Follow the North Star: History in Action

Follow the North Star (FNS) has been posted in Volgistics and people are already signing up. For some of you, it will be your first experience with this intense living drama. Follow the North Star debuted at Conner Prairie in 1998 and is offered in November and April. More than 30,000 guests, including more than 17,000 students ages 12 and older, have participated in the last five years. The program has earned national awards from the American Association of Museums and the American Association for State and Local History. But still, FNS is not for everyone – guest or volunteer. Participants take on the role of an escaped slave and depending on the volunteer position you choose, you could be a witness to all they experience.

Follow the North Star demonstrates the wide-ranging social attitudes toward African-Americans in pre-Civil War Indiana. Participants travel back to the year 1836 and assume the role of fugitive slaves seeking freedom on the Underground Railroad through the state. Traveling as a group, they encounter a variety of characters, ranging from sympathetic allies to racist antagonists. It is a powerful experience that generates empathy, provokes discussion, and immerses visitors in this important part of our nation’s history.

None of the horrors or atrocities of slavery are depicted, and no vulgar language is used. But, participants are forced out of their comfort zones for a realistic historical re-creation.

The program ends as guests encounter a visionary who shares their character’s eventual fate – some are tortured, others captured, some die and a few find freedom. A debriefing session after the program allows participants to share their feelings, ask questions and learn more about Indiana’s role in the Underground Railroad. Facilitators draw correlations between 1836 slavery and today’s human trafficking, bullying and equal rights struggles.

Follow the North Star offers a powerful diversity training tool and effective educational experience for groups (civic, church or corporate), individuals, and schools. Our daytime program is just for school groups and presents age-appropriate programming. All FNS scheduled volunteers are offered free admission to the program in order to get the full experience. Open volunteer shifts are posted in Volgistics.
It’s October, and that means the Headless Horseman is here again, roaming the woods of ConnerScairie. This year, he gets 12 nights to search for his missing head. All of your favorite characters from the past few years are back, including Beautisha, the cosmetics loving witch; Dr. Acula, a wanna-be stand-up comedian; Ed, the mad scientist and his assistant Esmerelda; and Holly Ween, a childlike monster. There will be crafts, fortune telling, scary-o-ke, s’mores, apple treats from the Apple Store, a puppet show, storytelling and more! Headless Horseman is a beloved fall tradition for guests, families, and for volunteers, too.

We still have many volunteer opportunities. Join your fellow volunteers who have already enlisted for a night or more of hauntingly good fun. Sign up for your favorite position or try a new one. All open shifts are posted in Volgistics.

NEW for 2016 – We will not be serving the light meal to volunteers and staff as in past years. Snacks and drinks will be available starting at 5:00pm in Bayt Pavilion. Orientation begins at 5:30 and the gates open at 6:00. When volunteering, remember to dress for the weather. All activities take place outdoors and it gets cold on the prairie once the sun goes down. Volunteers may wear jeans for this event but wearing your red volunteer shirt is not required. Do wear your name badge. Layer your clothing and bring a hat and gloves. You can always take a layer off, but you can’t add one if you don’t have it with you. Parking is in the Blacksmith Lot and volunteer check-in is at the Apple Store Gate. All hours for Headless Horseman must be entered in Volgistics from home. If you don’t have a computer or access to the program, tell Jody or Pam and we will enter hours for you. So heads up, necks out and have fun!

STEVE RHONEMUS, JOHN WEIKEL & GENE CAREY (top) and CHRISTIAN WRIGHT & VICKI WOJTKIEWICZ (bottom) volunteer during Headless Horseman. Interested in helping out with this program? Sign up in Volgistics today!
Save the Date

The grounds will be closing shortly and the major events for the year will soon be over, so it’s time to sit back and celebrate everything that you, our treasured volunteers, have accomplished this year. Volunteer Recognition is slated for Saturday, November 12 at 10:00am. Please save the date and join fellow volunteers and staff as we honor all the time and talents that you have contributed to Conner Prairie during the year. Watch for your invitation with all the details to arrive later this month.

Volgistics Year End

We hope that you’ve been entering your hours in Volgistics faithfully. Conner Prairie volunteers’ fiscal year ends on October 31. After that, we will be calculating our total volunteer hours for the year, as well as everyone’s individual hours. It all counts. Volunteer hours are needed for grant applications and other funding.

If you have put in 100 or more hours since November 1, 2015, you are eligible for a free membership. October is your last chance to get in any hours you’ve missed entering. Volgistics won’t allow you to enter hours that go back more than 30 days. Anything older than that has to be sent to Jody or Pam. Check your records and if something looks or is wrong, let us know and we will be happy to help fix it.

Questions? Contact Jody or Pam.

Thank you for donating your time and talents to Conner Prairie. Check back next month for more opportunities to join the fun.