



UU REVUE

Spring 2017

The Journey Starts in the REWing



Resettling a Family
What Would Ella Do?
Camp UniStar



First Unitarian Universalist Church

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Church Mission

To create a compassionate, welcoming community that nurtures spiritual growth and practices justice

UU Revue

The *UU Revue* is produced quarterly by the First Unitarian Universalist Communications Committee. Articles in *UU Revue* focus on the positive work done by First UU members and friends, demonstrating our congregation's commitment to the Seven Principles.

Much of the volunteering by our members is behind the scenes and, unless you are closely involved with these efforts, you may not be aware of the time and dedication, the challenges, or the joy experienced by those involved – not to mention the impact on those who benefit from their work.

By telling the stories of our wonderful members, we hope to inspire others to volunteer, become active, and find the reward of working with the church.

The Journey Starts in the RE Wing

By Sue Wheeler



"I enjoy helping out with RE for one major reason – the children. Children lighten our hearts and make us smile – and laugh. They are the hope of the world – they deserve my best shot."

—Judy Jensen,
Explorers Teacher

Venture into the Religious Education (RE) wing of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Rochester on Sunday morning, and you will be amazed at what goes on in the children's RE classrooms. According to Joyce Rood, Director of Religious Education (DRE), 60 children are registered for classes this year and 28 adults are helping them learn about Unitarian Universalism, other religions, and themselves and their beliefs. Fifteen of those adults contributed to this article by writing about their experiences this year.

The children are divided into classes with interesting names: pre-K-Kindergarten **Explorers**; 1st-2nd grade **Trailblazers**; 2-5th grade 9 a.m. **Pathfinders** and 3rd-4th 11 a.m. **Pathfinders**; 5th-6th grade **Keepers of the Flame**; 7th-8th grade **Navigators**. The names suggest searching and finding the way, which is exactly what the children (and adults, by the way) are doing. As William Ellery Channing, a 19th century Unitarian minister, wrote in 1837, "The great end in religious instruction, whether

in the Sunday School or family, is not to stamp our minds irresistibly on the young, but to stir up their own; not to make them see with our eyes, but to look inquiringly and steadily with their own.... to awaken the consciousness, the moral discernment, so that they may discern and approve for themselves what is everlastingly right and good." That's what our RE classes aim to do.

"I was involved with young children in my career and since retirement I find this a way to continue to interact with them. It also gives me a chance to get to know the parents."
(Explorers Volunteer)

Each class has a team of teachers, doorkeepers, and subs. They are all volunteers; some are parents, and some are part of that 68% of members who are 56 years old and older. There are usually four or more teachers in the teams, and they alternate teaching Sundays to fit their schedules. Each class always has two adults every Sunday. Teachers can access the lessons from their home computers to review what children will be learning that week. Joyce oversees all of the organization and volunteers, in addition to setting up lessons and materials for Keepers and Navigators. She is assisted by Karmen Frana who shows up every Saturday

to set up for the three youngest RE classes: Explorers, Trailblazers, and Pathfinders. Karmen's goal is "to make sure that the lessons are engaging and fun for the children as well as the teachers."

"The RE program needs teachers, parents need 'adult time,' and it feels good to be part of the 'Village' that raises these children."
(Trailblazers Volunteer)

One volunteer exclaimed, "Karmen adapts the lessons, develops craft projects, gathers the materials and provides wonderful books that relate to the lesson for us. It is a complete pleasure and a 'piece of cake' to teach." Another remarked, "I was very impressed with the prepared lesson plans and materials ready to go. When I taught long ago it was so much more labor intensive. Plus we brought snacks." Another called Karmen and Joyce elves! "I've taught classes on and off since volunteering for Bible School in the early 1960's. This is the first time I have had all the materials prepared by elves, so I could preview them and enjoy the time with the children."

"Creating an atmosphere where we welcome and value the presence of our children/youth is important to our faith community!"
(Pathfinders Volunteer)

Children start out their Sundays at the service in the Sanctuary—they are there for the lighting of the chalice, greeting those around them, a hymn, and a story or skit presented by Joyce and/or our minister Rev. Fritz Hudson. He calls this portion of the service "Introduction." And indeed it is an introduction—both for the children's class topics and the sermon topic. The beginning of the service is not just "the children's time," but an integral part of the service,

accessible to people of all ages. A teacher commented, "I...enjoy having the children start out in the sanctuary; I think it's important to help them feel more connection with the entire church, not just RE families."

This year there are five Social Justice Sundays, when all the children gather to learn and discuss some aspect of social justice, and to build multi-age connections. One Sunday last fall, members of the church's Refugee Resettlement Task Group led an exercise on how it might feel to be refugees fleeing from their homes.



Making posters for the MLK, Jr. Freedom March

On a Sunday in January the children gathered in the Murray room to hear about a few of our country's leaders in civil rights and civil disobedience, sing songs, and then create posters for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Freedom March the next day in Rochester. Members of the church's Racial Justice Task Group created this lesson.

Listening to a story during a Sunday service



"I love seeing the children bond with each other and with the teachers."
(Explorers Volunteer)

*Students' perspectives
when asked to describe
their RE classes*



Regular classes begin with lighting a chalice (battery operated) and saying words together such as the following. The words end quietly as everyone holds hands.

*This is the Unitarian Universalist church.
This is the church of the flaming chalice.
This is the church of the open mind.
This is the church of the loving heart.
Where friends come together and share.*

What happens next? A 5-6th grade teacher provided one answer. "This group of kids has really pulled at my heart. What an incredible age! The kids are articulate and do not yet have the social anxiety to inhibit speaking their mind. As a result, we are able to have significant discussions around spirituality and belief."

