

The Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., is a service organization designed to help the community. To that end, Virginia Amateur Sports contracts with the group to help with the post race food service at the Star City Half Marathon on Nov. 19, providing a valuable service for VAS and a great fundraiser for the sorority. The partnership also gives the sisters of Delta Sigma Theta a chance to meet hundreds of people and tell them of the services they provide in and around the Roanoke Valley.

Always in need of volunteers and other helping hands, VAS first started using Delta Sigma Theta to coordinate its post-race food service in 2019. Helen Ferguson of Delta Sigma Theta loves the chance to work for the organization and meet the runners and those who support them.

“The first year we did it was 2019 and we were at the O. Winston Link Museum,” Ferguson says. “Since then, the race has been on the greenway, so we’ve been outside. It’s been interesting being a little cold out, but it’s great being out there. It’s a way to talk and bond with people. Since its cold, people gather a little closer so it opens up opportunity for conversation. Also, being outside gives more space to joke and have fun with the people.”

The sorority will gather the food from six local restaurants and set up the post-race spread in a “Taste of Roanoke” fashion to give participants a chance to sample the local offerings. The work starts on Friday and goes well past the end of the race, after the last participant has left the race area.

“The day before the race and the morning of the race there are five or six of us running all over the place to get everything there,” Ferguson says. Delta Sigma Theta has helped VAS build a relationship with Chicken Salad Chick, that recently expanded into the Roanoke area, and is glad to work with Duck Donuts for the first time this year.

Ferguson has been familiar with VAS for many years. She’s the niece of the late Owen Grogan, an assistant director for VAS under Pete Lampman. Grogan was a fixture in the sports community, not only in the local arenas but as a nationally known football official who worked in the Big East Conference. Ferguson herself dons the stripes on high school basketball courts.

The sorority uses the money it raises to provide scholarships, up to \$15,000 annually. Since Delta Sigma Theta is a sorority for African American women, offering assistance for education is a natural goal. The group does more than offer help for college tuition, Ferguson says. The group works to provide programs of education to the community in five major areas: Economic development; educational awareness; internationals awareness and involvement; physical and mental health; and political awareness and involvement.

“We offer four different educational programs for school systems in the Roanoke Valley and New River Valley,” she says. “For kids in middle school we gear them up for high school. For the high school students, we gear them up for college or to go into the workforce.”

This Star City Half Marathon and 10k will offer Ferguson and her sorority sisters more people than normal to meet and greet. VAS is expecting more than 800 runners this year. The half marathon is the final leg of the Roanoke Valley Triple Crown, along with the Blue Ridge Marathon/Half Marathon and the

Salem Half Marathon. The Roanoke Valley Triple Crown Sprint Series sees the Star City 10k as the final event, along with the Salem 8k and Blue Ridge 10k.