Volunteer of the Month: Bonnie Woodford

Bonnie L. Woodford of Winona has been volunteering around the area for 25 years. (Andrew Link/Winona Daily News)

Retired Winona woman finds inspiration in helping others

It was 25 years ago when Bonnie L. Woodford was introduced to her first volunteer venture: Women in Business, then associated with the Winona Area Chamber of Commerce. She was hooked from there. “It makes you feel so good,” Woodford said. “You feel so appreciated.”

Woodford was born and raised in Winona and, after graduating from Winona Senior High School, was eager to get out of town and travel. But she soon missed home. When she returned 31 years ago, she began working at Winona State University in human resources, then transitioned to student life and development. She volunteered to serve on multiple WSU committees, which she continues today, serving on the Grandparents University and the orientation committees.

Over the years, Woodford has volunteered for the Winona Health Auxiliary and worked at the gift shop, the Grand Excursion in 2004, Visit Winona, the Clean Steamboat Task Force, the Winona American Legion, the 2006 MS TRAM, the Winona Area Chamber of Commerce and the WSU Retiree Center Advisory Board. “When I started volunteering, I had to go out and get a calendar,” Woodford said. “I seldom have a day when I don’t have something to do. Volunteering gives me energy.”

Woodford said the MS TRAM, a six-day bicycle tour to raise money for multiple sclerosis, was the most rewarding experience she’s ever been a part of.

Woodford doesn’t volunteer in a vacuum — she also recruits her friends for various events. She said when former Winona Mayor Jerry Miller’s plate was full, he would say, “Call Bonnie and tell her to gather up the girls,” referring to the team of friends and neighbors Woodford converted to ambitious volunteers.

Now that she’s retired, Woodford is committed to promoting Winona and WSU. She’s focused on her work at WSU’s Retiree Center, the Winona Health Auxiliary and the American Legion. Woodford confessed that she expected to be exhausted after 30-plus years of work, in addition to her extensive volunteer service. But these days, she’s only inspired to do even more in her position as an ambassador for Winona. Volunteering, she said, is the reason why she isn’t another bored retiree. “People need volunteers,” Woodford said. “Everybody should try and volunteer at least once or twice.” Her favorite part? The people. “I appreciate them, and they appreciate our work. For people that don’t know what it’s like, it’s made me so confident. I’ve had the opportunity to meet new friends.”