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Reimagining the Visual Communications of the Westcott Community Center

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Reimagining the Visual Communications of the Westcott Community Center

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors
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Honors Capstone Project in Graphic Design

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Abstract

I sought to redesign and reimagine the visual materials produced by the Westcott Community Center, a nonprofit organization that serves the local Westcott area as well as the entire metropolitan Syracuse area. The Westcott Community Center is a venue for classes, dramatic performances, celebrations, community meetings, and more.

The Westcott Community Center has many diverse programs and events and is truly an asset to the community. I wanted to update their materials to convey a sense of cohesiveness as well as a more sophisticated and organized design aesthetic. I redesigned the Center's logo and volunteer application, created a stationery system, took photographs, created flyers for various programs, created poster highlighting the Center's mission statement, created volunteer posters, shot and edited a short video, created a kinetic typography video and designed and coded a website. The focus of most of the materials I produced was to support the center as a whole, and more specifically, spark interest in its volunteer opportunities and educate those who are interested in getting involved.

In completing the materials, I used design skills I had previously learned as well as skills and techniques learned over the course the process. I used a variety of design programs to create the materials for the Center, including Adobe inDesign, Illustrator, Photoshop, After Effects, Dreamweaver and iMovie.

Many of the elements produced for the Center are currently being used. The volunteer video has been especially helpful in acclimating individuals with the programs offered by the Westcott Community Center.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

As I was beginning to think about the topic of my capstone project, I knew that I was interested in completing a creative project. From the beginning, I was sure that I wanted to combine elements of print as well as multimedia design, to mirror the shift towards digital design in the graphic design field. While I am most comfortable working in print, I wanted to challenge myself artistically as well as technically in stepping outside of my comfort zone and working with video, multimedia and web components.

One of my problems was presented in conceiving of a concept for my project. In my Junior year, I decided that I could potentially gather a host of interesting materials and stories in my travels abroad, and turn that into a dynamic project. In the Spring of 2011, I studied abroad in Dublin, Ireland, and was hoping that inspiration would strike. Originally, I thought it would be interesting to focus on something that was uniquely Irish. I considered creating multimedia promotional materials for the Bloomsday Festival, promoting Dublin's cultural activities, or creating an interactive representation of one of Joyce's novels such as a map of the locations visited in *Ulysses*.

While I was abroad, I experimented with shooting video and photography, but ultimately was not happy with the materials I gathered. I did not have the amount of time I had hoped I would have to collect information and faced some technological shortcomings as well. I also thought it would be better to complete the project when I returned as I would not be able to revisit any of the materials I gathered once I left Ireland.

In the fall of my Senior year, I had the idea to work with a nonprofit after taking an Honors seminar that dealt with community engagement, called "From the Hill to the Hood" with Mark Muhammad. I settled on working with the Westcott Community Center, as they were very optimistic and enthusiastic about working together. Originally, I had plans to work with another Honors student to complete a joint capstone but scheduling conflicts prevented her from completing the Honors program. We planned to complete a redesign of the center's materials, redesign their website, increase their social media presence and help to better publicize the many programs and events the center offers. We hoped to involve the campus community as well as the local community.

In beginning work with the Center, I met with Steve Susman, the Executive Director of the Westcott Community Center. I began by brainstorming and drafting ideas for a logo for the center and website redesign, and examining the Center's media presence, including their central Facebook page and Twitter. In completing my research, I attended events

and meetings to talk to people who regularly visit the community center as well.

After I returned from Winter break, I learned that the Center had secured outside funding through a grant which would allow them to hire a professional to redesign their promotional materials and their website. They were also in the middle of a shift in leadership and personnel and had recently hired new staff members who were committed to revitalizing the materials produced by the center. After consulting with my advisor, I decided to go on with the project as I had planned, creating materials that could easily be incorporated into the Center's current structure as well as ones that would still be useful after the redesign that would take place in May.

