

# *Planting the Seeds of Volunteerism*

An impact volunteerism initiative ~ Pierre, South Dakota



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*“There has never been a time when our community’s resolve has been challenged to this degree and there has never been a time when our people responded in such a positive and cohesive manner. The spirit of volunteerism shone brightly throughout this disaster and it will continue to play an active role as we rebuild our community one brick, one home, one tree and one green space at a time.”*

▪ Pierre Mayor Laurie R. Gill  
In the aftermath of Pierre’s 2011 flood





November 16, 2011

The summer of 2011 provided countless challenges to the people living and working in South Dakota's capital city. More than three million sandbags were filled and stacked, an extensive levee system was constructed and hundreds of homes were evacuated. Unlike a traditional flood, this event lasted more than three months and affected nearly every family in our community either directly or indirectly.

Amidst this chaos, however, some amazing and heartwarming things occurred. Most noticeably, we pulled together as one community and helped our friends and neighbors prepare for the worst. The acts of kindness we witnessed are too numerous to mention. Strangers volunteered their time and resources to assist those potentially affected by flooding; businesses worked together to protect their storefront properties; civic organizations rolled up their sleeves; and neighbors worked side by side to defend their properties. The spirit of volunteerism shone brightly throughout this entire event and continues today.

The Cities of Service model of impact volunteerism will complement our current recovery efforts. It will help ensure we target issues which are important to our residents and provide a tool for measuring both impact and participation. The City of Pierre's first Cities of Service initiative has been aptly named, "Planting the Seed," which reflects both symbolic and literal project components. A key component is training volunteer arborists, who will then train others to replant the hundreds of trees lost in the flood. It will also plant the seed for future volunteerism by targeting young adults and pairing them with seniors.

During the coming months, these volunteers will be trained to select, plant and care for vegetation in public and private green spaces throughout our community. While the initial effort will focus upon areas affected by the flood; it is my sincere hope this project will plant the seed for a more widespread effort.

I continue to be proud of our community and the people who step forward to make a difference. Working together, we can achieve anything we set our minds to accomplish and we will continue to make our community a better place in which to live and work.

Sincerely,

Mayor Laurie R. Gill

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## *Planting the Seeds of Volunteerism*

In the spring of 2011, Mayor Laurie R. Gill and the City of Pierre, South Dakota, joined the nationwide Cities of Service coalition. Mayor Gill recognized the potential power of impact volunteerism and this exciting, new initiative. She also understood impact volunteerism would eventually play an essential role in addressing one or more needs throughout her community. Within days of joining this coalition, however, the need for impact volunteerism would become not only essential, but it would become a daily way of life for the community's 14,000 residents.

### **Executive Summary:**

The summer of 2011 created many challenges for the City of Pierre and its residents. Heavy snowfall and spring rains during the preceding months forced the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to release record amounts of water along the Missouri River. As a result, portions of Pierre remained inundated for nearly four months. Homes, businesses and green spaces were destroyed during the summer-long flood.

When the waters receded in September, it was evident that most of the inundated trees would not survive this historic event. An arborist from South Dakota State University estimated up to 70 percent of the vegetation in flood-affected areas would not survive. The inundation areas included public parks and green spaces, private residences, an 18-hole municipal golf course, a 26-mile recreation trail, 10 softball/baseball fields and other areas known for their wooded surroundings.

As the full effects of this flood became evident, the City of Pierre was developing an impact service strategy to address the community's most pressing challenges. Stakeholders representing a broad spectrum of the community met in October to discuss potential projects. The group unanimously agreed that replanting trees and other vegetation was a priority need in Pierre. The group also agreed a stronger emphasis should be placed on re-vegetating private properties and even more importantly – providing the knowledge to select, plant and maintain flood-resistant species.

The initial goal will be to train 15 people to be volunteer arborists. These volunteers will work with the general population to identify areas where vegetation must be replanted and work with private landowners to ensure they are properly trained. These initial volunteers will be trained by state and local officials with strong backgrounds in forestry. The City Arbor Board and the State Forester are two potential partners in this initial training. A strong emphasis will be placed upon training young volunteers and pairing them with senior volunteers – thus, planting the seed for future volunteerism.

An online fundraising campaign is already in place to purchase young trees. In addition, the City of Pierre has more than \$7,000 in its Parks and Recreation Department budget to purchase new trees and a \$5,000 recognition award from AARP that will be partially used to launch the project through tree purchases. The initial goal will be to plant 200 new trees in flood-affected areas.

