



Backstage volunteers seek smoothly running convention

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DENISE FORD-MITCHELL

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In many ways, they are the cavalry.

They're the hundreds of volunteers reducing confusion, answering questions, directing crowds and securing the premises at the Jehovah's Witnesses' free "Deliverance at Hand!" District Convention at TheDow Event Center, 303 Johnson in Saginaw.

More than 5,500 worshippers are slated to attend this weekend's gathering, the last of three staged on consecutive weekends. The event started Friday and continues today. Worshippers will wrap up at 4:15 p.m. Sunday.

"We take great pride in making sure everything is ready for worship to God," said volunteer John Colburn Jr. of Grandville. "This community, which is going through tough economic times, has been very kind to us.

"I've had an opportunity to look around some, and I've noticed all of the 'for sale' signs as well as the overall chaos going on in the world today. That is exactly why we opened our convention to the public, to share with them the love and deliverance of Jehovah."

Including this weekend's attendees, the conventions have brought about 17,200 worshippers to downtown Saginaw, booking hotel rooms and filling tables at mid-Michigan restaurants. The convention last year took place in Toledo, Ohio.

The dollar impact of the convention is about \$220,000 for each weekend for eating and lodging, said Wendy Scott, director of convention sales for the Saginaw County Convention & Visitors Bureau, adding that the estimate is conservative and doesn't account for fuel sales or shopping.

Convention volunteers divided into 12 departments, including administrative, attendants, security, parking, lost and found, installation and trucking/equipment and platform workers.

Four or more volunteer coordinators oversee workers in each division, sitting at desks neatly lined up against walls encircling the Event Center. The workers are ready to spring into action at a moment's notice to accommodate conventioners visiting from Bay City, Flint, Grand Rapids, Port Huron, West Branch and South Haven, among other locales.

"It's our job to know where all the departments are so we can direct people to the exact spot they're searching for," explained James A. Thornton, 52, of South Haven. Thornton is one of 124 volunteers handling security during the convention.

"If there's any type of disturbance, we take care of it, and we assist with first aid and crowd control," Thornton said.

"It's such a privilege to serve. This convention I'm doing this, but the next time elders may ask me to help out someplace else. They like to have brothers work in many different departments so they get a feel for things."

Sitting a few chairs down, Gordy V. Wilton, 42, of Port Huron is one of three men monitoring the baptism department's table. Volunteers working this table direct baptismal candidates to changing facilities and maintain the 4,000-gallon, 12-by-18 foot baptismal pool.

"We make sure everything runs smoothly so that it is a positive experience for everyone," Wilton said. v

Denise Ford-Mitchell is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9668.

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