One of the areas in which the Center identified the need for immediate assistance was working on publicizing their volunteer program. The Westcott Community Center runs a large amount of programs and events, across a variety of focuses and target audiences. These programs rely heavily on volunteers to operate. The Center takes volunteers from local schools and universities, individuals who have free time or need to complete community service for a program, and individuals who have court-mandated community service hours. For those who are not previously acquainted with the Center and its various programs, the process of educating these individuals can be a daunting one for the staff. Explaining each and every program in-depth takes a lot of time and also takes away from the productivity of the staff members. They expressed interest in having a short, informational video produced that

could serve as an introduction to the Center and its programs. Ideally, this video would inform potential volunteers as to what the Center does as well as give them a starting point to look into the types of programs in which they would be interested. Going off of this idea, I decided to focus much of my energy on working with the volunteer aspect of the center.

Chapter 2

Inspiration

In beginning my work on the campaign, one of the most important

steps I took was to look for inspiration as well as learn about the Center and

its visual identity. This involved collecting and examining visual materials

currently produced by the center and identifying problems with the current

organization and ways in which I could improve them. I also looked at similar

organizations and how they chose to communicate with the public as well as

design periodicals to gather ideas. I then conceptualized and created a mood

board. A mood board is a useful tool used by designers that combines visual

inspiration to show a "sketch" of the kinds of materials that will ultimately be

produced. While a mood board is something like a blueprint of a design, it is

subject to change, and in my case, I had some adjustments along the way.

When I sat down to create my mood board, I happened to be

browsing Tumblr and came across a graphic someone had posted called

"Terms Most Useful in Describing Creative Works of Art." Upon further

research, I learned that the image was a painting by John Baldessari, an

artist known for painting text on canvas[1]. As my project was creative in nature, I felt this would be an appropriate jumping off-point for my work. I went through the list of terms and tried to focus on those that stood out most and those that I felt best communicated what it was I was trying to accomplish in designing materials for the center. Some of the phrases that stood out to me were "direction," "permanence," "take seriously," "charm," "communicate," "improve," "value," "command attention," "beautify," "identify," "associate" and "revise." I was seeking to provide the visual materials with direction, create a set of lasting visuals with a professional feel that still imparted the engaging feel of the center, clearly communicate that all the materials were produced by the same organization, creating a sense of continuity and brand-consciousness, improve upon current materials to make them more visually appealing, and create materials that made people want to look at them.

With these self-defined guidelines in mind, I began to look for inspiration. In my original mood board, I looked at logos and wordmarks of other nonprofit groups, looking for something with a basic or geometric feel. I wanted to find something clean that reflected the idea of the community as "building blocks," which is part of the Center's tagline. I looked at the logos of Shelter, the Child Poverty Action Group, New York City Ballet, and aspex. I also determined that I wanted to use shades of gray and red as a highlight in

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[1] *John Baldessari discusses Terms Most Useful in Describing Creative Works of Art*

my color scheme. Lastly, I researched websites that I thought communicated

information in an effective hierarchy.

Chapter 3

Defining the Problem

In examining the current materials produced by the center, I came to the conclusion that they lacked cohesiveness. For the most part, it was difficult to tell that the materials were produced by the same organization at first glance. The typography treatment could use some updating and the website was crowded with information that was not organized in the most logical manner. I decided that it would be essential to make sure the materials I produced for the center clearly included the center's logo and overall, had a similar aesthetic.

In producing a complete and comprehensive visual package, I combined my skill for designing in print with my newly acquired ability to shoot and edit video, create kinetic typography videos, shoot still images and code a working website. Throughout the semester, I focused on learning how to design and code for the web using HTML 5, jQuery and CSS. Ultimately, these skills would allow me to pull together some of the different materials I created and unify them in a dynamic way. Most of my technical abilities were capabilities and techniques I learned throughout my time at Syracuse University. In my graphic design classes, I was introduced to Adobe

Photoshop, Illustrator and inDesign and used these programs extensively in creating materials for the Westcott Community Center. I also learned and adapted by design theory over the course of my design career – learning what looks good together, how to properly frame a photo, and how to create a visual hierarchy.

While the materials I created could have possibly come across as segmented and fragmented when viewed individually, I tried to create continuity in the content, font choices and themes. One of the most important unifying aspects was including the logo I created on all of the other pieces I created for the center. I wanted it to be clear and easily recognizable that all of the elements were related. In my design choices, I wanted to convey a clean, modern, organized aesthetic for informational materials. In informational materials, successfully communicating the content is one of the most important aspects. In the materials in which I allowed myself a bit more artistic and creative freedom, such as the posters calling for volunteers at the center, I wanted the design aesthetic to convey the history of the organization, one which has served the community for a number of years. I achieved this by creating a vintage feel, while still appealing to a modern design sensibility.

