



Grand bargain: Volunteers do work taxpayers can't afford

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LEWISVILLE — Retired and 69, Sal Lascari isn't satisfied sitting around being inactive.

He spent 50 years in the masonry business, and continues working with cement — although he no longer earns a salary.

"I'm originally from New Jersey," Lascari explained. "New York City is where I worked. I actually worked in the World Trade Center — the one that fell down."

But the last four years, Lascari has worked at Lewisville Lake.

"We cut the grass, do the trimming of the trees... everything," he added.

Lascari doesn't get paid a dime.

Neither does Gary Conner, 65. He drove to North Texas from Kansas City after retiring from AT&T.

Charlie McElyea, 69, used to be a mechanical engineer.

And Ronny Evans, 64, a tile setter, came six years ago.

They're among a dozen volunteers who now maintain much of this park.

"What if we got a contractor out there to do that? How much would that cost?" asked Chad Eller a spokesman for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The Corps, which runs a large park around the lake, provides volunteers with free campsites — along with water and electricity — at no charge.

"We have 50 amp service," Lascari said while showing News 8 around his motor home. "I run two air conditioners."

Volunteers must work at least ten hours a week.

"We pay a little bit of electricity. No question the value we're getting out of it," Eller added.

It's work the government can no longer afford.

"This work would not get done," Eller said. "You would see parks close, parks deteriorate. We just cannot do what we do without our volunteers."

Last year alone, the Corps said volunteers across the country performed improvements that would have cost taxpayers \$43 million.

On a state level, Texas Parks and Wildlife has a similar program, and the numbers for the state are just as astounding.

Volunteers performed more than 580,000 hours in 2012. It's the equivalent of what about 252 full-time employees might have done, or what would have cost taxpayers more than \$10 million.

"This is a little washer and dryer combo so I don't have to go to the laundromat," said Sara Kinnard as gave News 8 a tour of her motor home parked a few hundred feet from shore.

Kinnard, 65, sold her home in Arlington and now lives here full time.

"See, with this I don't have any property taxes," she said. "I have insurance, but that's minimal."

The Corps has a waiting list of volunteers... and plenty of work to be done.

Lascari and others recently helped rebuild a large outdoor bathroom.

"If we didn't do it, it would be a cost to the government of \$10,000... just that little job we finished," he said. "So here we are — volunteers — and we're loving it, and we saved the government \$10,000 just this last two weeks."

Retirees and RVs, at Lewisville Lake (and in the state park system), take parks personally.

What's still up for debate is who gets the biggest benefit — financially-strapped government agencies, or senior citizens who refuse to retire?

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