

ONLINE DATABASE PROVIDES ACCESS TO VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES IN A PANDEMIC

Bozeman, MT April 27, 2020 – Individuals looking for opportunities to serve the community while adhering to social distancing guidelines can access a database of broad volunteer opportunities online, at VolunteerMT.org, powered by the Greater Gallatin United Way.

As one of over 35 nonprofit members of the Southwest Montana COAD (SW MT COAD), the Greater Gallatin United Way offered its online service portal to the broader southwest Montana community, as a primary destination for both individuals looking for ways to volunteer, as well as non-profit organizations in need of volunteers. Instead of searching the websites of various individual nonprofit organizations, volunteers can come to one online location and learn about the needs of each of those nonprofits.

“There are many individuals in Gallatin County who, in a traditional emergency situation, would be eager to lend a hand. Because of the nature of safety guidelines around this pandemic, many people don’t know where to turn to offer help,” explains Danica Jamison of the Greater Gallatin United Way. “As a result of the relationships we’ve developed as members of the Southwest Montana COAD, we have been able to fill our online database with a variety of ways people can safely support our community as a volunteer.”

One of the services the SW MT COAD offers to the community is volunteer coordination. During a pandemic that requires isolation, that coordination looks much different, but is still critical to the well-being of our community. The use of an online database, accessible to anyone with an internet connection, has been the most practical solution in this particular situation.

“In addition to posting volunteer opportunities on their own websites, we hope non-profit organizations see VolunteerMT.org as a resource to reach even more willing volunteers,” said Jill Ellwood, Lead of the Volunteer Subcommittee of the SW MT COAD. “As the volunteer arm of the COAD, we felt this portal would be an efficient way to manage the broad variety of volunteer opportunities for the COVID-19 response. VolunteerMT.org allows volunteers to browse a variety of opportunities to see what they could help with based on their availability, age, skills, etc.”

The SWMT COAD works closely with Gallatin, Madison and Park County Emergency Response officials, as well as Help Center 2-1-1. These organizations, as well as the members of the SWMT COAD, are jointly pointing potential volunteers to the VolunteerMT.org database, which is bringing a large number of motivated individuals to the site.

“It is our goal that VolunteerMT.org can help match enthusiastic individuals with non-profit organizations in need of support,” said Susan Spanjol, Co-Chair of the SW MT COAD. “It is in these connections that we envision our community pulling through this pandemic and emerging stronger at the other end.”

Organizations like Masks for Heroes, who are looking for volunteers, have found the needed volunteers as well as an increased sense of community on VolunteerMT.org.

“This entire community has come together to help and it’s come from a place of love. Even though Bozeman has grown significantly from the days of being a small ranching community, the Montana spirit and style of helpfulness has stayed. It took a community of ranchers and farmers to help when things got rough and that’s no different than today,” explains Mask for Heroes co-founder, JoAnne Nordhagen. “We work together to bring protection to those who protect us. But it’s gone so beyond that. We’re connecting organizations, were meeting beautiful people. People feel a sense of purpose in a time when uncertainty and sometimes hopelessness can weigh heavy on their hearts. We’re blessed to have started something that so many people have jumped on board.”

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Officially founded in June 2018, the Southwest Montana COAD (Community Organizations Active in Disasters) is an association of local organizations assisting our communities to be mobilized and prepared for disasters including the COVID-19 pandemic through coordination, preparation, education, and implementation serving Gallatin, Madison, and Park Counties.

Find us online on Facebook (Southwest Montana COAD), Instagram (@SWMTCOAD), and Twitter (@SWMTCOAD).

For COAD media inquiries, please contact Rachel Allen at SWMTCOAD@gmail.com.

For media questions about volunteerism, please contact Danica Jamison, President and CEO, Greater Gallatin United Way at 406.451.1343 or danica@greatergallatinunitedway.org

For specific volunteer related questions, please contact Tia Goebel, Community Engagement Coordinator, Greater Gallatin United Way at 406.545.2244 or tia@greatergallatinunitedway.org