A recent lesson in the Pathfinders class focused on Harriet Tubman who was able to lead more than 300 slaves to freedom because they trusted her and listened to her. These 3rd and 4th graders practiced trusting with a trust walk, learning the value of being "trust worthy" leading one another around and over the barriers obstructing the way.



Trailblazers 9 a.m.

The Trailblazers discussed the word faith and heard a story about the many different spiritual beliefs of people in our country and around the world. The lesson illustrated the UU fourth principle—a free and responsible search for truth and meaning. The 1st and 2nd graders found that principle on our church's anniversary window (see cover photo).



Pathfinders on trust walks

*"Meeting the younger people in the church and their parents. Getting to know people I might otherwise not get to know by teaching/learning with them."
(Pathfinders Volunteer)*

*Teachers' perspectives
when asked to describe what
goes on in their classes*



A hula hoop created real togetherness!

"I mostly enjoy getting to know the students. Most are very chatty and eager to share. A few are quiet and creative and just take it all in. Some are exuberant and love attention. A very typical group of kids!"
(Trailblazers Volunteer)

In December the Explorers studied the gift of helping and giving thanks for being together.

The Navigators studied Buddhism in January, and one Sunday they learned about the Zen Buddhist approach to attaining enlightenment, which includes meditation, surprise, humor, and bringing peace to one's surroundings. The 7th and 8th graders created their own Zen gardens to bring peace to a special place in their homes.



Navigators making Zen gardens

Students aren't the only ones learning; teachers learn too. As one volunteer explained, "I didn't grow up in this tradition, but because I have taught consistently for years, I have learned a lot about Unitarian Universalism. When people ask me about my religious faith, I can express my ideas pretty well because teaching RE gives you plenty of opportunities to develop your ideas. I encourage people to teach RE because it gives you the opportunity to learn and reflect on your own spiritual growth." Another said, "I enjoy that the discussions each week provide me time to pause and consider MY core beliefs and journey."

The Church Board of Directors has stated that one of its visions this year is "to change our culture to be more supportive and inclusive of children, youth, and young families." The volunteers, staff, and children in RE are helping to fulfill that vision. Why does it matter? Rev. Hudson states, "It's really the only reason we exist. We are a community of memory and hope, and if we aren't transmitting our values and culture to our young people, then we have no hope."

How can you support that vision?



Sue Wheeler has been a church member since 1983 and surprised herself this year by volunteering to teach in RE for the first time since 2001.

2016-17 Children's RE Teachers, Doorkeepers, and Subs

Margaret Brandl
Jessica Hoffman
Sandy MacLaughlin
Judy Jensen
Patty Trnka
Bonita Underbakke
Chris Young
Sue Wheeler
Jerry Katzmann
Beth Thompson
Angela Gupta
Ash Gupta
Schalleen Nelson
Tammi Tacinelli
Julie Gilkinson
Linda Thompson
Erika Beetcher
Amy Nelson
Charyssa Cobb
Garth Nelson
Drew Frana
Gloria Marmolejo
Kari Cahill
Natasha Vermilyea
Ann Braus
Bill Rood
Derik Robertson
Ryan Thompson-Jewell

Our DRE provides volunteers with an orientation to curricula, the RE wing, and class materials. The church conducts a background check for all who work with children.



Keepers of the Flame discuss the Ten Commandments and other rules we all live by—written and unwritten.

“It’s fun and invigorating to work with kids/adolescents of different ages and get a sense of their views on life, and see how they address religious and philosophical topics. I don’t feel that old (I’m 34), but the world they live in is already REALLY different than when I was a kid. My daughter just turned 3 years old and I want to help her become a compassionate, thoughtful and engaged citizen. I feel the curriculum designed by UU religious education is a wonderful way for her to learn some of that.”

(Navigators Volunteer)



Trailblazers 11 a.m.



Pathfinders’ chalice lighting

Resettling a Family

By Anita DeAngelis



Anita with the family she is working with.

First Unitarian Universalist Church of Rochester's history of involvement with refugee resettlement began in the late 1970s when many Southeast Asians were settling in our part of the country. Beginning in 1979, many of our church members worked directly with Catholic Charities' Refugee Resettlement Program (CCRRP) to sponsor a large family. At that time, the volunteers directly provided for many of the needs of the newly arrived family: securing housing, providing transportation, and enrolling them in schools, as well as linking them to medical and dental care and other community services as needed. Elizabeth Katzmann, a longtime church member, describes this as "...a successful story. The children worked hard in school and post-secondary education and training. They were employed in computer technology, electronics, engineering, and retail. Our church's

volunteers described their interactions and relationships as rewarding and fun. Several family members continue contact with some of those volunteers."

Although Elizabeth had often donated financially to organizations providing support for refugees, in the fall of 2015, images of refugees in the Middle East moved her to become involved more directly. As she said, "I needed to do something more than write a check." After discussion with our minister and other volunteers who had been involved in the previous efforts, Elizabeth and church member Cynthia Daube reached out to CCRRP to see how our church members might again become involved. CCRRP is the agency that resettles recent refugees to the US in Southeastern Minnesota. In recent years CCRRP has resettled approximately

200 refugees or approximately 40-50 families per year from many different ethnic and religious backgrounds. CCRP has a small staff of six, which include the director, four case managers/interpreters, and an administrative support person. Current languages that these case managers speak include Arabic, Somali, Anuak, and English.

On a winter evening in January 2016, Kristina Hammell, Director of CCRP, met with about 40 members of our church to discuss how we might become involved. What we learned surprised us. Much has changed since the 1970s regarding U.S. government requirements for how support of refugees is handled. Previously, groups such as civic organizations, faith communities, and individuals could sponsor families. Some of these situations worked out well, while others did not. Refugees are a vulnerable group, new to the country and unfamiliar with our customs and cultures. Current standards for resettlement agencies are very strict.