Chapter 4

Creating the Solution

My package for the center ultimately consisted of a video discussing the various programs and events offered by the Center, a kinetic typography video that communicated the Center's mission statement, a redesign of their volunteer application, the creation of a wordmark for the center to use in its visual communication, photos of various events and programs that can be used in promotional materials, online galleries and displayed in the center, flyers advertising programs offered by the center both to potential volunteers as well as individuals interested in participating in these programs, a poster displaying the Center's mission statement, a stationery system for the Center, posters used to secure volunteers and a website geared towards potential volunteers that would allow many of these materials to be displayed.

<u>Volunteer Video</u>

To begin, I shot and edited a short video in which the staff at the Center discussed the programs they offered as well as talked about their need for volunteers. I shot this video using a Flip Cam and edited the footage together in iMovie, as I don't have any video experience. I created a graphic outlining the programs to play for a few seconds at the end of the video to

highlight the programs that were discussed. I also made sure to include a frame in which the logo and motto of the center appeared. Throughout the video, I intercut photos I had taken as well as photos provided to me by the center to illustrate the programs and events clearly. I posted the video to YouTube so that the staff can easily send it out to people who inquire as to what types of volunteer positions they have. This way, I could also include the video on my volunteer website. I also provided the center with the files for the video so that they may save the video on their computer and show people who come into the center to ask about volunteer opportunities as well.

Mission Statement Video

I created a short kinetic typography video for the Center that displayed its mission statement. A kinetic typography video is one that uses motion and animation to display type in a dynamic way. I used Adobe After Effects to create the video and exported it as a .mov file so that I was able to upload it to YouTube and eventually, to the website I created. I had previously been introduced to After Effects in one of my design classes that I took in my Junior year, in which I created my first and only other kinetic typography video. In creating this video, I experimented with effects that I had not used before and learned more about the program as well the process.

I chose to echo the same aesthetic I used in creating the mission statement poster for the center so both pieces would have continuity. I used a muted color palette, with a distressed paper texture for the background and a

dark brown for the font color. I chose to use Avenir for the font, as I chose it

as a signature typeface for the organization. It is a clean, modern, easily

readable font, yet one that is distinct, unique, and a welcome departure from

typefaces typically used in corporate communications. Many of the Center's

previously produced materials used sans serif fonts, so I wanted to keep that

same aesthetic. I wanted to include audio that also reflected this relaxed but

upbeat mood, so I chose a simple, electronic beat – the intro to "We Will

Become Silhouettes" by the Postal Service. I also wanted the animation to be

pretty basic, while still clean and engaging. I chose to mostly use scrolling

motions and text moving out of the shot. I made sure to include the same

ending frame as the volunteer video, in which the logo and motto of the

organization are displayed. Overall, I think the video is an organized,

engaging presentation of the mission of the Westcott Community Center and

is a creative way of explaining their goals.

<u>Volunteer Application</u>

In order for people to become volunteers at the Westcott Community

Center, they must submit a volunteer application. While there is an

application form currently on their website, they still receive many more

paper applications from people who come into the center to inquire about

volunteering. The Center had a form that they were using, but at four pages

full of information, I thought it could use a bit of re-organization. The form lacked visual hierarchy and division and the information seemed to get lost. In my redesign, I wanted to keep it simple, while still making it visually interesting and highlighting the parts of the application that I felt were the most important. Again, I wanted to include the logo I created and also used Avenir as my font choice. I also used Din, which is the font that I used in the logo. I kept the document in grayscale so as to cut down on printing costs for the Center. I created the application using Adobe inDesign, a program that I have been using throughout the duration of my design career.

Logo Design

In creating the logo for the Westcott Community Center, I was looking for something bold and compact. As their motto is "building community one brick at a time," I was inspired by the idea of blocks of type stacked on each other, mimicking the building blocks. I chose to use Din as my typeface as it is narrow and bold. I rendered the name in capital letters so as to reinforce the idea of the blocks. Using uppercase letters as opposed to lowercase also reinforces the idea of strength and commands attention. It situates the center as an integral part of the community. To create visual interest and separation between each of the words, I chose to use different shades of grey. Using grey also allows the center to print materials in black and white, saving on printing costs. I created the wordmark in inDesign as well.

