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### ***Building a Culture of Volunteerism: Countering ‘Drive-by Volunteering’***

As National Volunteer Week 2007 approaches, April 15<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup>, volunteers and volunteer-driven organizations throughout the province will look for ways to celebrate the contributions which volunteers make to our communities and quality of life in BC. We have a solid history to stand on: BC is home to over 1.58 million volunteers, or 45% of the population aged 15 and over, and hosts more than 24,000 not-for-profit societies.

Yet recent trends in volunteering in the province, as indicated in the 2004 National Survey on Giving and Volunteering, point to some discouraging patterns. The bulk of the total volunteer hours is being done by a relatively small group of people, as the number of volunteers has remained consistent but those volunteers are taking on more and more hours.

There are multiple factors playing into this new environment of volunteerism. Not least are the challenges which the many newcomers to our province face in accessing volunteer opportunities in light of linguistic, cultural and socio-economic barriers in place. But of equally serious concern is an overall shift in the *culture of volunteering*.

Increasingly, volunteerism habits are mirroring the general pace of our lifestyles. Individuals are seeking out drive-by volunteer opportunities: fast, easy, no long-term commitment and done in a New York minute. While I truly honour the enormous contributions of all volunteers, whether for one day or over a lifetime, I am concerned. In a future context, I am worried about the role of the *enduring volunteer*. There is a critical need in our communities for enduring volunteers.

I am speaking of the volunteering where there is no group participation, no media hype, and no public campaign to draw attention to the needs of ordinary life. These are acts of quiet purpose and dedication, and often follow a routine, a sustained involvement, and the nurturing of human relationships. A need remains for largely invisible, backroom volunteers: those unsung heroes -- a person who, without fail, drives my elderly mother and her friends to the doctor or to a social outing every week -- a person who day after day delivers meals to the shut-in. A person who consistently works to support and sustain their community volunteer center. These many quiet hours of human service ensure the vulnerable are cared for and keep the social fabric of our communities taut.

We in BC need to work to ensure a sustained culture of volunteering is consistently woven into the fabrics of our communities. We need to build limited engagement volunteer stints into ongoing commitments to the social change we want to see through our volunteer roles. We should all add the label of ‘volunteer’ to our many other labels: parent, student, teacher, manager *and* volunteer. So as National Volunteer Week approaches, let us celebrate all acts of volunteering and truly give thanks, but let us all be mindful that we not exchange the hours needed for the New York minutes.

Michael McCoy  
President, Volunteer BC

*Promoting excellence in volunteerism to build a better British Columbia!*