

There is No Age Limit for Giving Back to Community
The small things we do add up in a big way when we LIVE UNITED

Gladys Stephan, United Way Loyal Contributor, believes that.

Like many children of the depression era, Gladys Stephan remembers both her parents working hard to provide for their family during very tough times. Her father worked as a carpenter and her mother grew a large garden and did lots of canning. “I grew up in Fort Atkinson, Iowa. We lived on the very edge of town and we raised chickens besides having a garden. I admired my parents. It wasn’t an easy time,” Gladys remembers.

The year following her high school graduation she arrived in Rochester to find work and has lived in the community ever since. At age 91, Gladys lives independently in the same home she and her late husband bought with one of the first GI loans made in Rochester following WWII. That was 1945.

Every Wednesday, during the good driving months, you will find her continuing to be a volunteer at St. Mary’s Hospital on Domitilla-5 as a Patient Visitor. Many times her list of patients to visit includes those who have no family or friends with them while hospitalized. She began this volunteer role before her retirement over 20 years ago.

Being able to still help by giving of her time is not the only way Gladys makes our community better. Every year for 44 years Gladys has made a gift to United Way.

“I don’t imagine everyone gives. I have not needed help but people should know it is there when they might need help. They should think about helping out the other person,” Gladys reflects on her United Way giving. In 1970, after becoming a widow, Gladys went to work at the Information Desk at St Mary’s Hospital. Before computer systems, information was put on a 3x5 card and placed into one of 3 sections on a large desk area – Admissions, Transfers and Discharges. “It was very interesting work. We were the first stop for everyone when people entered the hospital. I met people from all over the world.” Grateful people befriended her and some would even send her Christmas cards.



Part of her job was helping family members find local accommodations. For a number of years, boarding houses were located near the hospital. Gladys would personally help those who “just needed a clean room” by calling the rooming houses herself. ” It was another time,” she remembers. Once a woman and her seeing-eye dog, named Gretchen, came to her looking for a place to stay. Gladys made some calls and found a boarding house close by. The woman asked Gladys to give the directions to her seeing-eye dog. Gladys went a step further by accompanying the woman and her dog to meet the owner. Before the woman entered the home, Gretchen entered and ‘inspected’ to be sure it was safe. Gladys has never forgotten the experience of the trust the woman placed in Gretchen and Gretchen’s care for her. Gladys even received annual cards from the family even long after learning of Gretchen’s death. Gladys did for those people just what she believes the community should be doing – lending a hand and doing the little extras to help.

In her tradition of continuing to do the little things to help, Gladys continues to be a Loyal Contributor to United Way. She first learned about United Way in the workplace where she made her first gift. “I was inspired when I learned about the good that is done with the money and how they (United Way) find ways to help people.” Gladys is no longer able to travel (she has visited every state except Alaska) but you can find her actively making a difference in the community that has been her home for over 7 decades. Gladys puts it simply this way, “I’m happy to help in a small way.”

Thank you Gladys for being an example of someone who believes that the small things can add up in a big way when we LIVE UNITED.