

The Mount Airy Museum of Regional History has issued a call for volunteers — especially those interested in the culture, history, and traditions of this region — to serve as museum docents, as well as volunteers for the front desk. A docent training class begins on Jan. 14 and will run for six consecutive weeks, until Feb. 18, from 4 to 5 p.m. each Tuesday. According to Mount Airy Museum of Regional History Executive Director Matthew Edwards, a docent is “a name that basically means tour guide.” Edwards said volunteer docents fulfill a “vital role” in bringing history alive for those who visit the museum, especially groups of children who often tour the museum with their classes, as well as groups of adults and senior citizens. Docents may also research information for training and workshops, assist with programs and workshops, assist with craft projects, help with summer programs, or may choose to specialize in one particular part of the museum or specialty. The museum has a group of about 16 docent volunteers, according to Guest Services Manager Nancy Davis, who added that it is a lower number than usual. “We really want people-people; volunteers who just really love interacting with all kinds of people, especially children and senior citizens.” “We want people who are interested in and passionate about local history, and also people who love to interact with other people. These folks are so important to us — they help us personally interpret the history of our community with our visitors,” Edwards described.

During the docent training classes, Edwards said the volunteers will learn about every aspect of the museum, receiving both the public museum tour but also a behind-the-scenes tour. Volunteer docents will learn about the “stories we tell and how they relate to our collections,” Edwards said. The training is designed so that by the end, docents will shadow an existing docent before they give their own tours, and each person may add their own personal touch. “We don’t use a set script, but we do provide a general outline. The great thing about being our tour guide in a space like the museum is the many stories we have. There is something for everyone to focus in on. If you have a particular interest in a certain subject, we welcome that specialty. We have go-to people we use for certain programs and areas of the museum,” Edwards remarked. Each volunteer will receive a docent training book full of information about the museum and the region.

Museum docents and volunteers are a “key to the museum’s future growth,” Edwards said, adding that the volunteer opportunity is open to adults of all ages, and those who are interested are not required to have a background in history or museum work. “We welcome those with all types of backgrounds and interest levels.” Retired teachers make “wonderful docents” Davis remarked. “I love to have teachers, because they really do well with the kids and know how to keep them entertained and interested in the museum.” Edwards and Davis added that the museum is also in need of front desk volunteers who are willing to commit to work 3.5 hour shifts as their schedule allows.

All museum volunteers, including docents and front desk volunteers, have a variety of commitment levels, according to each person's individual schedule. Some volunteers are more of an "on call volunteer" according to Davis, while others work on a regular schedule. Some docents are those who can be called upon if the museum needs their particular talents or knowledge base. Docents may volunteer anywhere from 30 hours per year to 100 or more hours per year. Docent volunteer training classes will be held every Tuesday afternoon beginning on Jan. 14 and lasting until Feb. 18, from 4 to 5 p.m. If interested in becoming a docent and/or a museum volunteer for another area such as front desk, or have any questions about volunteering, please call Nancy Davis at 336-786-4478, ext. 229 or email nmdavis@northcarolinamuseum.org.