

Celebrating National Volunteer Week, April 15-21 Spotlight on Jim Urban: Stan Hywet Volunteer

By Emma Rainear
Volunteer Coordinator

Volunteer. It is an important word and an important job at many, many non-profit organizations. At Stan Hywet, the volunteer legacy is long and proud, a place where, since 1957, volunteers at Stan Hywet have been actively involved in the preservation, restoration, and advancement of Stan Hywet's history and mission.

Today, volunteers perform a wide variety of tasks — all vital to the estate's operations. The volunteer core numbers well over 500 dedicated individuals, who collectively contribute more than 50,000 hours of service annually. A Seiberling grandchild perhaps best summed up the significance of volunteers at Stan Hywet, and the importance of the Akron community's continued support.

"Volunteers are the backbone of any nonprofit. The citizens of Akron brought Stan Hywet to life after the family donated it, and continue to breathe life into it today."

The week of April 15 – 21 is National Volunteer Week when Stan Hywet and thousands of other organizations recognize the time, efforts, and talents of volunteers who contribute time on a daily basis. So we sat down with Jim Urban, one of Stan Hywet's longtime volunteers, to talk about his experiences here. Jim has accrued **13,024 volunteer hours** putting him in elite company as one of only eight active volunteers with more than 10,000 hours of service. He has been involved in nearly every department of the estate's operations since 1992.



Q: *Can you tell us where you have volunteered on the Estate?*

A: In no particular order, I have been a Gate Lodge Guide, a Manor House Interpreter, a Garden Guide, a History First Hand character, a Murder in the Mansion participant, and I have worked the Easter Breakfast, Founders' Day, Father's Day Car Show, Shakespeare, Ohio Mart, the Madrigal dinners, Deck the Hall, Dinner in the Dining Room, wine tastings, and I chaired the Decorated Egg Show for ten years. I bet you didn't even know we had that event! I am also 1st Vice President of

the Stan Hywet Gilde, Food & Beverage Chair for the Ohio Mart Steering Committee, a member of the Auxiliary Board, and a former Friends Committee representative.

Q: Wow that's quite a resume. So what was the thing that interested you the most about volunteering at Stan Hywet?

A: I first started volunteering at Stan Hywet at the Madrigal Dinners. A friend from church was chairing the event, and she asked me if I would like to be a waiter-server. And I never left! What interests me most is that we have a magnificent estate and we all should support it. Also this is a part of Akron's history, and I love history.

Q: I'm sure it's challenging to name just one, but do you have a favorite event or program that you enjoy volunteering for?

A: It is difficult to say what my favorite event is, but Founders' Day Weekend is special. As a tour guide in the Manor House, I can truthfully say that no two days are the same - you meet some very interesting people. And I'm a people person.



Q: Well that's a perfect lead-in to the next question. What would you say is the best encounter you've had with a guest at the estate?

A: I've encountered many interesting guests, from a baseball player that pitched in a World Series, to a former art student of Dr. Franklin Seiberling [youngest child of F.A. & Gertrude], and a family that I met. This family was from Willoughby. As we talked, I found out that the husband was a lawyer whose office was in one of the few remaining Penfield homes. As a result of this conversation I was able to put a trip together for the Stan Hywet Gilde to Willoughby, and learn more about the Penfield/Ferguson families.

Q: Through your research and interpreting, is there a fun fact or story about the Seiberling family or Stan Hywet that you particularly enjoy?

A: Because of *History First Hand*, I'm familiar with the guests and entertaining by the Seiberling family. Have you heard the story about the "late" night buffet supper? At 11pm on a cold February night, Gertrude and F.A. Seiberling hosted 150 guests and the guest of honor was Rosa Ponselle, a famous Met Opera soprano and close friend of Gertrude. Rosa stayed at Stan Hywet four different times and always during the month of February. The cook had to prepare 8 or 9 baked tongues, as well as a ham and sandwiches for this large supper without much notice. We still have the full menu in the archives. This is a fun fact for sure, and one I especially like to tell the children who visit.

Q: Lastly, since it is National Volunteer Week, why do you think volunteers are so vital to Stan Hywet's mission today?

A: We need volunteers to support the mission of Stan Hywet. Yes, there are estates that have few or no volunteers, but those are often supported by major foundations (like Ford and DuPont) and/or have expensive admission prices. Given the experience you get at Stan Hywet, the admission price practically pays for itself.

Thank you to Jim and all of our volunteers who donate their time as Manor House interpreters, collections assistants, greeters and receptionists, gardeners, nitpickers and maintenance specialists, retail assistants, flower arrangers, decorators, butterfly program and educational interpreters, historical reenactors, special event assistants, and board and committee members.



***We would not be able to operate this beautiful estate
and historic treasure without you.***

A Magnificent Historic House Museum and Country Estate

714 N. Portage Path
Akron, OH 44303-1399
330.836.5533
stanhywet.org