Regulations currently allow resettlement agencies to provide services for only 90 days post arrival. During these 90 days, the resettlement agency is required to provide the following specific services to help stabilize and provide an initial safety net to the refugees:

- **Stable and Safe Housing** – CCRP usually rents an apartment in the refugee's name so that the refugee can establish a rental history. There is currently only one landlord in our town who will rent to refugee families (who arrive without social security numbers).
- **Food** – CCRP signs up the family for the SNAP/EBT card (food stamp) program.
- **Resettlement and Placement Grant** An initial amount of \$1000 per person is allocated. This money is used generally to pay for 2-4 months' rent (most rents are between \$1000-1100 per month), one month's rental security deposit, initial bus passes (\$100 for each adult), and 2-4 months of utility bills (~ \$150 per month). As you can see, this money does not go very far.

- **Cash Benefits** – Either through MFIP (MN Family Investment Program) or Match grant employment program (approximately \$600-750 per month, depending on family size).
- **Access to Education** – Adults are enrolled at the Hawthorne Education Center for English language classes, and school-age children are enrolled in our public school system's Newcomer Program.
- **Transportation** – Provided by the case-worker or volunteers for the first 30 days – until a bus orientation has been done. After that the expectation is that the refugee(s) will navigate the bus system for transportation needs.
- **Medical Access** – Refugees are seen at Olmsted County Public Health's refugee program, and they are also connected to a primary care provider at either Olmsted Medical Group or Mayo Clinic.
- **Medical Insurance** – Refugees are signed up for medical insurance coverage.
- **Administrative Help** – Assistance is given in applying for Social Security numbers, opening a bank account, and signing up for utility accounts and energy assistance.
- **Orientations** – Refugees are taught skills for using the bus system, budgeting and financial literacy, accessing the Channel One food bank, and getting a library card and using services offered at the public library.
- **Public Library** – Getting a library card and learning about services offered at the library.

This is so much to accomplish in such a short period of time. We were surprised to learn that Catholic Charities' work with a family is very short; at the end of 90 days, the family is no longer provided case management or services from the resettlement agency. Basically, they are "on their own." For those 25 percent of refugee families that qualify for the Match grant program, an additional three months of employment support is provided to the family, as long as the agency



can show that volunteers are also helping the family with integration into the community.

That's where our volunteers are able to play a part. Whereas CCRP only works with the families for 90 days, volunteers can continue with the families for much longer and perhaps develop long lasting friendships while supporting their integration into our community. Volunteer involvement can take many forms:

- **Gathering** supplies and furniture for the apartments rented for new arrivals.
- **Grocery** shopping for the first 5 days after a family arrives – providing enough food to last until food stamps kick in.
- **Providing** targeted services such as transportation, tutoring, English language support, homework help, or family mentoring.

To register as a volunteer, we had to complete some paperwork and attend a required orientation session. All volunteer positions that involve direct contact with refugee families require that volunteers complete a background check. Those providing transportation must have a valid driver's license and proof of car insurance. For those who come in contact with refugees in their homes, further training in the prevention of child sexual abuse, called "Virtus training," is mandated.

At the orientation session, we learned about basic services provided by the resettlement agency, what sort of budget the families have to work with, and how their need to learn to

budget and save money is extremely important. Kristina Hammell also described the psychological and emotional needs of many refugees. Culture shock is common for many who are recent arrivals in our country. Often the reality of life in the U.S. may be very different from the dream that the refugee may have had about "life in America." The goal of the first 90 days is to provide "safety and stability and begin to achieve self-sufficiency." Long term employment is the ultimate goal and is the only real, long-term solution to becoming self-sufficient. Of course, depending on skills, education, and language fluency, employment may come sooner rather than later. As Kristina told us, Catholic Charities' goal is to "help build the foundation on which refugees can build their future."

Eventually, 32 volunteers from the initial group completed the paperwork, orientations, and training to work under the auspices of CCRP either directly or indirectly with the refugee families. As Elizabeth describes, "church volunteers have bought groceries, made meals, driven family members to appointments, tutored and mentored. Others volunteer at Hawthorne Adult Learning Center as tutors, computer assistants, and nursery workers. In addition, participants at the 2016 Mike Podulke Annual Auction donated to CCRP as the social justice recipient, and church families generously donated goods and clothing collected from the Holiday Mitten Tree." The efforts have been endorsed by our church Board and Social Justice Council.

For me, all of this training and paperwork occurred over many months and it wasn't until November 2016 that I was assigned to a recently arrived refugee family. As mentioned earlier, there are many roles volunteers can take when they choose to support refugee resettlement. The role that appealed most to me was the role of family mentor, perhaps because the mentor role is so varied and can depend on the family's needs and desires. The goal for family mentoring is to provide additional support and friendship. Case managers find they are able to accomplish more because we as mentors can

reinforce and support their efforts. With the goal being self-sufficiency, as mentors we work hard to avoid dependency. We want to encourage the family members to succeed on their own.

Generally, the case manager will introduce the mentor volunteer to the family after the family has been here approximately 4 -5 weeks. By that time, many things have already been accomplished for the family: housing, medical access and insurance, enrollment in school for children and adults, a bus orientation, and much more.

I met my family in November when they had been here about 5 weeks. Two other volunteers were also assigned to the family, and I agreed to be the “lead” volunteer. As such, I would be the person to most frequently communicate with the case manager, and help to coordinate our activities so that we were not duplicating services or efforts. We set up a private spreadsheet to track our activities and hours, and to set goals for our involvement. Below are some of our activities.

