

Volunteer Centers Expand Coverage

By Brandon Seng, Communications Manager, ConnectMichigan Alliance



LANSING- Representatives from the communities of Chippewa, Livingston, Tuscola, Lenawee and Marquette County convened on February 15-16 in Lansing with a common goal: to efficiently provide those in and around their community with volunteer opportunities. These opportunities will come through the development of volunteer centers in those counties. The Volunteer Centers of Michigan (VCM) hosted these representatives, providing

guidance and support through their two-day intensive Volunteer Center Start-Up Academy.

"The Volunteer Centers of Michigan strives to provide every individual in Michigan with the opportunity to become engaged in their community," said Diana Algra, Director of VCM. "Through providing funding and resources like the Start-Up Academy, VCM is continually increasing the reach and coverage of Volunteer Centers throughout our state."

Participants in the Volunteer Centers of Michigan Start-Up Academy had the opportunity to take part in several trainings to help guide the development of these local centers while keeping essential services in mind. Beth Ludlum from The Points of Light Foundation facilitated the academy, and participants were guided by *Origins: A Process for New Volunteer Center Development*. This guidebook is comprised of a series of workshops that included discussions on: creating a winning team, community need and asset assessment, collaboration and what a successful volunteer center looks like.

Robin Lynn Grinnell Director of the Michigan Nonprofit Leadership Institute presented a workshop on collaboration. Also presenting was Denise Hubbard, Executive Director of Volunteer Connections of Macomb County, who shared her expertise in the establishment of local partnerships to strengthen volunteer centers. Through this interactive academy participants from all counties were able to share the plans, challenges and excitement that comes from beginning a new project in a community.

"Through the Start-Up Academy, I have gained access to the network, channels and resources essential to the development of a successful center," said Sean Smith, The Volunteer Center Program Initiative Coordinator from the Human Development Commission/Thumb Volunteer Alliance. "By participating in this open forum, I was able to discuss how our developing center might best serve our community."

The participating counties recently received grant funds through the Michigan Community Service Commission and the Volunteer Investment Grant to explore the

possibilities of establishing or reestablishing local volunteer centers in their communities. These counties will continue with their planning phase grants through August 2007. They will then be eligible for continued support as they work to strengthen the new volunteer centers in their communities.