

Daily Herald

Big Picture . Local Focus

Volunteer has her hand in many efforts

By Mary Jekielek Insprucker
Daily Herald Correspondent

Posted Sunday, January 28, 2007

As an educator for the past 24 years, Mary Szuch has taught many things. Perhaps the greatest lesson she has passed on to her family and those around her has been the importance of giving back.

The principal at Frank C. Whiteley Elementary School in Hoffman Estates, Szuch has a soft spot for children and their needs. As such, she served on the board of the Palatine Opportunity Center, representing the needs of students and families.

"They have wonderful programs for the residents in the northeast quadrant (of Palatine)," said Szuch, who was instrumental in establishing a gala fundraiser for the organization.

The Palatine Opportunity Center Cinco de Mayo Celebration at Toreo Restaurant was a mini-gala with entertainment, food, raffle and silent auction. Szuch, a Palatine resident, was responsible for organizing the entire event.

"There is a sense of community in me, and I feel it's important to do what we can so community members' needs are met," Szuch said.

Her experience as a gala chair for the Palatine Opportunity Center led her to chair another such event for the Palatine Township Senior Citizens Council.

As a volunteer board member for the organization, Szuch will oversee the affair's arrangements, including dinner, dancing and live and silent auctions. She will log some 200 volunteer hours during the yearlong preparation.

"Our family lives minutes from the center, and we felt we needed to support it because of its wonderful programs for seniors," Szuch said. "We see volunteering and assisting the community as just something you do."

As a member of the Palatine Historical Society, Szuch volunteers for several of their events, as does her husband, Frank, and daughter, Susan.

The family participated in the society's Hillside Cemetery Walk. Each was given a script and portrayed residents buried in the cemetery.

"Mary and Susan both acted in the Cemetery Walk, playing a mother and daughter," said Connie Rawa, a trustee on the board of directors for the Palatine Historical Society. "Both are very interested in the Victorian period, and they did a great job. They also acted as tour guides at one of our cemetery walks."

The Szuch family was also involved in the Palatine Historical Society's anniversary festivities.

"They volunteered at the 50th Anniversary Ice Cream Social," Rawa said. "They were in charge of children's games."

Something else the Szuch family is in charge of is activities at the Holy Family Catholic Church in Inverness. Frank serves as Ministry Leader-Eucharistic Ministers.

As such, he co-leads in training, recruiting and scheduling the church's ministers. Mary serves as a family greeter, and 11-year-old Susan is a table and light minister.

"I think it's wonderful as a family to connect to the community and make a difference," said Szuch, who credits her mother, Eugenia Stachurski, with instilling such concern for others.

"While growing up on the Northwest Side of Chicago, my mom always involved me in fundraising and seeking out donations for organizations. I would accompany her to businesses to see if they would support the Mother of Twins Organization. She always tried to make life better for people," said Szuch, who is a twin.

"Susan does the same thing with me now," Szuch said. "She waited in line with me for two hours to get an autographed football from Nathan Vasher of the Chicago Bears for an auction item for the Palatine Township Senior Citizens Council Gala on Feb. 17 at the Cotillion Banquets in Palatine."

Szuch's next challenge for the gala will be to acquire a similar autograph from Bear Devin Hester. However, she said her biggest challenge in organizing the event was securing a guest of honor. With the help of another board member, she ended up with two.

"This year our guests of honor will be WGN Radio personality Steve Cochran and former Chicago Bear Tom Waddle," Szuch said.

Szuch has also volunteered as a co-captain for the American Cancer Society Relay For Life. She organized a mini-fundraiser with food, entertainment and silent auction on short notice.

"Anyone who volunteers their time and talents, including people like Mary, is a big help," Rawa said.

[dailyherald.com](http://www.dailyherald.com)