

Tonya Christoffersen would rather be helping

Marysville volunteer is always on the move

By Bill Sheets
Herald Writer



LAKE STEVENS -- There aren't many charitable activities in Lake Stevens that can't in some way be linked to Tonya Christoffersen.

She's president of the Lions Club. She's community service officer of the Rotary Club. She's on the finance committee for the Lake Stevens Food Bank. She's working to get a skate park built. She's also treasurer for the Greater Lake Stevens Chamber of Commerce.

Last year, she started a group that's a combination of all those organizations, plus numerous other groups and churches, called Synergy.

For many people, if they have something they'd like to give away but they're not sure where to take it, they call Christoffersen. She'll often get the TV, or furniture, or hearing aid for an elderly man, and deliver it herself.

"A lot of stuff I do, I just go and do it," she said. This helps her see the effect of what she does. That's what she enjoys the most, she says. "I love people, I love making a difference in people's lives," she said.

Christoffersen, 48, says that because her two children are grown, she has time to volunteer. But it's hardly as if she has nothing else to do. She works full time as the office administrator for the Lake Stevens Sewer District. Before that, she worked for banks in Lake Stevens and Everett.

She said she's fortunate that her current boss, district manager Darwin Smith, knew she was an active person when he hired her and gave her his blessing. She does a lot of her volunteering at lunchtime.

A Marysville resident, she gets up at 5 a.m. and goes to the gym. That's her only personal time during the week and is important to her, she said. She sets Sunday aside to spend with her husband, the only day the couple has off together.

She's started taking an English class on Saturdays for personal enrichment. That meant she had to drop her position on the board of directors for the Lake Stevens Family Center, another nonprofit help group.

Still, Christoffersen spends most of her spare time doing things for other people.

"I'm just really impressed with her selflessness," said Lake Stevens city administrator Jan Berg, who serves with Christoffersen in the Synergy group.

Christoffersen never seems to slow down, is always on the go and always upbeat, Berg said.

"That's rare," she said.

Christoffersen has to be goaded to talk about herself.

"I don't usually tell people what I do, because it's between me and God, actually," she said.

But the results are clear. Christoffersen started the Synergy group when, from the vantage of her positions in two clubs, she saw there were more areas in which groups could work together.

The service groups meet monthly. That helps "make sure they're not duplicating something or leaving someone out," Berg said.

In September, the groups coordinated a roundup and giveaway of clothing for school-age kids in conjunction with the Family Center.

"That was created because of Synergy," Christoffersen said.

Christoffersen rallied people to collect the clothes and personally did a lot of the washing, sorting and boxing, Family Center director Kathleen Friend said.

"It was incredible," Friend said. "She works really hard to make sure people are working together for the common good."

The volunteers then served as "personal shoppers" for the kids, said Becky Daily, who will serve as president both of the Kiwanis Club and Synergy for 2008.

"We helped those kids and walked them through and made them feel comfortable," Daily said.

Last summer, the Lions, Kiwanis and Rotary clubs, the Lake Stevens Senior Center and the city agreed to have the groups split time manning the concession booth at Lundeen Park. The arrangement worked well: The city didn't have to staff it, the groups could raise some extra money and those visiting the park on a hot day could get a cold drink or a Popsicle.

For all her work, Christoffersen was named Business Leader of the Year for 2007 by the chamber.

She has been involved in causes all her life, she said, starting with charity work as a child growing up in Bothell, attending Easter Seals camps.

" 'Tonya, you can't carry the weight of the world on your shoulders,' " she said her mother told her.

Still, she'd like to do more in the world at large. She immensely enjoyed a trip to Mexico for the Rotary Club, distributing wheelchairs. Next, she'd like to take a trip on behalf of the Lions Club to give out used eyeglasses in a developing nation.

"If you can just change one person's life and make a difference, they can do the same for another person," she said. "I believe that giving is everything, that we should reach out and help our fellow man."

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