

April 6, 2015

Bob Nesbitt, Richmond Public School Community Volunteer

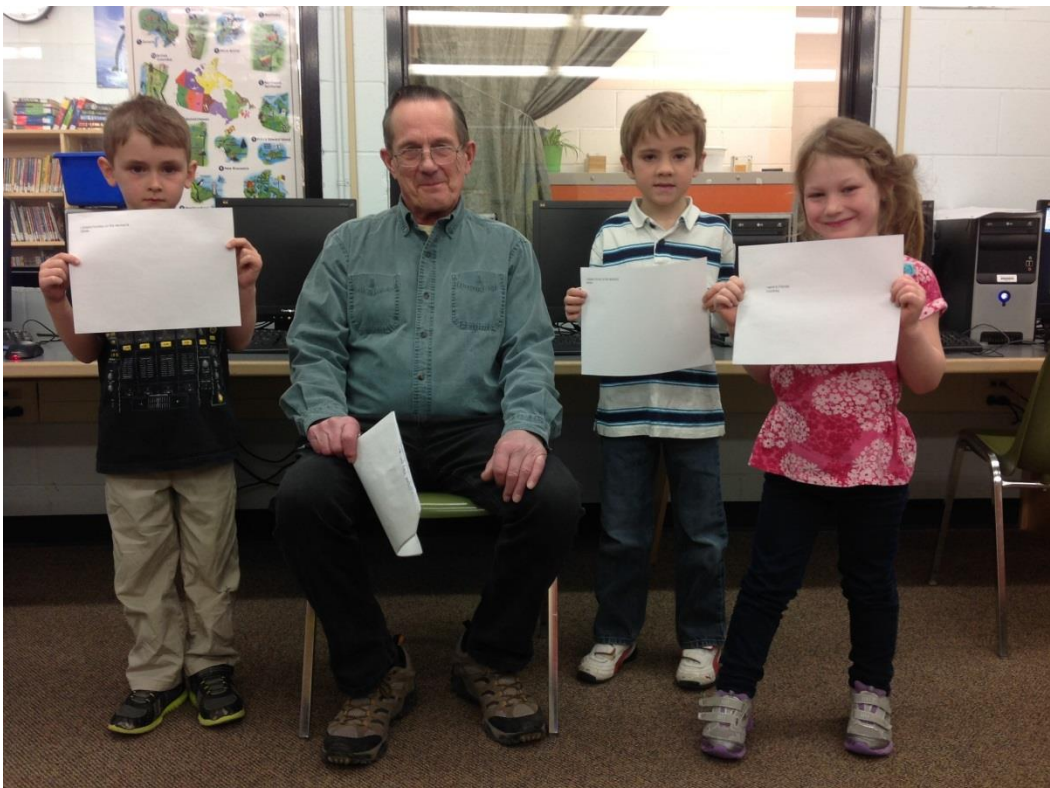
### Bob Nesbitt: Conductor of Human Energy

*Written by Lee-Ann Scott Director, Volunteer Programs, Ottawa Network for Education*

The dictionary definition of ‘conductor’ describes Ottawa community volunteer Bob Nesbitt perfectly:

Conductor, noun:

1. a person who conducts; a leader, guide, director, or manager
2. a person who directs an orchestra or chorus, communicating to the performers by motions of a baton or the hands his or her interpretation of the music,
3. a substance, body, or device that readily conducts heat, electricity (human energy), sound
4. a lightning rod!



As the Producer of the Ottawa Grassroots Festival Bob Nesbitt is a well-known community volunteer but he is also well known as “Mr. Nesbitt” to over 400 elementary students whom he has supported over the past 13 years in Ottawa schools.

Bob retired about 8 years ago, but he has been volunteering in schools for about 13 years. Bob did not just wake up one day and decide to volunteer in schools. He was “voluntold” by his daughter-in-law that his help was needed in his grandson’s senior kindergarten classroom. He was hesitant at first but after only a few days Bob loved volunteering with young children and he followed his grandson to grades 1 and 2 until grade 3 when his help was no longer needed. Wanting to continue his volunteer work, Bob contacted a friend, Principal Lynne Price, who had him apply to volunteer through the Ottawa Volunteers in Education program (OVIE). Anne Brouillard, OVIE Program Coordinator, reviewed Bob’s application and after screening was completed she matched his interests and availability perfectly to Richmond Public School and he has been known as “Mr. Nesbitt” ever since.