Initial volunteer training will take place during the summer of 2012 and trees will be purchased in early fall. The project goal is to begin planting in the fall of 2012, but it will be largely dependent upon weather conditions and the projected growing season. Training and planting is expected to continue through the spring and summer of 2013.



### **Background:**

The City of Pierre lies on the banks of the Missouri River and is just five miles downstream from one of the largest man-made reservoirs in the nation. The Oahe Dam was built in the late 1950s to provide flood control and hydroelectric power. The furthest thing from most people's minds in Pierre was flooding, as the control structure was literally in their back yards.

On May 24, 2011, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers notified Mayor Laurie Gill and City of Pierre officials that flooding was imminent along the Missouri River. Heavy snowfall in the Rocky Mountains was compounded by heavy spring rains and the Corps had no choice but to increase water discharges through the dam. In fact, the Corps indicated discharge rates would likely exceed the previous high of 59,000 cubic feet per second (cfs).

Within 24 hours of notification, floodwaters began flowing into green spaces along the Missouri River. The Corps revised its projections several times during the following days and eventually announced it would release up to 85,000 cfs throughout much of the summer. In reality, discharge rates throughout much of the summer hovered around 150,000 cfs and exceeded 160,000 cfs at its peak.

Volunteer workers were quickly organized to fill sand bags, provide meals to workers, coordinate housing needs, respond to emergency requests, establish emergency shelters, construct more than four miles of levees and perform other essential tasks in preparing for the flood. It was a volunteer effort that stretched beyond the city limits and included people of all ages and from all walks of life. The efforts also bridged the Missouri River and brought Pierre and neighboring Fort Pierre together in an unprecedented manner.

Hundreds of homes in Pierre and Fort Pierre were ultimately affected by flooding and groundwater surges. Gated communities were established to protect homeowners in affected areas and storm sewers were plugged to prevent back-flow into the city. Every drop of rainfall during the summer of 2011 was pumped from the system and over the top of newly-built earthen levees.

While the levees protected most of Pierre's downtown business district and residential neighborhoods, they were unable to protect the city's green spaces along the Missouri River. Much of Pierre's public recreation facilities were inundated for more than three months. Those facilities included, but were not limited to:

- Steamboat City Park
- Griffin City Park
- The Oahe Softball Complex
- Hillsvie Municipal Golf Course
- The City Arboretum
- LaFramboise Island
- The Lewis & Clark Recreation Trail
- Public Fishing Piers
- Downs Marina and Boat Ramps
- Swimming Beaches
- Volleyball Courts
- LaFramboise Island Causeway

In fact, more than 255 of the city's 350 acres of public green space were significantly impacted if not destroyed by the flood. Hundreds of trees within these public green spaces were inundated for several months and mortality is expected to reach as high as 70 percent, according to an arborist with South Dakota State University. The most significant losses will likely include old growth cottonwood trees throughout Steamboat and Griffin city parks.

The loss of trees and other vegetation was not limited to public lands. Hundreds of homes along the Missouri River will lose their trees and shrubs during the coming years. Hardest hit on public properties were fruit and evergreen trees which are most susceptible to flooding and high ground water levels. The mortality rate of these privately-owned trees will likely exceed 70 percent and leave behind scarred neighborhoods along Pierre's Missouri River waterfront.

There is little doubt that trees are an important part of a community's aesthetic appeal. They are much more important, however, from an environmental standpoint. Trees and similar vegetation help decrease average temperatures and can reduce a home's carbon footprint by providing valuable shade during the hot, South Dakota summers. Trees also help reduce pollution and absorb water and rainfall that would otherwise impact a city's drainage system. According to arborists, a tree can ensure that 1,500 gallons of water per year will evaporate before hitting the ground.

With all of these things in mind, the City of Pierre and its various stakeholders agree that replanting the community is a top priority during the long-term recovery effort. This Cities of Service initiative will address the need by training volunteers to identify flood-resistant strains of trees and other plants, providing them with the knowledge to plant trees and rain gardens in targeted flood-damaged areas (both public and private) and to teach them proper techniques to maintain these plants throughout the coming years. In turn, volunteers will instruct others and perpetuate the volunteer planting efforts.

Through this initiative, residents will have increased awareness of the importance of trees and will also adopt ownership in the replanting efforts. This project will also provide the means and experience in which to "plant the seed" for future volunteer efforts either directly or indirectly related to flood recovery.



