necessarily “art,” what Fred has managed to create in his short time as a City of Elgin employee is a program that has a similar impact on participants – making memories and showing the best of what a community has and can be.

Fred quickly identified the need to reform the volunteer and community restitution programs. The need was twofold. First, there was low participation in both programs. Second, the awareness and image of the programs needed work.

“For the community restitution program, individuals used to be assigned by court to complete community service hours with the City, but laws changed in recent years and they can now choose any non-profit to complete hours,” said Fred. “Many desired an environment that seemed more inviting or where work seemed easier, so they were going to churches, food banks, senior services...basically anywhere but to the City.”

The City’s volunteer program, on the other hand, had been experiencing low enrollment because there was little awareness of opportunities, and recruitment and communication was not consistent across the organization. Both the software system to capture volunteers and website to list opportunities were also outdated.

“Since the two programs are similar in that we are looking to match volunteer work with interests, I saw an opportunity to merge the programs and create more value for both participants and the organization,” said Fred.

And so, *Elgin Allies* was born. Fred worked to rebrand the programs to offer a better image of what community service is, bring greater awareness that the City has such a program and provide a welcoming and valuable experience to participants. He created a social media presence on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) and created a new [website](#) with modern volunteer management software to showcase what the *Elgin Allies* are doing in the community and what opportunities are available.

Fred explained, “Community service can have a stigma attached to it, so changing the image was crucial. Just changing the wardrobe has had a positive impact.”

The restitution program used to provide yellow vests, and it wasn’t uncommon for participants to be treated poorly, with passersby concerned by their presence, and the City receiving complaints. When changing to



FRED WIMMS
COMMUNITY RESOURCE
COORDINATOR



and the City receiving complaints. When changing to the blue Elgin Allies shirts and vests, participants instead receive thanks and compliments as residents witness the work.



"Those completing court-ordered community service are not bad people. They often made a mistake, like a misdemeanor offense or traffic violation, and are required to give back to their community," said Fred. "Changing the physical appearance of the program changed how participants are perceived by the public, helping empower them and also peeking interest from others considering volunteer work."

Whether dealing with individuals who are volunteering by choice or as required by court, Fred hopes the *Elgin Allies* program will bring out the best in individuals.

"The purpose of the program is to build better people by helping and connecting with your city," said Fred. "What happens here, you can take and apply to your own life and in your neighborhood, be it technical skills or learning how to treat others and socialize."

Fred gets to know each participant by asking questions and then uses that information to provide a role that works for each individual. He assigns leaders of crews working on different projects, which builds pride, confidence and independence. And with Fred overseeing the crew leaders, this structure also allows them to tackle more projects.



While the program's priority is to work on City projects, it also assists other needs in the community, like those of churches, social service agencies and seniors. Recent projects include trail work at the nature center, restoration work in the Burnidge Woods Park, assisting with the Martin Luther King Jr. food drive, building props for the new Little Park of Horrors event, cleaning up litter and debris on a vacant property and shoveling snow for senior citizens in need.

"Community service and volunteering should not be looked at as a punishment or just doing the work," says Fred. "It's a time to build a better self and a better community."

COLLABORATION



DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION



INNOVATION



CITY OF CHOICE



SAFE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITY



FINANCIALLY STABLE GOVERNMENT



STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES & PRIORITIES

CORE VALUES

COLLABORATION



DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION



INNOVATION



STEWARDSHIP



DEFINED GOALS

CITY OF CHOICE



HIGH PERFORMING,
FINANCIALLY STABLE
GOVERNMENT

SAFE AND HEALTHY
COMMUNITY



PROMOTIONS - CONGRATULATIONS!

David Zierk - Police Officer to Police Sergeant - Elgin Police Department

Marcy Wolf - Police Officer to Police Sergeant- Elgin Police Department

Isela Santoyo - Bilingual Clerk Typist to Fire Secretary- Elgin Fire Department

NEW EMPLOYEES - WELCOME!

Lakysha-Ann Evans - Police Officer - Elgin Police Department

Tony Fitzpatrick - Police Officer - Elgin Police Department

Alyssa Zopp - Police Officer - Elgin Police Department

Pedro Villagomez - Utility Worker - Public Works

Matt Long - Seasonal Laborer - Parks and Recreation

Diana Gonzalez - Bilingual ClerkTypist - Community Development

Scott Loboono - Electrical Inspector - Community Development

Andres Guitierrez - Utility Worker - Public Works

Angel Acosta - Seasonal Laborer - Parks and Recreation

Kristina Pantoja - Program Leader - Parks and Recreation

Alejandro Venegas - Program Leader - Parks and Recreation

Tyler Thavong - Lifeguard - Parks and Recreation

Tyler Ford - Health Desk Clerk - Parks and Recreation

Mayra Urieta - Health Desk Clerk - Parks and Recreation

Isaac Vasquez - Health Desk Clerk - Parks and Recreation

Andres Dominguez - Program Leader - Parks and Recreation

Sophia Hein - Youth Soccer Official - Parks and Recreation

Nancy Lazarz - Pro Shop Attendant - Parks and Recreation
Charlotte Semyck - Cart/Bag Attendant - Parks and Recreation
Davis Wronkiewicz - Cart/Bag Attendant - Parks and Recreation