- **Riding** the bus with the family to Channel One – This activity required a half hour bus ride into the city and another half hour bus ride out to Channel One, an hour of shopping, and then re-tracing our route home via bus, carrying the heavy bags and boxes of food. Clients can access Channel One once each calendar month. Our excursion occurred on a day when it was raining and was relatively windy and cold. I gained a new appreciation for how much I take for granted my access to a car and easy transportation.
- **Applying** to Christmas Anonymous and then accompanying the family to the event, helping them transport the items home, and then making a second trip to pick up an adult bicycle that they chose. The bicycle may soon become transportation to work.
- **Assistance** with learning how to use some of the foods they receive at Channel One Food Bank– Even cooking a turkey that was



donated around the holidays. Learning that the water from the tap is safe to drink – that it is not necessary to buy bottled water for drinking.

- **Going** to Salvation Army Store to pick out some appropriate winter clothing.
- **Gathering** donations of winter clothing, hats, boots, mittens, and snow pants from connections we have in the community.
- **Playing** games and reading with the children – helping to build English vocabulary.
- **Studying** a Rochester map and bus routes and learning to read the time tables.
- **Traveling** by bus to the Rochester library, getting a library card, and becoming familiar with all the library has to offer.
- **Creating** an email account and learning how to reset passwords.
- **Helping** the family learn how to navigate in Rochester – I recently drove the father to one of the community health clinics, noting street names and landmarks on the way. The father determined it would be easier and faster to walk the 3 miles home than to take a bus to the city center and then another to where they live.
- **Learning** to dress for winter weather here in Minnesota. Becoming acquainted with long underwear, boots, snow pants, etc.

- **Navigating** the banking system – How to interact with the tellers, deposit checks, and withdraw cash.
- **Walking** to a satellite Channel One pantry site that is within a half mile of the family's home. This trip requires much less time and energy than the long bus ride across town. On one such occasion, un-shoveled sidewalks made it difficult to pull a metal shopping cart loaded with Channel One food.
- **Assisting** with negotiating getting a learner's driving permit.
- **Getting** eyeglasses as well as prescriptions for medicine filled at a pharmacy.
- **Most** importantly, being a friend and being available for the family to reach out to for concerns or questions.

Anita DeAngelis is a longtime member of First UU Church.

As I finish writing this article, the new administration in Washington has just imposed a travel ban for refugees and those from 7 Middle Eastern countries. This work with refugee resettlement, exemplifying our American ideal of democracy and welcoming those from all over the world, has taken on a new meaning and imperative for me. As a UU, it is about living my UU values by valuing the inherent worth and dignity of every person. Already I have learned and gained so much from my experiences with this courageous family. Most importantly, it has helped me recognize and be grateful for the many blessings that make my own life easier as well as very comfortable. I have learned about the aspirations of many who once lived in a faraway part of the world. My understanding that we all share common hopes and dreams – regardless of where we are from – has been enhanced. Somehow it has brought our worlds closer together.

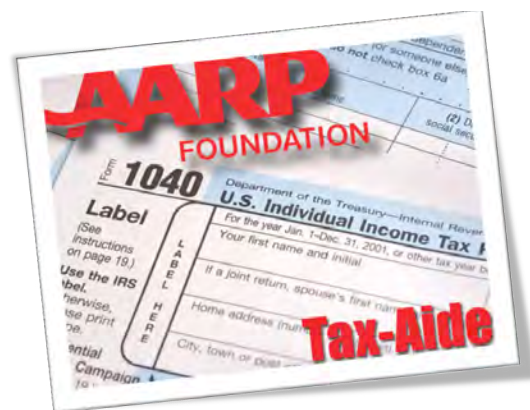
Consider being a volunteer with refugee resettlement in our community. What gifts might you be able to offer a newly arrived refugee family? We live in a land of wealth and knowledge; and providing hospitality and generosity to these recent arrivals benefits us all.

"We must not face terrorism with fear, love is the only thing that I know can truly conquer hate. I call on our elected officials to lead on the side of love for refugees."

- UUA President Rev. Peter Morales



What Would Ella Do?



By Kathy Brutinel

When Ella VanLaningham and her husband Glenn moved to Rochester in 1965, they immediately began attending our downtown church, shortly before we moved to our current location. On their very first Sunday, Rev. Vern Curry pulled up a chair on the stage and said he was not going to give a sermon that day, but rather just talk about his recent trip to Selma, Alabama, marching in support of racial justice (see Winter 2016 issue of *UU Revue*). Ella and Glenn's response? "This is the church for us!"

They enrolled their two toddlers, Dale and Kate, in RE and, with the encouragement of Sue Bateman who was serving as the church's first paid director of religious education, they joined the religious education committee and led the junior high fellowship group for the next 2-3 years. Over the next 30 years Sue and Ella were both active in many facets of our church community and got to know each other pretty well.

In 1995 when Ella retired as Executive Director of the American Association of Electrodiagnostic Medicine, she told people that she planned to rest on the couch reading romance novels and eating chocolates. Everyone acquainted with her knew that wasn't true, especially Sue Bateman.

Sue had been volunteering as District Coordinator for the American Association for Retired Person's Tax-Aide Program for several years and was looking for someone to replace her. Ella's ability to organize people and solve problems, her facility with both numbers and communication, and her commitment to helping people made her an ideal candidate for the job.

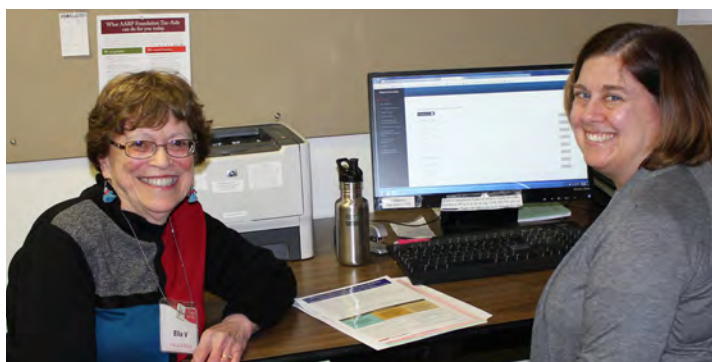
And when Sue said, "I have the perfect thing for you – you'd be so good at it," Ella said, "OK." Her dedication to the task over the last 20 years has been astounding.