*“If local governments everywhere routinely engaged their citizens in solving problems, America would be so much stronger for it. That’s the goal that all of us in the Cities of Service coalition share, and we look forward to continuing our progress.”*

- New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg

## *About Cities of Service*

Founded in New York City on September 10, 2009 by 17 mayors from cities across the nation, Cities of Service is a bipartisan coalition of mayors who have committed to work together to engage citizens to address critical city needs through impact volunteerism.

The coalition aims to create a vibrant and growing network of municipal governments effectively leveraging citizen service as a reliable, viable tool to achieve measurable impact on pressing local challenges. By accelerating the service movement at the most local level—connecting local needs to the supply of willing volunteers in innovative and impactful new ways—Cities of Service aspires to create a new chapter in America’s longstanding history of service while making local government more effective.

Today, the Cities of Service coalition includes more than 100 mayors, representing nearly 50 million Americans. Like the founding mayors, each coalition member has made a commitment to work with other mayors around the country and advance service strategies in their own city by crafting a high-impact service plan.

### **Cities of Service Approach:**

Cities of Service efforts focus on “impact volunteering”—volunteer strategies that target community needs, use best practices, and set clear outcomes and measures to gauge progress.

Cities of Service is leading a multi-year effort to engage mayors across the country by:

- Developing a comprehensive service plan and a coordinated strategy focused on matching volunteers and established community partners to the areas of greatest local need.
- Working with other mayors and elected officials to advance strategies and best practices that accelerate the service movement and produce measurable results.
- Encouraging other mayors to join this national effort to engage our citizens.
- Ensuring the voice of cities is heard in federal legislative, policy, and program discussions related to service, which will help the country achieve the ambitious goals of the Serve America Act.

The City of Pierre became a coalition member in 2011, when Mayor Laurie R. Gill signed the organization’s Declaration of Service and committed to develop an impact service plan as part of the Cities of Service Coalition. With a population of 14,000 people, Pierre is one of the smaller communities involved with Cities of Service and will initially address only one key initiative. The plan identified in this document, however, will become the blueprint for similar future projects and will nurture the seeds of volunteerism in young people, seniors, and Pierre residents from all walks of life.

It’s important to note this initiative will not replace nor duplicate the efforts of existing volunteer organizations in the Pierre-Fort Pierre communities. Instead, it will leverage the tremendous work currently accomplished by these volunteer groups and organizations. In fact, members of these existing groups were instrumental in identifying the community’s needs and developing this Cities of Service project in conjunction with Mayor Gill’s office, a volunteer chief service officer and key City of Pierre staff.

## About AARP

*“Throughout this event, the outpouring of assistance from our senior residents was nothing short of remarkable. They filled sandbags, coordinated meal deliveries and assisted in virtually every way possible. AARP and its membership will continue to play an important part of both our long-term recovery efforts and this environmentally-sensitive, Cities of Service/AARP initiative.”*

- Pierre Mayor Laurie R. Gill  
October 2011

AARP was founded on the principle of service. Since its establishment in 1958, AARP has been dedicated to delivering value to its members through service. Now, with the heightened interest in civic engagement and a new vitality around service, including the passage of the Kennedy Serve America Act in 2009, AARP is well positioned to tap into the strength of its millions of members to help solve pressing problems at the community level through the Cities of Service – AARP Volunteer Chief Service Officer Initiative.

### Chief Service Officer Approach:

The City of Pierre joined the Cities of Service – AARP Volunteer CSO Initiative in May of 2011. Through this collaboration between Cities of Service and AARP, coalition members with less than 125,000 residents have been given the opportunity to appoint highly-skilled volunteers to serve as Chief Service Officers for one year, many of whom come from AARP’s membership.

Chief Service Officers are senior members of the mayor’s leadership team and are responsible for the development and implementation of an impact volunteer plan that leverages citizen service to address the city’s most pressing challenges. In addition to appointing a volunteer Chief Service Officer, participating cities receive a \$5,000 Recognition Award from AARP and technical assistance from Cities of Service to develop and implement their impact volunteer initiatives.

In Pierre, former City Commissioner Larry Weiss was appointed to be the first volunteer Chief Service Officer. Weiss brings a wealth of institutional knowledge to the table including 37 years as an engineer for the South Dakota Department of Transportation; 37 years as an officer with the South Dakota Army National Guard; and 12 years as a Pierre city commissioner. Volunteer service has played an integral role in Weiss’ life and his selection was a natural fit for Pierre’s Cities of Service initiative.

