

Marie Brinkmeyer

Matching
People with
Opportunities

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An Interview with Marie Brinkmeyer of RSVP

BY BERTA PARRISH

I left the interview with Marie Brinkmeyer singing, “Matchmaker, Matchmaker, make me a match. Find me a find. Catch me a catch,” a popular song from *Fiddler on the Roof*. Not only do the lyrics describe her lifework, but the upbeat rhythm and unflappable optimism describe her philosophy of life. What keeps her so hopeful in these troubling times?

As the Director of the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) of the Central Coast, Marie is constantly witnessing successful partnerships, connecting over 1500 volunteers to the needs of 300 organizations, agencies, and nonprofit groups in San Luis Obispo and northern Santa Barbara Counties. Not surprisingly, the approximately 200,000 hours annually contributed by RSVP members result in millions of dollars for the community. Marie’s greatest pleasure is marrying the desires of the person to those of the organization. “I enjoy the openness of this effort,” she says. “We are open to anyone over 55, no particular skills or experiences are required. We’ll find the site and the activity that’s best for their availability, talents, and interests. We’re here to help both the volunteer and the organization thrive.”

Three life experiences in particular make Marie the best match to direct RSVP’s mission. She brings administrative expertise from working over thirty years in human resources in hospital and business settings throughout California. Additionally, she developed patience and empathy from raising ten of her own children plus six stepchildren and from keeping up with thirty

grandchildren, and eleven great-grandchildren. Nevertheless, she believes that her grandmother was the most influential in her career choice. “My grandmother’s house was known throughout the Hobo Jungle as a place to go for a good meal. She shared soup and bread with whomever came to the back door.” From her grandmother’s example, Marie learned that it feels good to help others.

Sixty years later, she is still benefiting from this lesson, just like the RSVP members who discover that those who volunteer live happier, healthier, and longer lives. Our local RSVP is part of Senior Corp, a national volunteer recruiting and placement agency conceived during Kennedy’s presidency. It currently links more than 500,000 Americans to service opportunities through its three programs—Foster Grandparents, RSVP, and Senior Companions. Along with AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve America, Senior Corps is under the newly formed Corporation for National and Community Service which provides Americans of all ages and backgrounds opportunities to give back to their communities and their nation.

Marie’s daily tasks of helping others make a difference in their community while helping the community make a difference in the lives of its citizens would make anyone feel good and hopeful. She is indeed a Matchmaker who, like the marriage broker in the song, will look through her book and make a perfect match.

If you’re interested in volunteering with RSVP, call (805) 544-8740 or visit <http://www.rsvpcentralcoast.org/>.