

## Celebrating our Volunteers: Pete Abraham honored for dedication to Appleton North, Boy Scouts, YMCA

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APPLETON – When Pete Abraham was asked to drive a truck for the Appleton North High School theater program, he didn't expect he'd become a full-time volunteer.

Since then he's logged thousands of volunteer hours, leading set design and construction to teach students skills they will use for the rest of their lives.

On Tuesday, Abraham will receive the 2014 Daniel P. Spalding Volunteer Educator Award through the annual Celebrating Our Volunteers program sponsored by Post-Crescent Media and the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region Inc. The award recognizes a volunteer for their dedication to education.

Abraham said he enjoys watching students learn new skills.

"Ten years from now these students will need shelves in their closets. A young lady will go buy herself a circular saw, purchase the wood, measure the pieces, make the cuts and put the shelves up. When her boyfriend asks her where she learned to do that, she'll say in the theater," Abraham said. "It's kind of a cool skill to share."

When parents volunteer with the North theater program, they work under Abraham's watchful eye. Having seen firsthand the relationships students build with volunteers, Abraham said he's "thrilled to have them."

"When they go home at night they can talk with their high school student and they get to connect the way I can connect," he said.

Abraham's wife, Mary, also volunteers with the theater program, which he said makes the experiences even more special.

Abraham has been a stay-at-home dad for 18 years, and said he is grateful he has had the time to volunteer for Appleton North, the Boy Scouts and the YMCA.

He led a Boy Scout troop when his sons were in the program. Since the early 1980s, Abraham has been involved with the Appleton YMCA summer camp program. He chaired the Camp Committee from 1995 to 2012.

The common thread that ties all three organizations together is their emphasis on leadership development. All three of Abraham's children went through the programs he volunteers for, and he saw how they benefitted from those experiences.

Theater teacher Ron Parker said in a reference letter that Abraham "exemplifies all that is best in the teaching profession. He provides a strong leadership example while making learning both exciting and fun."

Abraham is patient with the students and helps them progress so that they can mentor new crew members, Catherine McKenzie stated in her nomination letter.

Brian Legare wrote that Abraham understands the benefits of student-led programs and the obstacles they will face in their roles. He has a knack for supporting students.

“He is a ‘whisperer’: He can encourage and help others without them realizing they have been encouraged and helped,” Legare wrote.

Furthermore, Abraham’s dedication has helped North build a strong reputation for its high-quality sets, McKenzie said. From the barber chair in “Sweeney Todd” that dumped victims into a room below to the sinking deck of the “Titanic,” Abraham’s vision has made the productions come alive.

While Abraham enjoys the program’s success, it’s the progress students make that he finds most meaningful.

“I see the growth in them. That’s why I find (the theater program) so special to work with,” he said.

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#### Daniel P. Spalding Volunteer Educator Award

The Daniel P. Spalding Volunteer Educator Award honors an individual or group with a history of dedication to education. The award, sponsored by School Specialty Inc., goes to a volunteer or volunteers currently working with preK-12 students in a creative program. Other characteristics include an evident passion for education and the ability to work in the best interest of students and teachers. School Specialty renamed the award, originally called the Volunteer Educator Award, in 2003. The change is a memorial tribute to Dan Spalding, former chairman and CEO of School Specialty, who died of a heart attack at age 47 in the spring of 2002. Spalding was described as the “ultimate education volunteer.”

#### About this series

Each day through May 6, Post-Crescent Media is highlighting the good deeds of Fox Valley volunteers in advance of the annual Celebrating Our Volunteers event, which takes place Tuesday at the Radisson Paper Valley Hotel in downtown Appleton. It is sponsored by the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region Inc. and Post-Crescent Media. Readers submitted nominees.