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## Buhl Day honoree Joe McLaughlin turned mother's advice into a lifetime of giving

Honoree Joe McLaughlin turned mother's advice into a lifetime of giving

By DAVID L. DYE Herald Staff Writer Aug 25, 2018



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"Don't wait to be asked to help," Joe McLaughlin says of volunteerism. "We all have abilities and we may not recognize it or we might not think they're particularly great or unique abilities, but you'd be surprised once you get involved in something, how those abilities can grow and you'll find a niche that only you can satisfy," he said.



HERMITAGE — At an early age, Joe McLaughlin acquired a passion for volunteering.

He got it from his parents. Joe said they were avid volunteers themselves, and they instilled those values in him, his sister, Sue, and brother, Charles.

“On my very first day of school, my mother told all of us, ‘Sit up straight and volunteer,’” he said.

On Labor Day, McLaughlin will be honored for a lifetime of doing just that. He joins Joe Joseph and Tom and Mitzi Kuster of Hermitage as 2018 Buhl Day honorees.

His reaction, of course, was to deflect the credit.

“I credit all the guys with a mother or a sister who said, ‘Could you take a look at this,’” he said. “Ability is nothing without opportunity, and so many people have afforded me an opportunity.”

Joe said his family spent a lot of time at Buhl Park — especially at the family-night swims they attended every day of the week. He said Gordon “Cap” Esterline, pool manager at the time, gave him and his siblings one of their earliest opportunities to volunteer, because of their Red Cross swimming lessons.

“We were kind of like the junior lifeguards. And we got to have these little whistles,” Joe said.

Starting in his sophomore year of high school, Joe worked as a “blueprint boy” at HHSDR Architects and Engineers in Sharon, where he made copies of blueprints. He worked after school, on weekends and almost every day during the summer.

When he graduated from Sharon High School in 1971, Joe attended two years at Penn State Shenango and two years at the main campus, where he received a degree in electrical engineering. While attending Penn State, he continued to work at HHSDR during the summers and on holiday breaks, which led to him being offered a job at the firm after graduation.

“When I started, I was a blueprint boy. I became an associate with the firm in 1980, and I became a partner in 2000, so I went from the lowest position to the highest position,” he said.

Joe’s sister, Sue McLaughlin, worked in a variety of roles at Sharon City School District — swim coach, teacher and guidance counselor. But she also worked as production manager on Sharon High School’s musicals. Since the productions sometimes needed help from someone with a technical background and Joe was always willing to help out, he assisted in the production of about 27 musicals.

"I remember for the production of 'Grease' she called me and said, 'We need to turn a hairdryer into a microphone,'" he said.

Working on the musicals gave Joe a chance to apply his skills to the sets or special effects, and it allowed him to work with students. He also passed on some of his knowledge and encouraged them to try their hand at technical artistry.

"A lot of times I would kind of start a project and let the students finish it. Or if a student thought they were capable of pressing the right button on a stereo at the exact right moment, then I'd let them try it," he said.

Sue — a longtime tennis instructor at Buhl Park and namesake of the park's tennis courts — helped get him involved in other projects such as Buhl Day. Joe said she asked him about 30 years ago to just "take a few pictures."

"I've gotten to do plenty of other things, too, like driving golf carts for seniors or helping out with the parade," he said.

Since he retired three years ago, Joe said he has been able to fill the void with other activities at St. Joseph's Church, where he is a lifelong member.

"I don't consider myself retired anymore. I just changed career paths and the pay is something other than money," he said.

One of those activities includes helping to hang decorations such as the church's advent wreath, which is 12 feet in diameter and hangs 10 feet above the floor. To hang other decorations, Joe said he has to climb up into the church's cupola about 65 feet up.

"I felt a little uneasy the first few times, but necessity can make people very brave," he said.

When Joe learned he would be recognized for his volunteer efforts as one of the Buhl Day honorees, he said he felt a little "embarrassed" because of his preference to stay behind the scenes.

"That's one of the reasons I like to work on special effects. I get to be behind the curtain while everyone else gets to see it and not really know how it gets done," he said.

However, Joe encouraged others to try their hand at volunteering. The good Lord above has given everyone something that they can do, he said.

“Don’t wait to be asked to help. We all have abilities and we may not recognize it or we might not think they’re particularly great or unique abilities, but you’d be surprised once you get involved in something, how those abilities can grow and you’ll find a niche that only you can satisfy,” he said.

Like David L. Dye on Facebook or email him at [ddye@sharonherald.com](mailto:ddye@sharonherald.com).

### JOE McLAUGHLIN’S VOLUNTEERISM

Joe McLaughlin’s volunteer efforts have included:

- St. John XXIII Home — Board member for about 18 years, offered technical advice on the building’s renovations and repairs.
- WaterFire Sharon — Work ranging from handing out pamphlets to stacking wood to wrapping torches.
- West Hill Ministries — Work with an after-school program Wednesdays and Thursdays in the computer lab, and other areas.
- St. Joseph’s Church — Activities include the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, Eucharistic ministry, and the senior food program.
- Buhl Park — Activities such as Spring Clean-Up.

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