Funding from AARP will be dedicated to supporting the launch of this initiative by training volunteer arborists and purchasing trees for both private and public properties. These funds will be leveraged with appropriated funds from the City of Pierre’s Parks and Recreation Department and ear-marked donations which are being solicited both online and through various fundraising activities.





## *Service in our Community*

The Pierre community has a long tradition of volunteerism. The Cities of Service initiative is not designed to replace or duplicate efforts of these existing groups. Instead, it will leverage membership from these groups and bring them together with one common goal – replanting the community!

Dozens of volunteer groups in the Pierre and Fort Pierre communities are ready to lend a hand when help is needed. These groups include a broad cross-section of the community and include: non-profit organizations, service clubs, public and private schools, City agencies, and religious groups. The level of volunteerism was never stronger than during the flood of 2011, when more than 2,500 volunteer hours were documented by the City of Pierre's Finance and Business Office. The actual number of volunteer hours may have actually been much higher, as not all volunteers logged their hours with the City of Pierre.

One of Pierre's largest volunteer groups is the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). According to Project Director Katie Nagel, 356 members donated more than 69,000 volunteer hours in the Pierre/Fort Pierre area during calendar year 2010. RSVP officials expect this number will rise as the two communities begin their long-term recovery efforts.

Most of the volunteer opportunities provided by these groups are marketed toward adult and senior participants. The Cities of Service initiative in Pierre will tap into the youth sector and partner these young people with senior volunteers. Potential sources of young volunteers include: Georgia Morse Middle School, T.F. Riggs High School, Pierre Indian Learning Center, the Capital Area Boys and Girls Club and the Oahe Family YMCA. By instilling a sense of volunteerism at a young age, this initiative will plant the seed for future public service.

Mayor Gill has experimented with this model through her, "Go Green and Clean" initiative in which volunteer groups spend one morning each spring removing litter and debris from the community's public parks and green spaces. During the 2011 event, students from Georgia Morse Middle School and Pierre Indian Learning Center contributed greatly to this clean-up event. The contacts made through this annual initiative will be useful as the Cities of Service initiative moves forward.





## *Project Overview*

Mayor Laurie Gill, the City of Pierre staff and the Pierre City Commission are all committed to replanting the community's trees and ensuring the wooded shorelines, residential neighborhoods and green spaces are returned to pre-flooding conditions. This impact volunteer plan was designed to address this priority need and plant the seeds of future volunteer projects.

### *Determination Methodology:*

The City of Pierre understands that priority initiatives identified by its public officials are not always the same as those identified by its residents. To ensure that a wide variety of thoughts and opinions were considered during issue prioritization, Mayor Gill invited stakeholders from across the community to a public brainstorming meeting. More than one dozen people representing nearly 20 various organizations attended the meeting which was held at Pierre City Hall on October 3, 2011. In addition, private interviews were conducted with invitees who were unable to attend the meeting.

Stakeholders were broken into several groups and each created a list of priority issues facing the Pierre community. Those issues included:

- Flood Recovery
- Child Violence Prevention
- Improving Graduation Rates
- Curbside Recycling
- Affordable Housing
- Workforce Development
- Life Skills / Mentoring
- Senior-Related Quality of Life
- Lowering Youth Alcohol/Tobacco Use
- Character Development
- Volunteerism Development
- Tree and Petunia Planting
- Multipurpose Public Facility

Each group listed flood recovery as one of the community's priority needs. During subsequent discussions, all agreed that replanting trees and vegetation lost in the flood was a priority need and one that was not adequately addressed through the long-term recovery process.

### **Initiative:**

“Planting the Seeds” is an impact volunteer initiative with a two-fold goal: to train volunteer arborists in proper tree selection, planting techniques and long-term maintenance; and to replace hundreds of trees that were lost during the 2011 flood. The project will also be used as a model for future volunteer initiatives in and around South Dakota’s capital city.

The summer of 2011 created many challenges for the City of Pierre and its residents. Heavy snowfall and spring rains forced the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to release record amounts of water along the Missouri River. As a result, portions of Pierre remained inundated for nearly four months. Homes, businesses and green spaces were destroyed during the summer-long flood.

When the waters receded in September, it was evident that most of the inundated trees would not survive this historic event. An arborist from South Dakota State University estimated up to 70 percent of the vegetation in flood-affected areas would not survive. The inundation areas included public parks and green spaces, private residences, an 18-hole municipal golf course, a 26-mile recreation trail, 10 softball/baseball fields and other areas known for their wooded surroundings.

