



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

Volunteers take on many roles to welcome, inform museum visitors

More than 500 people help out annually

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Every year, the National Museum of the United States Air Force opens its doors to nearly 1 million visitors – a job that is only possible with the help of willing volunteers.

The museum is the world's largest military aviation museum, run by 96 staff members and the assistance of more than 500 volunteers annually. The museum volunteers have a range of backgrounds with the Air Force; some have military history, while others simply have a passion for aircraft and serving the community.

Lyle Albert, Don Meyer and Virginia Miller are just three of the many volunteers who represent the lifeblood of the museum. These volunteers cover a variety of responsibilities, such as monitoring the museum galleries, providing information to visitors, leading guided tours and assisting with special events.

Albert served 21 years in the Air Force and expressed an interest in aircraft since a young age. He began volunteering as an Air Force museum gallery monitor seven months ago.

"My dad used to take business trips to Dayton, and I joined him on one of his trips to the museum," said Albert. "On top of that, I have always



Don Meyer, a National Museum of the U.S. Air Force tour guide, tells a group of museum guests about the Memphis Belle exhibit. (U.S. Air Force photos)



Lyle Albert, a National Museum of the U.S. Air Force gallery monitor, provides directions to guests.



Virginia Miller, a National Museum of the U.S. Air Force volunteer, answers questions at the museum's information desk.

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had an interest in aircraft. So, the museum was a good option because it satisfied my interest in airplanes and my increasing interest in World War II history."

As a gallery monitor, a typical day for Albert involves interacting with museum visitors, answering questions and monitoring the exhibits.

"Every shift is a little bit different. My duties consist of focusing on the visitors and tending to their needs. In just a four-and-a-half-hour shift, I can interact with several hundred people. I hear stories from visitors about their family members or themselves about the airplanes that they are standing in front of because they know it firsthand. I learn a lot from them."

Meyer has served 23 years as a museum tour guide, including VIP tours and touch-tours for visual-

ly impaired guests. Meyer also volunteers for the museum education division.

"I was born on an Air Force base, and I served in the Air Force for 20 years," said Meyer. "After I had been retired for about a year, I missed my connection with the Air Force. I thought the NMUSAF would be a good way to keep that connection."

The museum offers six free guided tours a day, and Meyer is one of the tour guides, often leading groups of 30 or more people at one time. In addition, he volunteers as a VIP tour guide for special guests and offers touch-tours for the visually impaired. He makes the walkthrough interactive and entertaining, as well as educational for his visitors.

"People don't always want a lot of facts and history dropped on their laps. So, I feel like I have to make it interesting," said Meyer. "You have to bring out the radical facts and interesting stories. You have to

keep them engaged and watch their interest level. Sometimes I like to ask for audience participation and play the role of Alex Trebek."

Meyer also volunteers with the museum's education division during Family Days and Home School STEM Days. The museum hosts these events to stimulate learning through educational activities, aerospace demonstrations and scavenger hunts.

Miller serves in three different volunteer positions: information desk assistant, gallery monitor and evening event volunteer. She has no prior military experience, but she has volunteered at the museum for 15 years and received the "NMUSAF Volunteer of the Year" award in 2015.

"I always thought the museum was a treasure. When the first building opened, our boys were little, and my husband and I used to take them out there all the time," said Miller. "Then I started working at

the museum in 2003. The first day I worked, I didn't know one plane. But I was able to learn new subjects, make new friends and experience a new world."

At the information desk, Miller greets staff and guests, directs youth and school group visits, assists visitors and provides museum information. In the galleries, she interacts with visitors and patrols the area. As an evening event volunteer, she assists with special events, such as concerts, reunions, military dinners and promotion and retirement ceremonies.

Miller, Meyer and Albert may have different responsibilities, but they share an interest in Air Force history and volunteer regularly to tell the Air Force story.

"I love the people and the story we tell," Miller said. "I am privileged to work with really educated and talented people. I have the highest respect and regard for my fellow volunteers and staff. And our

subject couldn't get better than the NMUSAF."

The museum staff encourage individuals to volunteer even if they possess no prior military history or knowledge of aircraft.

According to David Thomas, museum volunteer resources program manager, there are more than 500 volunteers from six different states who provide more than 112,000 hours of service each year, an equivalent to almost 55 additional full-time staff employees.

"Their invaluable service helps support nearly every

aspect of the museum's operation – from staffing the exhibit galleries and guided tours, to assisting with education programs and events and even manufacturing aircraft parts," said Thomas. "There are at least 70 volunteers serving every day at the museum, and many of those are generally a visitor's first and primary contact with the museum."

For those interested in volunteering at the NMUSAF or for more information, contact Volunteer Services at 937-255-3495 or nationalmuseum.volunteer@us.af.mil.