The Westcott Community Center currently has a logo, which they use in some of their communications, but many of their materials do not contain the logo. I wanted to create a workmark in black and white that they could use when they did not see it fit to use the other logo, as it is important to make sure all pieces of corporate communication contain a logo or workmark of the organization. In this way, my workmark can be used on materials whose color palette does not work well with the bold red of their current logo. It can also be used on pieces that they don't have the funding to print in color.

Photos

Throughout the course of my involvement with the Center, I attended different programs and events to get a feel for what it was they did. For many of these events, I took photos. The staff expressed interest in having photos of their events and programs to use for promotional materials, as they were usually too busy to take photographs themselves during the programs. Some of my photographs are being used in flyers and handouts that the Center is currently producing, including a flyer for their upcoming flower bulb sale.

I also wanted to use the photographs I took to promote the programs in flyers that I designed. I used the photos in my volunteer video as well as an online photo gallery that I created for the website. I shot the photos with my DSLR camera and edited them in Photoshop.

Program Flyers

I noticed that the Center didn't have any eye-catching flyers or posters advertising their programs, rather, they had one sheet of paper that listed all of their programs. While this listing is very informative, I thought it would be beneficial to make additional flyers that were visually appealing and dealt with one program. I decided to focus on six of the programs that were mentioned in the volunteer application as ones in which help was needed. I designed these flyers with two purposes, they would serve as informational material for people interested in working on these programs, as well as for individuals who wished to participate in them.

I wanted the flyers to be colorful and visually appealing so as to draw attention. I chose to make each program's flyer a different color, but to use the same design for the sake of continuity. I thought that using photos to advertise the programs best conveyed the spirit of the center and the programs, so I wanted the images to play a central and important role in the design. I chose to place the photos in a center circle, making them large. I repeated the circle element at the top of the poster for visual depth. I chose to use Helvetica for the font because I thought it worked well with the geometric elements in the design because of its clean and simple design. It also complemented the logo well. I placed the logo on the posters to reinforce the ties to the organization and I colorized the logo so that it felt like part of the rest of the design. I created these flyers in Photoshop.

Mission Statement Poster

The mission statement poster reflects the design aesthetic of the After Effects video; I used the same colors and fonts and tried to create a design that was organized and clean while still maintaining an element of interest. I wanted the design to reflect and reinforce the words of the statement, drawing attention to certain elements and characters to underscore the point. I thought the inclusion of typography as a visual helped to communicate and highlight certain parts of the statement. Combining weights and sizes of typography also added to the visual hierarchy and draws the viewer's attention to certain points of interest. The poster was created in inDesign.

Stationery System

I wanted to create a stationery system for the Westcott Community Center as I feel this is one of the most important aspects of an organization. Having a consistent system shows a level of professionalism and organization. The Center currently has business cards, but I opted to redesign them to compliment the envelope and letterhead that I designed.

Using the wordmark I created, I wanted the stationery system to compliment the colors and style of the wordmark. I chose to keep the materials in grayscale to cut down on printing costs and I also chose to use Avenir and Din as my font choices for consistency. I wanted the materials to

be very clear and concise. I created all the elements of the stationery system in inDesign.

<u>Volunteer Posters</u>

One of the best ways to get people involved in volunteering is to put out informational materials. I thought it would be beneficial for the Center to have posters that asked for volunteers that they could put up in places around the Westcott area as well as in schools and campuses that have volunteer requirements.

I created two volunteer posters for the Center. One of the posters I chose to create using typography as the main visual element. I used the copy that the Center has on their volunteer section of their current website and created an interesting block of text as a visual element. I used Bodoni as the typeface; I wanted a serif font because I thought it would add visual interest to the design. I placed the logo and contact information at the bottom of the poster and added texture and noise to create visual interest. I created this poster in Illustrator and Photoshop.