This Cities of Service initiative will focus largely upon training volunteers to select, plant and maintain new trees in flood-affected neighborhoods. Using highly-qualified arborists from federal, state and local agencies, the initial goal is to train 15 volunteers to be volunteer arborists. In turn, each of these volunteers will become initiative leaders and will commit to training three additional volunteers. This force multiplication will ensure the number of trained arborists in Pierre continues to grow and future needs are met.

Once trained, these initial volunteers will work with private and public property owners to identify places where vegetation should be replanted. Working with these property owners, they will plant new trees and shrubs, share critical information related to plant maintenance and serve as a resource for future questions each property owner might have.

A special emphasis will be placed upon training young people from George Morse Middle School, the Pierre Indian Learning Center and T.F. Riggs High School. These adolescents will be paired with older adults during the project’s execution. Again, the seed of volunteerism will be planted within these young people and will hopefully carry through as they begin their adult lives.

### **Impact Metrics:**

Traditionally, efforts to track the impact of volunteering have focused on inputs – the number of volunteers involved, or the number of hours contributed. Cities of Service seeks to take that work to the next level by focusing on the impact, or outcome, of specific volunteer activities. This initiative will use two metrics to measure success. They include:

1. The number of trees replanted in flood-affected areas
2. The amount of green space acres rehabilitated

### **Participation Metrics:**

This initiative will also track participation metrics, to gauge how many community volunteers are involved in the effort. These metrics include:

1. The number of people directly trained as volunteer arborists
2. The number of people trained by volunteer arborists

### **Goals:**

During the three-month flood, more than 255 of the city's 350 acres of public green space were significantly impacted if not destroyed. Hundreds of trees within these public green spaces were inundated for several months and mortality is expected to reach as high as 70 percent, according to an arborist with South Dakota State University. The most significant losses will likely include old growth cottonwood trees throughout Steamboat and Griffin city parks.

The loss of trees and other vegetation was not limited to public lands. Hundreds of homes along the Missouri River will lose their trees and shrubs during the coming years. Hardest hit on public properties were fruit and evergreen trees, which are most susceptible to flooding and high ground water levels. The mortality rate of these privately-owned trees will likely exceed 70 percent and leave behind scarred neighborhoods along Pierre's Missouri River waterfront.

With all of this in mind, the City of Pierre has developed the following goals:

1. Replant a minimum of 200 trees in flood-affected neighborhoods and green spaces
2. Train a minimum of 15 people as volunteer arborists
3. Ensure volunteer arborists train 45 [community volunteers](#)
4. Rehabilitate a minimum of 100 acres of public green space

### **Timeline:**

Recovery work in our parks, green spaces and throughout waterfront neighborhoods began almost immediately. Levees and sandbags were removed, debris was cleared and homes were either rehabilitated or removed. The City of Pierre's Parks and Recreation Department began rehabilitation in some of its parks and green spaces during the fall of 2011, but much work remains.

The full effect of the flood may not be known for one or two years. Arborists agree that seemingly healthy trees may actually be living on reserve energy and losses may be realized through the spring of 2013. For the purposes of this initiative, a long-term timeline has been established. This timeline is weather dependent and the start/completion dates may vary depending upon the planting and growing seasons.

- Summer 2012 – Initial volunteer training begins.
- Fall 2012 – Initial planting begins weather permitting
- Spring 2013 – Planting continues and additional training continues
- Summer/Fall 2013 – Project is complete



## *Key Project Points*



### Initiative

- Train volunteers to select, plant and maintain new vegetation in flood-affected areas of Pierre, S.D.



### Metrics

- Number of trees planted
- Acres of green space rehabilitated
- Number of people trained as volunteer arborists
- Number of community volunteers trained by arborists



### Goals

- Replant a minimum of 200 trees
- Train 15 people as lead volunteer arborists
- Lead arborists train 45 community volunteers
- Rehabilitate 100 acres of public green space



### Timeline

- Begin training volunteers in spring 2012
- Order trees in fall 2012
- Begin planting in spring 2013

## *Acknowledgements*

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Volunteer Chief Service Officer Larry Weiss  
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Katie Nagel, RSVP  
Becky Bowers, Capital Area Boys and Girls Club  
Ruth Smith, Pierre/Fort Pierre Kiwanis Club  
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Scott Carbonneau, City of Pierre

### Pierre City Commission

Steve Harding  
Jamie Huizenga  
Jeanne Goodman  
Jim Mehlhaff

*Cities of Service -- 2011*