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Volunteer San Diego Wins National Award of Excellence **- Recognizes Innovation and Leadership in Volunteer Recruitment and Management-**

San Diego, Jun. 23—Volunteer San Diego (VSD) is the recipient of the *2009 HandsOn Network Excellence Award*, one of the highest national awards for volunteer centers.

The award—officially titled the George W. Romney Excellence Award—is presented by HandsOn Network, the volunteer-engagement arm of the national Points of Light Institute, which is made up of 250 affiliate volunteer centers across the U.S.

The Points of Light Foundation established the award in 1996 to honor Michigan Governor George W. Romney, who served as founding chair of the National Volunteer Center and as a founding member of the board and executive committee of the Points of Light Foundation. It goes to the volunteer center that best delivers on the network’s core focus areas:

- Connecting volunteers with the opportunity to serve.
- Promoting volunteerism.
- Building capacity for effective local volunteering.
- Participating in strategic initiatives that mobilize volunteers to meet local needs.

HandsOn Network’s president, Amy Smith, wrote VSD executive director Sue Carter last week to inform her of the award, which she presented today at the 2009 National Conference on Volunteering and Service in San Francisco (www.volunteeringandservice.org). In her letter, Smith cited Volunteer San Diego’s role in coordinating volunteers during the 2007 fires, innovative use and development of volunteer engagement systems and technology, and leadership in helping corporations structure and lead employee volunteer programs.

“Volunteer centers are at the forefront of equipping people and organizations to change their communities for the better through service,” said Carter. “So many volunteer centers are doing extraordinary work throughout the country. Our volunteer and staff team is humbled and energized by this recognition.”

To satisfy the nomination criteria, VSD had to detail significant areas where board and staff innovation has grown the organization to the point that it now serves more than 800 community partners and has already filled more than 40,000 volunteer positions this year:

1. Combining online database technology, training, and tracking to improve the volunteer experience from beginning to end. This allows a relatively small staff of 15 to make available thousands of volunteer opportunities requiring varying levels of skills and experience,

commitment levels, locations, and organizational contact details. A focus on continuous improvement, driven by both volunteer and organizational feedback, is a major factor.

2. Creating an organizational membership program that goes beyond simple opportunity listings to help community organizations develop comprehensive volunteer programs, improving the volunteer experience which prompts more people to volunteer more often. Members benefit from expert assistance in volunteer recruitment and recognition, training, networking, and related resources. Volunteer San Diego partners with San Diego's Parker Foundation (www.theparkerfoundation.org) to subsidize this program so organizations can join at minimal cost.
3. Developing a corporate program that provides experts to guide companies (in particular, their human resources and public relations teams) in developing and managing employee volunteering projects. (This is a growing trend as a teambuilding and corporate retreat activity.) The fact that local nonprofits are now referring corporate groups that want to volunteer with them to VSD is testament to the value of this program.
4. A multifaceted marketing program with a heavy focus on using social media—including podcasts, Facebook, and Twitter—to reach a diverse volunteer base. VSD's success in this area has been featured on the national *501c3cast* podcast, *Nonprofit Quarterly*, and at the national Nonprofit Technology Network (<http://nten.org>) conference.
5. Establishing a permanent Volunteer Disaster Cadre—a team that provides support, training, and management to handle the influx of spontaneous volunteers during a natural or other disaster. This team works closely with San Diego's disaster response professionals, including government, military, law, fire, and nonprofit responders (especially the local chapter of the American Red Cross) to handle this significant factor during disasters.

About Volunteer San Diego (www.volunteersandiego.org)

Volunteer San Diego is our community's expert at connecting volunteers and the organizations who need them. Through dedicated volunteer programs—specialized to facilitate and leverage individual, group, and corporate volunteers—VSD equips, inspires, and mobilizes the manpower, talents, and skills of more than 35,000 individuals annually.

Through innovative use of online management tools, an extensive network of more than 800 community and corporate partners, and a perspective that volunteer opportunities should be as unique as each individual's desire to volunteer, VSD seeks to maximize the volunteer experience as well as the volunteer's economic and social impact on the community.

About HandsOn Network (www.handsonnetwork.org)

HandsOn Network, the volunteer-focused arm of Points of Light Institute, leads people from impulse to action, turning ideas for change in to real projects.

HandsOn Network provides a national platform for action. Through our 250 Action Centers (Affiliates) we reach 83% of the American population and engage more than 70,000 nonprofits, government agencies, faith-based organizations and companies.

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