

...the number of male volunteers is continually increasing.

Volunteering has many advantages

by Marc Dumouchel

Regular readers of the Gateway may have noticed recent ads for a place called the Volunteer Action Centre (V.A.C.).

The Central Volunteer Bureau was founded in 1952. Today, known as the Volunteer Action Centre, the agency is a United Way member agency and receives funding from both the United Way and the City of Edmonton Family and Community Support Services.

Its mandate is to "act as a central resource to promote and foster the concept and application of volun-

teerism... assuring a positive experience for the volunteer."

To fulfill this purpose, the V.A.C. recruits, interviews, and refers volunteers, provides a system of consultation and training to the volunteer community, and increases public awareness of volunteerism.

The main focus of the V.A.C. is recruitment, interviewing, and referral of volunteers. Last year, 2 413 volunteers were referred to 234 agencies in the area.

The Fringe, classes for illiterate adults, daycare, hospitals, and probation offices are a few of the

places volunteers have worked.

"What makes the V.A.C. special," explains Mar Walker, director of public relations, "is that we are volunteer-focussed. The volunteer, not the agency, is our client."

In keeping with the V.A.C.'s pledge to "assure a positive experience for the volunteer", volunteers are placed where they would find the most benefit.

"Let's face it," says Sheila Grant, executive director of the V.A.C., "volunteers generally do not want menial work. They want to organize, work with people, or use some

special skill they have. They want to do something that they will find challenging and rewarding. And that's where we try to put them."

To these ends, the V.A.C. has set up the Skills Bank, a registry in which volunteers list the skills they would like to use in short-term volunteer assignment. These range from administrative to artistic to educational skills.

The V.A.C. gets the majority of its volunteers from the 20 - 35 year age group, although there are volunteers of all ages.

In addition, although most vol-

unteers are women, the number of male volunteers is continually increasing.

For students, says Walker, "there are three major benefits. Work experience is an obvious one. Students can also make contacts for later in their career. Finally, the students get a chance to see what the career they're interested in is really like."

To get involved is only a simple phone call, says Walker. "We really enjoy having students — they're so enthusiastic!" The Volunteer Action Centre can be reached at 482-6431.

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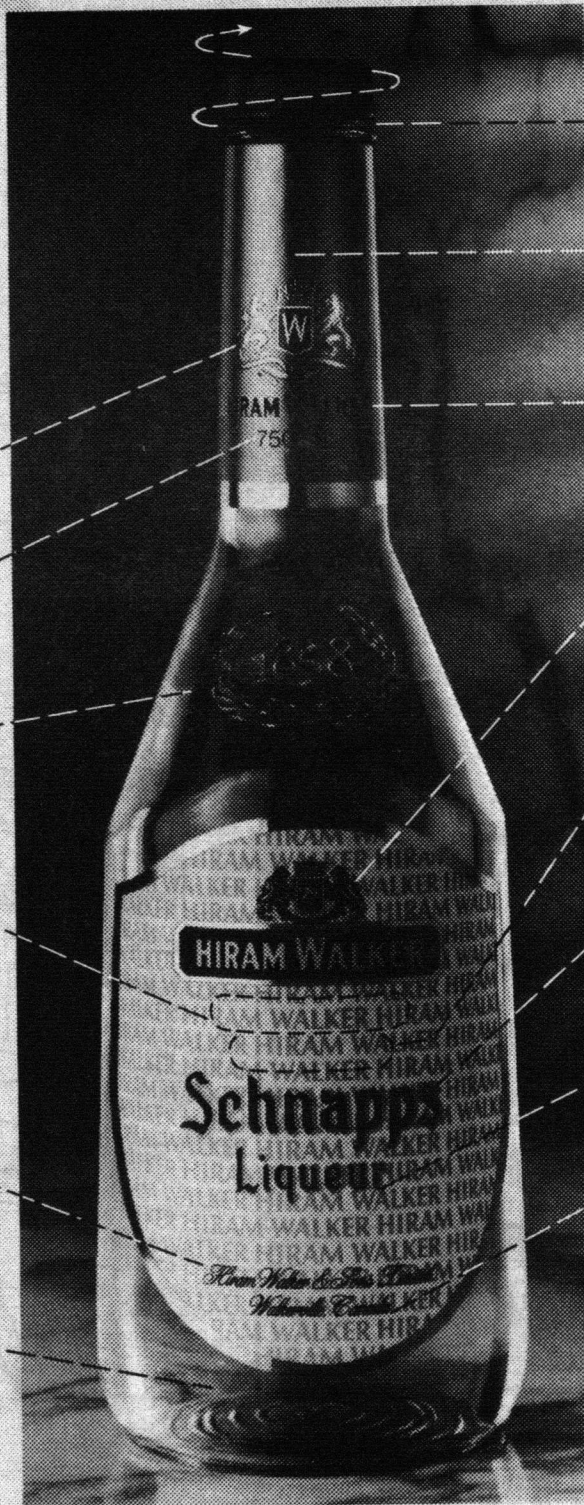
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