**This issue includes promotions and new employees since August 26, 2020.*

RECOGNITIONS

To: Meter Shop + 311 staff
From: Stephen Yoder, resident

I wanted to pass along a compliment and thank you to the meter shop and 311 staff. I have lived in Elgin for 2.5 years and have called several times. Each time and interaction I have had with staff has been helpful and resulted in a positive outcome.

To: Streets Division + 311 staff
From: Steve Gajeske, resident

Please thank the 311 team and the public works team for quickly responding to a non-urgent request I sent via the 311 app over the weekend about a stop sign needing repairs. You guys are great, keep up the good work!

To: Forestry Division
From: Dan Miller, resident

I called in the broken tree on city property south of 175 S. Gifford and crews started removing it this evening. Thanks!

To: Forestry Division
From: Hans Klemmer, resident

Vinnie, Adam & Danny did a great job trimming branches. Went the extra step to clean up the area. Great big "Thank you" for a job well done.

To: Traffic Maintenance Division
From: Melissa Marrese, resident

I am a resident of the Fountain Square condos on S. Grove Avenue. My boyfriend and I noticed that the hanging lights above the street were illuminated last night, and I'm writing to express that we LOVE them! We'd noticed the process of the lights being mounted, and have been anxious to see them in action.

To: Streets Division
From: Sharon Mahoney, resident

Thank you for your quick response (to call about dead raccoon in road). She really appreciates you.

To: Forestry Division

From: Sharon Raap, resident

I wanted to thank the crew that worked to remove a large tree blocking the street at 135 Brookside Drive yesterday (9/8/2020). Thank you and well job done!

To: Forestry Division

From: John Paar, resident

The city was out and had removed the branch as requested. Thank you, the crew did an excellent job!

To: Sue Campbell, Hemmens

From: Christen Sundquist, Community Development

Thank you again Sue for all of your help yesterday (live streaming the Mayor's Awards for Preservation to Facebook)! You all certainly made everything run smoothly and I greatly appreciate everything that you did!

Thanks again and have a wonderful rest of your week!

To: Rick Leos, Code Compliance

From: David Koski, Code Compliance

In our line of work, we rarely get compliments, but almost always get complaints. I want to congratulate you for doing such a great job since you started. Additionally, I just spoke to the owner of Brittain's car wash about paying an invoice, and at the end of the conversation, he made an effort to compliment you on your recent interactions with him.

He stated that you were fair, efficient and polite. Great job, Rick! You deserve to know that you're appreciated by Aaron and me, and that even some constituents realize that even though you're "just doing your job," they value the way in which your message is delivered, as well. Thank you!

To: Caleb Dodge, Water Department

From: Mr. and Mrs. Reid, residents (via call to the Mayor)

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Reid wanted to commend Caleb on stepping in during a confrontation with their very irate neighbor. The residents feel that Caleb saved Mr. Reid's life when he was being threatened by a much younger and stronger man. When the incident escalated and another resident who was walking his dog was injured by this same neighbor, Caleb tried to diffuse the situation, insisted on calling the police and staying on the scene as a witness. Mr. and Mrs. Reid are incredibly appreciative to Caleb and wanted to make sure he was thanked as they felt he would try to downplay his actions to his coworkers. They truly feel that without Caleb's intervention, Mr. Reid would have been gravely injured.

To: Max Heidgen, Engineering + Sewer Division

From: Resident (via Keith Lodding at HLR)

The resident at 1195 Borden would like to extend a sincere thank you to Max Heidgen and the City of Elgin public works crew that came out today and unplugged the sanitary line on the Parkwood project. The resident approached me today and said he heard a gurgling sound in his basement by his floor drain. We popped the sanitary lid in front of his home and saw that it was surcharged. We called Max & he contacted the crew which was onsite within 10 minutes and had the blockage resolved with 20 minutes!

Kudos to the public works crew & their quick response.

Share your story.

This month, our public works streets division was busy milling and patching areas of Dundee Avenue between Enterprise and Page, where the road was badly deteriorated. The efforts from this patching project will provide temporary relief until the road is completely reconstructed, which is planned for 2025. This and a handful of other project photos were well liked on the City's Facebook and Instagram accounts.

We want to see and share your pictures and videos. They may be used on the City's social media channels, website and in other hiring and promotional materials. [Send us photos from your workday and we can help share your story.](#)



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