




Difference Maker: Marlene Lewis Gives Back in Retirement

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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ALTON - For most people, retirement is a time to relax. For Marlene Lewis, it's a chance to volunteer to make the Riverbend community a better place.

Lewis believes her career in Community Relations and Development at Alton Memorial Hospital has prepared her to volunteer her time now with the Salvation Army, Alton Woman's Home Association and Alton Main Street. She encourages others to get involved and help out the community where possible.

"It's great because I'm retired, so I do have time to do these things. And like I mentioned, a lot of the things that I'm working on are things that are similar to my career path, so they're areas that I'm comfortable with and have a good understanding of," Lewis said. "It's just a wonderful way to meet people and to feel good about yourself and give your life a meaningful purpose that I think we all really want to have in our lives. So I hope that anyone that reads this that isn't already volunteering but thinking about it would go ahead and give it a try, because it really is a great experience."

Lewis has been on the Salvation Army board for almost 20 years and has loved "being a part of it and seeing how it's grown over the years." She also volunteers with the Alton Woman's Home Association, a group that grants funds to local organizations to help women, children and senior citizens. As Lewis used to write grants as part of her job, she says it's been "really enjoyable" to be "on the opposite side of the fence."

"Working with those organizations has given me a real awareness of what the needs are and what the resources are and how we can make the most of those resources to help people," Lewis added. "I think once you have an idea of how many agencies in the community are working and how they work together and how they work to meet the needs, I think you really connect with that and you feel a part of it and you want to do what you can to help."

Additionally, 25 years after Lewis first served on the Alton Main Street Board, she will start a new term this month. All three of these board positions may seem like a lot to juggle, but Lewis is passionate about the work. To her, it isn't work at all.

She is especially moved by the Salvation Army. As the [Salvation Army wraps up its Red Kettle Campaign](#), Lewis noted the organization's power in the community and her gratitude to be a part of it.

“They meet very real basic needs for people. They give out food, they provide hot meals, they give out clothing, emergency assistance, they provide showers for people in the community,” Lewis explained. “We have a program called Pathway of Hope and it’s coordinated by a staff member who has been trained to work one-on-one with individuals and families to help them get to a better place in their lives. So they’re not just meeting the immediate needs, but they’re looking at the future of these families and these individuals and doing what they can to get them on a better path.”

Lewis is also passionate about the Salvation Army’s afterschool program, which takes students ages 5–15. The kids do their homework, eat a snack and a meal, complete a devotional and play. The program also brings in volunteers to provide music lessons and share other skills with the kids that, Lewis points out, they wouldn’t have access to if they simply went home after school.

This passion for the cause guides Lewis through most of her volunteer work, and she encourages others to think about their own interests as they decide where to volunteer. While it can be difficult knowing where to start, she suggests that anyone who wants to get involved in the community can call local organizations and see what help is needed.

“I think people just need to think of what their skills are and what they enjoy doing,” she said. “I wish I had a clear answer, but I think people should probably just make a few calls and talk to different organizations and then see if they can find the right fit...If you can volunteer doing something that you enjoy doing, all the better.”

For more information about volunteer opportunities in the Riverbend region, check out [this article](#) on [RiverBender.com](https://riverbender.com). The Salvation Army will collect donations for their Red Kettle Campaign through Jan. 31, 2024. You can mail donations to 525 Alby Street in Alton or [donate online](#) at the [official Alton Salvation Army website](#).



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of the Riverbend