The other poster I created uses a photo of the center I took as the center visual element. I used circles in this design as well to establish some continuity. I also chose to use a distressed paper background to relate to previous design work. I used Musa and Ballpark for my headline fonts, as I felt they worked well with the design aesthetic. I used Helvetica as the minor font for relating information. I created this poster in Photoshop.

Image Gallery

Using the photographs that I took during my time working with the center as well as photos they provided, I created an image gallery using HTML 5. I wanted to display a large number of the photos online, as they all were not used in the promotional materials. I also thought an image gallery would be useful in informing prospective volunteers about the types of programs and events offered by the Center.

Volunteer Website

I created a website using HTML 5, CSS and jQuery to serve as a portal for information that would be useful to people who were interested in volunteering for the Center. As there is a large amount of information on the Westcott Community Center's current website, I thought it would be useful to create a separate website for volunteers. I created a home page that contains information about the Center and the mission statement video; a volunteer page that hosts the volunteer video and descriptions of the open volunteer positions; a page that displays the individual program flyers; a page with an online volunteer application; a page listing upcoming events; a page containing the image gallery and a page with contact information and directions. I chose to use a warm color palette and incorporate the red color

into the design. I also used the brick motif to reflect the motto of the center. I

included social media feeds on the right hand side of the page because I

thought it would be beneficial for all of that information to be accessible from

a common point. Overall, I think the information is displayed in a clear and

logical way. Keeping the information to a minimum and displaying it in an

organized fashion helps readability and functionality.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The audience of my project is primarily people who wish to get

involved with the Westcott Community Center. To a lesser degree, it is also

people who are interested in participating in its programs and events as well

as the staff of the Center. I chose to create a website because I wanted some

central point of organization that would bring together the different parts of

the project. Not all of the elements lend themselves to being included on the

website but I think it serves to unite many of them. Ideally, I hope that the

materials I created serve to inform individuals who are interested in working with the Center as well as encourage more people to volunteer. I am proud of the way the project turned out am happy to have contributed my time and skills to such a worthy organization. I would like to thank those who helped me with the design process along the way, including my professors and peers as well as the staff as the Westcott Community Center for being so accommodating.

Chapter 6

Materials

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Appendices

Summary of Capstone Project

In the fall of 2011, when I was in the process of changing the topic of my Capstone project, I took a seminar called "From the Hill to the Hood: To the Community and Beyond" with Mark Muhammad. The focus of this course was to "embrace the concept of community engagement;" at the same time, exploring the people that serve this city and its neighborhoods and identifying and challenging the boundaries that serve to separate "us" from "them." We extensively covered the different neighborhoods that make up the city, took tours of community centers, learned about non-profit groups that operate in Syracuse and discussed the importance of civic engagement.

Inspired by the seminar, I then decided that I wanted to work with a non-profit in the city for my capstone project. I had previously decided to complete a creative capstone project, working in the field of my graphic design major. I knew that I had wanted to produce multimedia as well as print pieces as part of my project as the communications field as a whole is moving in the direction of multimedia and digital content. I contacted the Office of The Mary Ann Shaw Center for Public and Community Service (CPCS) to see if they could identify any non-profits who would be interested in working on a project. I also did some independent research and sent out a handful of emails to the directors of various non-profits in the area. I received an overwhelmingly positive response, and unfortunately had to decline a few

organizations as I had chosen one of the first non-profits to respond to my message. This non-profit was the Westcott Community Center.

The Westcott Community Center serves not only the local Westcott area, but also the entire metropolitan Syracuse area. Their goal is "to provide a safe, accessible community space for activities and programs that meet community needs; strengthening and uniting the community by brining together its diverse elements; and raising conscious awareness through public education, art and to promote the full inclusion of all persons." They are a venue for classes, dramatic performances, celebrations, community meetings, and more.

The center offers an extremely comprehensive mix of programs and services; including the Kid's After School Program, Say Yes to Education After School Program, Golden Café and Senior Lunch Program, Second Saturday Concert Series, University Lecture Series, Euclid Recreation Club Dance, Syracuse Eastside Neighborhood Farmer's Market, eCUSE Green Job Programs, GED Program, Monthly sessions with the National Grid Consumer Advocate, Talk to a Lawyer Program, 40 Above/Workers in Transition Seminar Series and Networking, PSI-ETJ Employment Program, Westcott Community Art Gallery, Neighborhood Senior Advisor Program, Open Computer Lab, OASIS Computer Class For Seniors, Moving for Better Balance, CuseCar, Westcott

Radio, and enrichment activities such as African dancing, arts & crafts, cooking, digital video production and photography.

