

A LIFELONG VOLUNTEER

For Sarah Schrempf, volunteering runs in the family.

By MELISSA RUBALCABA RISKE | Photo by JANET KAY, NANCY MERKLING PRODUCTIONS

As a child, Sarah Schrempf remembers tagging along with her mother to volunteer at the food pantry or lending a hand with her scout troop around Crystal Lake, and says looking back, she can see why.

“I have always thought my mom got us into volunteering because of how it makes you feel. It gives you purpose, value,” Schrempf says.

And while she still volunteers with several programs and organizations, her role as the Executive Director of Senior Care Volunteer Network allows Schrempf to channel her energy into helping others find their fulfillment through volunteering. The nonprofit, formerly known as Faith in Action, coordinates more than 250 volunteers with opportunities to help adults age 60 and older in the community. A large portion of the volunteers are active in the ride services program, driving older adults to essential medical appointments, as well as providing the rides to places like the grocery store, church and the hair salon.

Last year, SCVN volunteers logged more than 152,000 miles and provided nearly 9,000 rides. Schrempf explains that without the volunteers, of whom 70 percent are considered seniors themselves, many would face extreme struggles to make it to essential appointments, such as weekly dialysis.

“Of those we serve, close to 80 percent are considered extremely low income and many live in an area outside of public transit,” Schrempf says.

Managing the organization isn’t easy, and yet she says it’s exactly where she was meant to be as she utilizes her life-long skills and experiences as a volunteer.

“I’ve been a volunteer my whole life. I understand the mind of a volunteer, and the expectations, and knowing what I want to get out of my service,” she adds.

Often the volunteers and those they are helping develop friendships through their shared rides and the small talk they enjoy together. And those short trips and weekly rides, provide one of the few times many home-bound seniors have social interaction and travel, knowing they can trust their safe rides.

The mission is personal to Schrempf, who remembers her own mother struggling with health issues and facing financial limitations that in many ways, outweighed the gravity of her failing health.

“I remember thinking, if I can alleviate any of that for another person, I was going to fight for that,” she says.

Senior Care Volunteer Network does more than provide rides, Schrempf says. Adding that some volunteers manage the medical equipment supply closet where McHenry County residents can borrow items they might need, such as a walker or cane, or items for post surgery, saving countless dollars especially when insurance won’t cover the equipment purchase. And there are volunteers who deliver donated flower bouquets to seniors on their birthdays.

She adds, the need for helping seniors is projected to increase as the population of those ages 60 and older continues to increase.

“It’s a very impressive program, and she’s doing a great job of marketing,” says Sue Dobbe-Leahy of Dobbe Marketing.

The two women have crossed paths numerous times in their lives and work, including Schrempf’s role as volunteer coordinator for the annual Johnny Appleseed Day Festival, where Schrempf manages more than 200 volunteers for the single-day event. Dobbe-Leahy says she is impressed by Schrempf’s ability to truly listen to her volunteers and collaborate with others.



“She has a very astute way of looking at a problem and coming up with solutions,” Dobbe-Leahy says.

And still, others in the community know Schrempf through her work with her husband in managing the Junior Bowling Association of McHenry County, where youth ages 5-18 hone their bowling skills.

While there are plenty of accomplishments for Schrempf, perhaps one of her proudest moments is when her son, now a college student, returns home at Thanksgiving. Instead of catching up on sleep, he asks her what time is their volunteer shift at The Community Harvest for the Crystal Lake Food Pantry. He was around 4 years old when he began tagging along as she volunteered in the community, and his simple question, reminds Schrempf that she, too, has created a legacy for her son on the earnest of volunteering.

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