The American Association for Retired Persons (AARP) was founded in 1958 in response to retired people's need for access to health insurance since, before Medicare's enactment in 1965, such insurance was virtually unavailable. Soon after, the Association began lobbying federal and state governments regarding issues affecting older people, as well as exploring services that might be important to them. One early success was the Tax-Aide program, which traces its roots to 1968 when four volunteers helped 100 older taxpayers prepare their returns.

Over the years the tax program grew by leaps and bounds. In 1980 it began operating under a cooperative agreement with the Internal Revenue Service as part of the IRS Tax Counseling for the Elderly program. In 1996, just as Ella was becoming involved, the administration of the program was transferred to the AARP Foundation, an affiliated charity. It is now AARP's largest volunteer program, with over 35,000 volunteers at 7,000 sites preparing federal and state tax returns for 2.6 million people. Way back in 1980, the program expanded to include not only retired taxpayers, but also low and moderate income individuals and families of any age.

In our region, which includes Olmsted and Dodge Counties, as well as Lanesboro and Pine Island, approximately 90 volunteers currently

serve about 4,400 people at five major sites – the Salvation Army, 125 Live (formerly the Senior Center), Hawthorne Education Center, and the Stewartville and Mantorville Senior Centers – as well as various senior residences. In addition, individual appointments can be arranged for home-bound individuals.



Ella helps counselors with new software at Salvation Army.

Although many people think of tax preparation as a project easily dispatched in April, the organization of this enterprise is a year-around job for the District Coordinator. In the less active months the Coordinator may work only 40 hours each month, but during the fall planning season and the spring tax season it is more than a full-time job. The Coordinator has overall responsibility for implementing every aspect of the program in the district, under the supervision of the State Coordinator.

A large part of the job involves the recruitment of volunteers to fill the many positions in the local area. The “administrative” staff includes a training coordinator, communications coordinator, technology coordinator, and electronic return originator coordinator. The “program” staff includes local site coordinators, schedulers, receptionists, client facilitators, counselors (tax preparers), interpreters, and electronic return originators. Ella has

found a rich source of volunteers in our church membership. She has a talent for planting a seed of interest and then following up at opportune moments. Joe Lobl remembers mentioning to Ella a few years ago that



Joe Lobl counsels clients at 125 Live.

he enjoyed preparing tax returns for his family and his mother-in-law. As soon as he retired last winter Ella asked if he would be interested in the Tax-Aide program. Of course Joe said yes; many UUs have found Ella to be such an enthusiastic recruiter that they find themselves eager to join.

Schedulers. A potential client’s first contact with the Tax-Aide service is often through a phone call to set up an appointment. Clients calling the Salvation Army may well speak to UU John MacLaughlin, who volunteers for several 4-hour shifts beginning on January 15 of each year. In between making sure their tax situation is within the scope of Tax-Aide services, finding a convenient time on the schedule, and instructing clients on the many items they need to bring with them to their appointments, John manages to make time for friendly conversation. John can’t remember exactly how long he has been volunteering – “several years” – but finds particular satisfaction hearing the relieved and grateful tone in their voices when people say, “Thank you so much. I didn’t know something like this existed.”

Receptionists. The next person clients meet is the receptionist at the site where their tax return is prepared. If a client goes to 125 Live, that person may well be UU Sandy Ramage. Sandy had originally volunteered to be a tax counselor, but the long period of training didn’t work out for her that particular year, so instead she became a receptionist. Now, after six years, she wouldn’t have it any other way.



Sandy Ramage welcomes clients at 125 Live.

As we all know, Sandy loves taking care of people. Her official jobs are welcoming and checking in clients, distributing intake forms, and keeping clients informed of any scheduling delays. Sandy goes above and beyond to solve problems that come up. Need change for a parking meter? Check. Need help filling out the intake form because you don't read English well or you don't see well? Check. Need to make new arrangements because your ride home fell through? Check.

UU George Thompson has also been a receptionist, in his case at the Hawthorne Education Center. As an African-American, he wanted to make sure that "people who look like me" knew they were welcome. Although he is no longer able to participate due to scheduling conflicts, he believes Tax-Aide is "an extremely powerful, wonderful program. It provides good service to people who really need it."

Counselors. At the counselor's desk, the rubber meets the road. Using the clients' intake forms and the documents brought to the appointment, the counselor interviews clients to gain a thorough understanding of their household makeup, employment and income, and other circumstances relevant to tax issues. The counselor's goal is to prepare accurate returns that include the maximum credits and refunds for which taxpayers are eligible. There is a maze of options (see sidebar on page 17), all of which have their own extensive, idiosyncratic eligibility requirements and limits. The counselor is assisted by web-based software, but an aptitude for logic and numbers and a talent for customer service are essential.



Paula Horner reviews documents with a client at 125 Live.



Bruce Bjorgum at the Salvation Army.

At a counselor's desk clients might find one of several UUs: Joe Lobl, Bruce Bjorgum, Paula Horner, Bill Thompson, Garth Nelson, Joyce Lewis, or James Rentz. Like Joe Lobl, Bruce Bjorgum had always prepared his own tax returns and, as an added bonus, was an

IT professional. He was attracted to the program by the stories Ella told about clients and, indeed, they are what he likes best about being a counselor. "I meet people with minimal income, raising kids – and even after you find all the tax credits you can, you still want to write them a check. But they never complain – they're just dealing with life as it comes to them. It is rewarding to help."