The University Lecture Series, a fundraiser for the Westcott Community Center, has raised over $20,000 to date. Proceeds from the lecture series have been used to support youth and senior programs as well as arts and cultural programming. The Community Art Gallery seeks to support local community arts by providing a venue for local, emerging artists, student artists and youth to exhibit and make their work available to the public. The WCC offers computer classes for seniors that cover topics such as getting acquainted with the computer, exploring the Internet, and an introduction to digital photography. They offer employment programs that deal with creating and upgrading resumes. Another program, called the Parent Success Initiative is an employment program to help non-custodial parents secure jobs in order to pay child support. Euclid Recreation Club is a dance, featuring live bands, that "target[s] persons with developmental disabilities, including autism, who live in their own homes (with parents or care-givers), as well as those living in group homes and those living independently in the community." These dances are held six times a year on the first Saturday of the month.

In one of my first meetings with Steve Susman, the Executive Director with the Westcott Community Center, I learned that the center, opened in 1996,

served nearly 63,000 people last year. Thirteen years ago, the center's annual budget was somewhere in the neighborhood of $80,000. Today, it has grown to roughly $600,000 and the center serves more than 61,000 people a year, on average. I also learned that they maintain many forms of contact with the community. I had not previously known how successfully the center operated or the amount of programs and services offered to the community. Their monthly newsletter reaches nearly 300 people by mail, plus a large number of people who receive it by email and access it on the website. One of my original plans was to help the center better publicize their events and services, though they seemed to be able to do that very well already.

The one area in which the center did identify the need for help was better acquainting potential volunteers with their projects and services so that the people who operate the center do not have to take the time to explain everything the Center does to interested individuals. The staff also expressed interest in encouraging more people to volunteer. The Center is in need of computer instructors for their computer classes, youth aides, event helpers, office helpers, handymen and maintenance workers, garden helpers, senior lunch aides, and volunteers interested in working in event publicity and fundraising. The Center asked that I help them in creating a short video that they could show to people who expressed interest in volunteering. They wanted it to highlight some of the programs offered by the Center that could

use the assistance of volunteers. Ideally, the video would be informative and allow the employees to communicate the opportunities available without having to talk to each prospective volunteer directly. It also should serve as a way for someone with little knowledge of the Center to decide if there was a program with which they would be interested in working. Additionally, it could offer information so that volunteers were able to come to the employees with specific questions about the programs.

I also decided to help redo some of their graphical elements to make them more appealing. Visual identity plays a significant role in the way an organization presents itself to both its beneficiaries and the community in general. A visual identity expresses the values and ambitions of an organization, its business, and its characteristics. All materials produced by and related to the organization should be visual and recognizable and must contribute to its image and reputation. Currently, the publications released by the Center do not seem to relate to one another in a recognizable way. They often lack visual interest and are composed of centered type typically paired with some clip art. Some of the materials seemed crowded with information as well.

My project includes a kinetic typography produced in Adobe After Effects that highlights the mission statement of the organization. A kinetic type video is a form of animation that centers mainly on expression with moving text. I also designed the format of their volunteer application, took photos during various

events and programs, created a photo-viewing gallery using HTML 5 in which the pictures are displayed online in a dynamic way. I created a wordmark for the center that I felt reflected the mission of the WCC, "building community one brick at a time." I also created matching flyers for the six programs that are mentioned on the volunteer application, posters publicizing the volunteer programs, a flyer that outlined the mission statement of the organization, stationery for various employees at the center, and re-imagined a design for the volunteer website. I coded the website in Dreamweaver, using the knowledge of HTML, CSS, JQuery that I attempted to learn this year.

This project is significant in that I believe I succeeded in updating the materials produced by the center, making them more visually appealing and attractive. This in turn, would ideally lead to an increase in the amount of people who are interested in volunteering with the Center as well as making the process of educating and then securing volunteers one that is easier for the employees of the Center. Additionally, my work on this project has directly benefited an organization in the community and I think, that in itself holds significance.