“From the very first year, I loved volunteering with children in schools and in my role as the producer of the Ottawa Grassroots Festival I am involved with lots of children. It’s my love of children that motivates me. Bringing people together and helping them individually is my passion.”

When volunteers help others they learn new aspects of their own character and Bob is no exception. “I knew I liked kids but I didn’t realize how *much* I enjoy kids just for being themselves. I also really enjoy teaching them. Helping bring a shy child out of themselves is intuitive for me, it’s a skill I didn’t know I had before volunteering.” Often volunteers comment on the learning differences between girls and boys. Bob has observed that boys need more support in learning social skills which include talking. He quickly adds, “You can teach kids how to talk. Ask them a question about something they know and understand and they’ll talk about it!”

Children often say what’s on their mind and this is a quality that Bob enjoys. “If a kid is shy, one way to get them talking is to ask if they have a pet a home. When I asked one little boy if he had a pet at home he answered with heartbreaking honesty, “I did have a dog, but he died this morning. Mom said I will see him in heaven.” Bob says the children’s heartfelt responses are indications of what’s on their minds, what’s going on in their lives and he’s glad he is there to share their concerns.

Bob relates a funny story about assisting a little girl during his first year volunteering; the little girl had turned her head and was staring at his face with concentration. He asked her what she was looking at and she answered with a question, “Why are your teeth so old and crooked?” Bob thought her comment was very funny and laughed heartedly. When I asked one of his students if he thought Mr. Nesbitt was funny, the little boy answered with quiet seriousness, “I have not heard him tell a joke, but he probably is funny.” Too cute for words!

When questioned about seeing the benefits of his support Bob answers immediately, “I definitely see the impact of my support especially in grade 1. If a volunteer gives support in grade 1 the impact of their support is huge! It’s very gratifying to support students in grade 1 as you see *immediately* how the students benefit. I used to own a construction company and at the end of the day I would feel a great sense of accomplishment if I had built something. I get the same sense of accomplishment after I volunteer.”



Teachers appreciate having a male role model and an elder volunteer in the classroom to show children that individuals, even older than their grandparents, have lots to contribute. Mr. Nesbitt assists weekly in Mrs. Dunnigan's grade 1 classroom. He works with 3 students at a time in the computer lab using a program called KidPix helping them write stories and create pictures. He guides the children's responses and helps them spell words they don't know. "He's the most amazing volunteer! He arrives every Monday and the minute he walks in the students all want it to be their turn. He is able to give individual attention to each student which they thrive on."

Ms. Gilchrest adds to Mrs. Dunnigan's praise, "Mr. Nesbitt taught my daughter when she was in grade 1 and even now in grade 6 she still talks about him. Each year he and his wife go on a trip abroad and return to give a slide show and bring small gifts to each student." On his travels, Bob makes sure to take guided tours so he can learn exciting and interesting facts about the animals he is photographing making his slide shows fun and educational for the students.

Bob also teaches the students the basics of how to use a computer; logging in and out, saving documents, and how to print. To facilitate showing them how a computer works, Bob brings in an old computer and several small screwdrivers. Working in groups of three, he gets the students to take the computer apart and explains each piece "...and this the hard drive where your pictures are saved..." then he has them put the computers back together again. This takes great patience and Bob has lots of it!

Bob ends the interview by reflecting, "If you are not volunteering for *something*, you are definitely missing out. Volunteering with kids is so rewarding. It's beyond me why more retirees are not volunteering in schools. I look forward to it every week. One day I was entering the school and noticed my own reflection and saw that I was grinning from ear to ear with great anticipation to see the kids." Bob's right—who wouldn't want to volunteer!

*Bob Nesbitt is the President of the Ottawa Grassroots Festival. He thrives on organizing and bringing people together. He manages over 100 volunteers annually with his team of crew chiefs making sure each volunteer is matched to their skills and interests. Bob is also the soundman for the Spirit of Rasputin's at Whispers Pub every Monday night. In addition, he mentors people who want to become renovators and provides financial advice to individuals who ask for his advice.*

*For more information about the Ottawa Grassroots Festival coming up on April 23-26, 2015 visit [www.ottawagrassrootsfestival.com](http://www.ottawagrassrootsfestival.com)*

*To learn how to become a volunteer in one of the Ottawa Network for Education's volunteer programs, please visit our website [www.onfe-rope.ca](http://www.onfe-rope.ca) or contact Anne Brouillard 613-366-3085 x255 [abrouillard@onfe-rope.ca](mailto:abrouillard@onfe-rope.ca)*