Local Site Coordinators.

Each major location has a site coordinator who keeps everything running smoothly. At Hawthorne Education Center that person is [Honorary] UU Bill Wiktor. Shortly after UU member Elaine Case and he were married, Bill



Bill Wiktor waits for a client at Hawthorne Education Center.

accompanied Elaine to church one fateful Sunday morning. Ella discovered that Bill not only prepared his own tax returns, but also had IBM management experience. For the last 20 years they have put that experience to good use. In the past Bill has been a Counselor and Training Coordinator. In his current position he makes sure that the Hawthorne facility is reserved and properly set up, the counselors are scheduled and properly certified, supplies and materials are readily available, and problems are quickly resolved. Bill most enjoys focusing directly on clients, however,

so he also works in quality control. He Reviews each prepared tax return with the client to make sure nothing was overlooked and everything was entered correctly.

No one is allowed to serve in an AARP Tax-Aide position without training. In November all volunteers begin with a 4-hour class on volunteer responsibilities and ethics. They learn the basics about maintaining confidentiality, working with diverse populations, treating clients and other volunteers with respect, and adhering to program policies, site schedules, and guidelines. Ethics certification is required.

Counselors go on to receive extensive additional training in December and January, based on curriculum designed by the IRS in collaboration with the Tax-Aide program. Just this year Joe Lobl completed 40 hours of in-class training (which introduces students to both tax law and data entry software), many hours of at-home study, and an IRS Advanced Level online certification test – which, he’s glad to say, he passed. One thing that impressed Joe about the training is how crucial Ella is. For several years Ella served on the National Tax Training Committee to create and maintain the materials that are used to train AARP volunteers around the country and continues to provide feedback to a subcommittee. Today, according to Joe, whenever someone has a difficult question, the instructor’s response is often, “Here’s what the book says, but let’s ask Ella.” Like, WWED.

Every year all volunteers must retake the ethics training and be recertified. Returning counselors get an additional 16 hours of training rather than 40, mostly to be updated on new tax policy and software changes. From paper to computers to cloud storage, Ella has seen it all. Although each new transition is hard – this year brought slightly-balky new software – Ella has embraced the advantages that each innovation delivered.

Like Sue Bateman before her, Ella decided in 2014 that it was time to pass on the leadership of the program. She found a new District Coordinator, Kathy Maegerlein, and is supporting her by serving as Administrative Coordinator (AC) and Electronic Return Originator Coordinator (EROC). As EROC, Ella oversees the electronic filing of the completed tax returns, following up to make sure that all are accepted by the IRS. Because of excellent training and oversight and the diligence of our local volunteers, our district’s accuracy rate exceeds 98%! As AC, Ella serves as backup to the District Coordinator. With her long experience she is able to mop up any stray details before they fall through the cracks.



*Ella turns over the reins to
Kathy Maegerlein.*

Contact Info

If you think you could benefit from the AARP Tax-Aide Program, call for an appointment:

Salvation Army – (507) 424-4197

125 Live – (507) 424-6407

Hawthorne Education Center –
(507) 287-1958
(scheduled through United Way)

The AARP Tax-Aide program is a wonderful example of social justice in action. Wealthy people have tax preparers and accountants who ensure that they pay no more income tax than legally required. Certainly people in the low and moderate income ranges deserve the same consideration and good service. As Paula Horner puts it, "It really distresses me that our tax system is so complex that people who can ill-afford it have to pay others to complete their tax returns. I want to provide that service and reduce people's anxiety about their taxes. I really feel good when I can find a tax credit that someone was not expecting."

At the end of each tax season Tax-Aide volunteers get together for a potluck to celebrate the end of another productive year. As Bruce Bjorgum puts it, "It's an incredible group of people – a community that wants to help others."

It's easy to become a part of this group. Just ask Ella

Kathy Brutinel is a regular contributor to the UU Revue and is an active member of our congregation.

Federal Tax Credits

These Federal Credits are subtracted from taxes owed:

- Child and Dependent Care Credit (so you can work or look for work)
- Education Credit (for college tuition or courses related to work)
- Retirement Savings (for contributions to your IRA or employer-sponsored plan)
- Child Tax Credit (for children you support)

These Federal Credits are available if you earn money, even if you're not required to file and don't owe any taxes:

- Earned Income Credit
- Additional Child Tax Credit
- Refund of amounts withheld by your employer or that you paid in estimated taxes

These Federal Credits are available even if you don't earn any money:

- Education Credit (college tuition or courses related to potential work)

State Tax Credits

These State Credits are subtracted from taxes owed:

- Marriage Filing Jointly Credit
- Credit for taxes paid to another state
- Credit for long-term care insurance

These State Credits are available if you earn money, even if you're not required to file and don't owe any taxes:

- Working Family Credit
- Child and Dependent Care Credit
- Refund of amounts withheld by your employer or that you paid in estimated taxes

These State Credits are available even if don't earn any money:

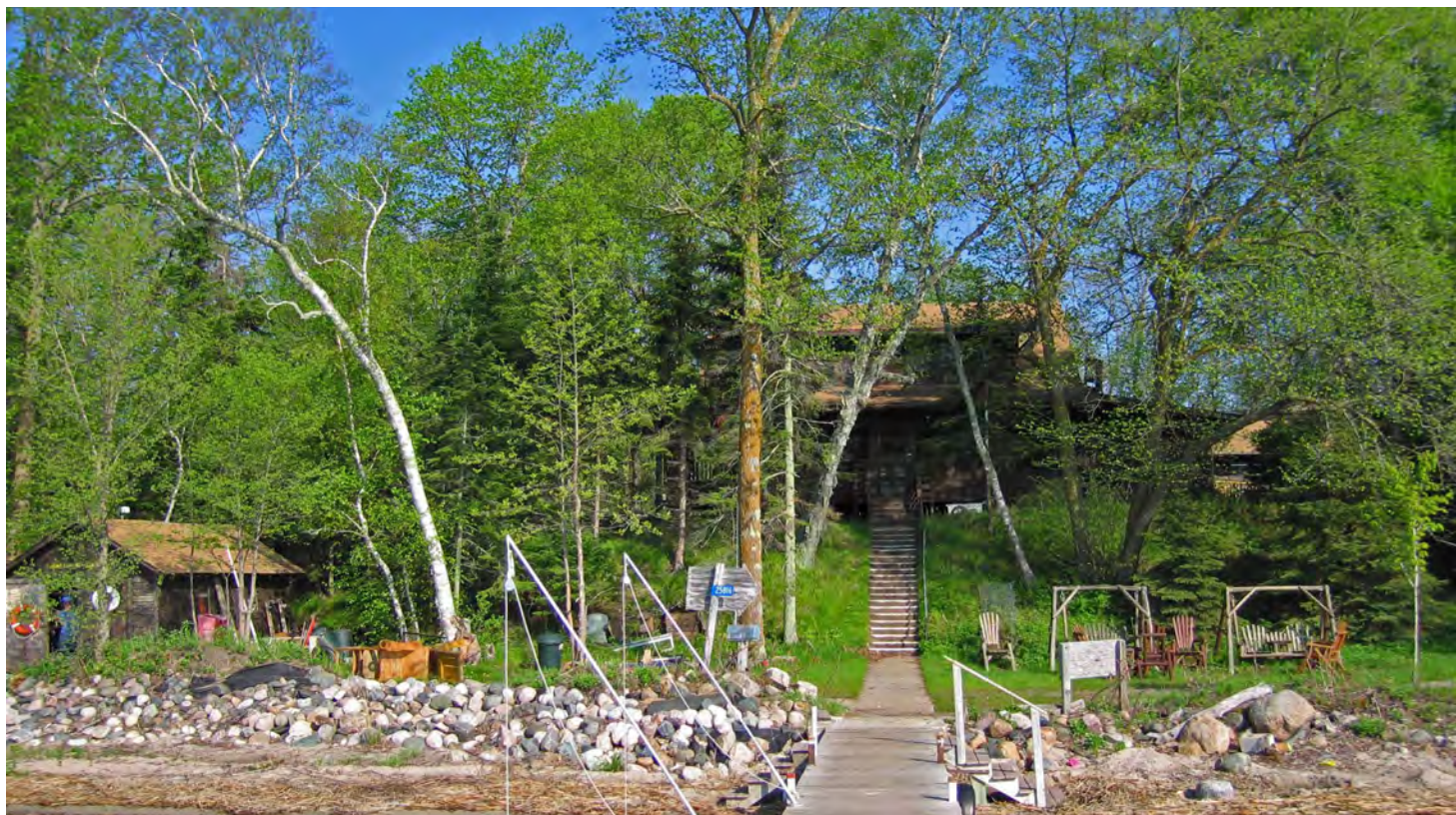
- Education Credit (K-12)

State property tax/rent rebate:

- Renters whose household income is less than \$58,880 or a homeowner whose household income is less than \$108,660 or whose tax increased over 12% and at least \$100 since the previous year

Camp Unistar

Photo courtesy campunistar.org



A Personal Recollection by Paula Horner

In Minnesota we talk about going “up North.” For many of us, this phrase conjures up a place far from the here and now; a place of natural beauty and serenity. It’s the cabin at the lake, it’s the Northwoods, it’s the Boundary Waters, and for the past 21 years for me it has been Camp UniStar.

Camp UniStar is a camp for Unitarian Universalists, their families, and other like-minded friends. It’s located on Star Island in Cass Lake, part of the Chippewa National Forest. (From Rochester, it’s about a six-hour drive, followed by a 30-minute boat ride.) The island is without stores, roads, or cars; just houses, footpaths, and the camp. It even has a lake—a lake on the island on the lake!

The camp was a gift donated in 1961 by the Anderson family of Houston, Texas to the Prairie Star District of the Unitarian Universalist Association. Members of First UU Rochester, Alicia and Dr. O.T. Clagett, were instrumental in making that gift happen.

For many years, my husband Pete Edl and I went “up North” mainly to the Boundary Waters on canoe trips, seeking a break from our daily routines. After our son Ethan was born, we continued taking trips up North. We had heard about Camp UniStar from other members of our congregation, who described to us a beautiful place that offered a program every morning with child care, lots of leisure time, and canoes. Best of all, someone else did all the cooking. We decided to give it a try.

One of the features of Camp Unistar is the weekly theme. Some programs are intellectually stimulating; some are dance weeks, sailing weeks, or nature weeks. So in 1995, when Ethan was 5, we put in our

application for a week described in the brochure as “Prescription for Stress Reduction: A Little Zen, A Little Yoga, Quiet Strolls, Well-Seasoned with a Pinch of Cass Lake Walleye Secrets.” We could not have picked a better week for us! We all jumped into the activities we were interested in: I went to yoga classes and many walks with the group leaders; Pete went fishing and caught a walleye! Ethan happily went to the children’s program and made a friend. We had fun as a family and individually. I think in that first week we fully embraced all that the camp could offer each of us. I kept some notes from that week and at the end noted “it was a wonderful week to truly relax.”

Camp UniStar is a little like having a time share in Northern Minnesota. We returned in 1996 and 1997 and then started going on the two-year plan. Over time we met other families and have returned time after time with them.

