

Matt Edwards, the director of the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History, hopes the spirit that built the museum from the ground up is still alive and well in Surry County.

“This is an institution that was created by volunteers, so volunteerism is a legacy that is an important part of our history,” he said Wednesday morning. “It is something that is at the heart of this museum, both in the past and moving forward into the future.”

Edwards said he has a pool of about 100 volunteers, but he needs more.

And don't think there isn't something for any city resident to do. From working the telephone from home to scanning historic photos to helping archive and preserve the museum's donated collections, Edwards said if someone wants to give a little of their time he can find the niche for the would-be volunteer.

“We have volunteers working in capacities that range from working the front desk to conducting tours to working in our collections,” he said, sweaty from building a hands-on exhibit in the children's section. “My goal is to find a position that is exciting for every volunteer. If we can make it fun and exciting, they will want to come back.”

Grant funding from the New York-based Bay and Paul foundations have given Edwards the chance to get back to archiving and preserving the museum's many collections.

“That's something that in recent years has been lacking here at the museum due to tight budgets, because unfortunately when money gets tight preservation and archiving is one of the first things cut,” he said. “This grant of \$5,000 has afforded us the opportunity to add at least a portion of it back into our budget. So now we need volunteers to re-house collections not stored in archival conditions.”

It is an opportunity to get hands-on with rare historical objects, something that summer volunteer Susanna Pyatt gets excited about.

Pyatt, a history and anthropology major at the University of Oklahoma, is currently working in the dusty storage area, helping archive and store various collections.

“I just love it,” she said. “This is something I want to do for a career, so the chance to get my hands dirty is exciting for me.”

Edwards said such work is “part of what we do.”

“It may not sound like the most exciting kind of job for many people, but it’s at the heart of our mission here: to collect, preserve and interpret our area’s history,” he said. “In the grand scheme of things our job is to preserve these objects in perpetuity, allowing us months or years down the road to be sure they’re in good condition.”

Work is also under way to digitize more than 10,000 historic photos, making them available online.

“It’s not very cumbersome or difficult, but it’s a time-consuming process and we need volunteers to help in the effort,” he said.

The bottom line?

“I’m not saying we’re dying for volunteers, but we need to expand our volunteer pool,” he said. “For anyone who is interested, we have a position for them and we’ll make sure it’s something they enjoy.”

Anyone interested in volunteering at the museum can call Edwards or Volunteer Coordinator Nancy Davis at 786-4478.

