

The Register-Guard

The art of involvement

Newfound passion for volunteerism benefits local performing arts group and others.

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Eugene transplant Dianna Bressler jumped into the community with both feet, volunteering for many nonprofits including Ballet Fantastique.

Dianna Bressler has never been a dancer, but she loves ballet. She's not a politician, but has found herself interested in government. She lives a comfortable life, but is drawn to help those in need.

For Bressler, retirement and relocation have been the inspiration for exploring her interests through a full, fun and diverse schedule of volunteer activities.

“I like interacting with the people,” Bressler says. “Especially being new to the area, how do you meet people (otherwise)? ...I just think it was a good way to do good works and meet good people.”

Bressler, 55, moved to Eugene about a year and a half ago with her grown son. Together they were looking for a place to settle in after he had completed service with the Navy and she had determined the housing market in San Luis Obispo, Calif., where she had been living, was not for her.

Once here, she did an Internet search to figure out what her volunteer options were, and sent e-mails to a handful of organizations, selecting two that responded.

Only an occasional volunteer earlier in her life, soon Bressler was helping Ballet Fantastique, a nonprofit organization that has a dance academy for students, children and adults, as well as a production side for professional dancers. Ballet Fantastique also does outreach to schools and offers free performances as a way to introduce children to ballet.

Bressler is secretary/treasurer for Ballet Fantastique’s board of directors, which includes handling financial records and tracking donations. Because she can do much of the work from home, she volunteers for the organization almost daily, a donation of about 80 hours of her time every month. The treasures part of her title is a new one, and it increased the workload quite a bit, especially because of the learning curve, but “it’s something I’m very happy and willing to do.”

“I admire dancers because it’s such a beautiful, athletic art form,” Bressler says about how she became interested in Ballet Fantastique.

She also has fun doing the work, and enjoys the family that runs the organization. In turn, they appreciate her.

“Dianna’s work for BFan has been absolutely invaluable to us,” wrote Hannah Bontrager, executive director of Ballet Fantastique, in her nomination of Bressler for volunteer of the month. “She is not only

the most generous person we have ever met, but tackles EVERY task, big or small, with gusto, positivity and determination. She is an inspiration to every person who works with or encounters our organization.”

The other organization Bressler found initially is BRING Recycling, whose efforts to reign in the use of natural resources, recycle used materials and conserve resources for future generations is something she’s happy to support. For BRING, Bressler also does clerical work, such as processing volunteer time sheets.

Once she was actively volunteering for the two organizations, a friend told Bressler about SHO (Support Hult Operations), and soon she was serving as a greeter at Hult Center performances. She also is on SHO’s board of directors, and is the organization’s newsletter editor.

“I think we would do without a lot of those little extras if we didn’t have volunteers,” Bressler says. “I think just people helping people is a great thing to do.”

Not to be limited either to the arts or the environment, Bressler got involved as a political volunteer this past year when she worked for now-President Barack Obama’s campaign in Oregon, calling voters, inputting data and going door to door.

“I was thrilled. It was really exciting,” Bressler says. “It was thrilling to see him win such an historic election.”

She hopes to get more involved in local politics before the next election, and wants to become more educated about local government.

In addition to one grown son, Bressler has two grown stepchildren, one grandson and another grandchild on the way. When not volunteering, she enjoys making jewelry and visiting family in California.

Despite her current level of community involvement, Bressler says doesn’t feel like she’s finished. Soon, once she gets past the lurning

curve on her treasurer work for Ballet Fantastique, she plans to find another nonprofit to which she can give her time.

Because she has a history of working with elderly residents –one of her last jobs was at an assisted-living facility in California –she is most interested in a program that helps people in need, especially senior citizens.

“I’d like to visit shut-ins, shuttle to doctors,” Bressler says. “I don’t know. Something.”

Though her volunteer hours are extensive, Bressler never tires of giving her time.

“When you’re interested, excited about things, you don’t even think about that really, you just do it,” Bressler says. “Now that I’ve found this, it’s like a vocation. It’s something I intend to keep on doing.”

Two of the organizations that Bressler gives her time to are planning fundraisers next month. Ballet Fantastique will perform “Danse en Rouge: Variations in Red” on Feb. 7 at the Hult Center. SHO is planning the SHO Wine Tasting Fundraiser for Feb. 28. Details for both are available at www.hultcenter.org.