There are many “traditions” at Camp UniStar. One of our favorites is the oatmeal sundaes on the second day of camp, Sunday. You get into line in the dining room and get a bowl of oatmeal. You are then offered ice cream and an incredible selection of toppings and you build your own sundae with nuts, dry fruit, ice cream, candies, and syrup.



Photo courtesy campunistar.org

I think one of the sources of great joy for me at UniStar is observing the children - my own child, his friends, and many others. Ann Klefstad in her book about Camp UniStar wrote: “In the safety of an island without cars, or streets or strangers, children can live the free outdoor life that used to be the birthright of most children, but in many places has shriveled to the boundaries of a fence or an apartment.” At Camp UniStar we do not allow our children to bring their electronics. Parents can relax their vigilance, knowing that lifeguards, children’s program staff, friends, and other parents provide a safety net that allows children unprecedented freedom. This freedom allows children to learn from consequences on their own. It’s perhaps UniStar’s most precious gift.

In *Island in the Stream: Camp UniStar’s First 50 Years*, there is a quote from a 9 year old arriving at Camp UniStar, taking a breath, and exclaiming to her friend, “Now that’s the smell of freedom in my nostrils!”

People take different things away from their Camp UniStar experience. Pete enjoys the chance to have more time to do what he doesn’t have much time to do in Rochester: kayak, canoe, and sail. He learned to sail at Camp UniStar, and it’s the only place he gets to do that. For many years, Camp UniStar was where I went to read. I tried to finish at least one, if not two, books each week, sadly sometimes the only non-professional reading I did each year. I



Photo courtesy Paula Horner



Photo courtesy campunistar.org

totally appreciated that someone else did the cooking and there was no need for meal planning for an entire week. Ethan looked forward to friends and some of the traditions of the children's program: the pontoon boatride to Cedar Island and then sliding down the sandy beach into the water. Imaginative games involving packs of kids was how a lot of time was spent. Quoting Joseph Miller, one of Ethan's friends from camp, "This place forces you to make things up, because there is no baseball, no tennis, no organized stuff."

Year after year we have returned to Camp UniStar to be nourished once again by this beloved place. We return to relax, walk, canoe, kayak, talk, eat, play, and to be.

History of Camp UniStar by Mary Amundsen

Camp UniStar, our Unitarian Universalist summer camp, located on Star Island in Cass Lake southeast of Bemidji, Minnesota, opened in 1961 as the result of the dream and persistence of Alicia Clagett, long-time member of our Rochester UU Church. Alicia wanted a place in Minnesota for UU's to go in the summer and develop ideas with an intellectual and spiritual focus. When a patient of her husband offered a large property and buildings on Star Island, Alicia saw her opportunity and was able to convince the Universalist and Unitarian headquarters to pursue it. Alicia chaired a committee that included Louise Hill, Rev. Vern and Betty Curry (then minister in Rochester), Dr. Corrin and Mary Hodgson, and Sue and Walter Bateman to work on this. This process began in 1960 when the Unitarians and Universalists were working out their eventual merger, and the camp opened the summer of 1961.

The Clagett's daughter Nancy and her husband Nick Muller were the camp directors and cooks that first summer and for several years. Dr. Mel Amundsen and his wife Mary were offered a free week if he would be camp doctor. Rev. Emil Gudmundson was the program chair. The number of families

attending that first summer was small but over the years the camp has operated at capacity. Families and individuals who are first time attendees frequently sign up to come year after year.

Children who grew up there are now bringing their own children and grandchildren. Programs and activities, as well as the setting, attract UU families for an enriching week of making great memories. Several families attend the opening week to help set up the camp by cleaning, painting, and doing all those tasks necessary for a successful summer. Erv and Marie Miller were one of these families for many years. Many families from our congregation have attended over the years: Amundsens, DeAngelis/McKeemans, Didiers, Hedgecocks, Horner/Edls, Karlsons, Katzmans, Langton/Yanowitzes, Laytons, Lobl/Taylors, Rothwells, Walz-Flannigans, and Joyce Wood. This is not a complete list of attendees but a sampling of past and current members.

Alicia Clagett, who pursued her dream of a UU camp, died in 1995 at age 85 and her husband, Dr. O.T. (Jim) Clagett, whose patient offered the land for the camp, died in 1990 at age 82. Their legacy lives on with the camp now operated by the UU MidAmerica Region.

Paula Horner is a long-time members of our church and has been a happy camper at Camp Unistar 13 times since 1995.

2017 Camp UniStar Programs

Go to CampUniStar.org for information on registering for the upcoming season. Registration runs through May 27. Priority registration ends March 11.

June 10 – 17, Helping Hands

June 17 - 24, Youth Week 1

June 24 - July 1, Youth Week 2

July 1 – 8, Capture the Moment

July 8 – 15, Guide My Feet: Justice on the Prairie

July 15 – 22, Animals & Landscapes of Star Island

July 22 – 29, Clean Energy Revolution

July 29 - August 5, Everyday Joy: Dance, Music, and Story

August 5 – 12, Win, Lose, or Draw?

August 12 – 19, Poses & Prose: Yoga & Writing

August 19 – 26, Bread for Body & Soul

August 26 - September 2, The Gospel of Mary Oliver



Photo courtesy Paula Horner

The Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism

We covenant to **affirm** and **promote** ...

The inherent **worth** and **dignity** of every person

Justice, equity and **compassion**
in human relations

Acceptance of one another and encouragement
to **spiritual growth** in our congregations

A free and responsible search for **truth** and
meaning

The right of **conscience** and the use of the
democratic process within our congregations
and in society at large

The goal of **world community** with
peace, liberty, and justice for all

Respect for the interdependent web of
all existence of which we are a part



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507-282-5209 uurochmn.org