

January 2024 Sioux Empire Volunteer of the Month John Nelson



Left to Right: Brett Cooper, Washington Pavilion; Jennie Marks, Helpline Center; John Nelson, Honoree; Dawn Stephens, Wellmark Blue Cross Blue Shield of SD

The Helpline Center congratulates John Nelson on being named the Sioux Empire January 2024 Volunteer of the Month. Volunteer of the Month is an area-wide award program sponsored by Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield of SD. John is nominated by the Kirby Science Discovery Center.

His nomination states, “John Nelson serves as the Kirby Science Discovery Center’s (KSDC) go-to volunteer for supervising interactive mobile demonstration carts, is the backbone of the KSDC volunteer team during the Pavilion’s Free First Friday events (when its museums are admission-free the first Friday of every month from 5:00-8:00 pm), has served as a judge during Pavilion-hosted science fairs and engineering challenge events, and has been the KSDC’s spokesperson at off-site science festivals and science education events.”

John has volunteered at the Pavilion since January 2015 and has served nearly 700 hours during his tenure. He shares his enthusiasm with Pavilion guests an average of 10 hours each month.

If the Kirby Science Discovery Center were a person, it would be John! He embodies the KSDC’s mission to promote learning under the guise of play. A retired engineer, John manages to be brilliant, personable, energetic, and witty all at the same time. John humbly shares his rare blend of talents with the tens of thousands of KSDC guests he engages with each year; he is probably one of the most easily recognized volunteers among student-aged Pavilion guests, who are delighted and enlightened by his demo cart presentations during Free First Fridays and on most Saturdays at the KSDC. John is essentially the Bill Nye of the Pavilion, a [in his case, literally] magnetic educator who sparks curiosity in the minds of those who are lucky to partake in his live experiments and demonstrations. He is a model ambassador for accessible STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) education and his kinetic personality is a true asset to the Kirby Science Discovery Center’s programs.”

The Helpline Center is pleased to present John with a framed certificate and a letter of appreciation from Mayor Paul Ten Haken.



For information on volunteer opportunities, please call the Helpline Center at 211 or visit volunteer.helplinecenter.org.