



Jeannette Massey Steps Down as Volunteer at Age 91

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ALTON, IL – At an age when many senior citizens need all the help they can get, Jeannette Massey was still providing valuable help of her own.

Massey, 91, has been an insurance counselor for the Senior Health Insurance Program (SHIP) at Alton Memorial Hospital's OASIS office since the office opened in May 1989. She volunteered at the hospital for almost 25 years until her last day April 1. Jeannette is moving to Paducah, Ky., to live near her daughter.

“I think I’ve been volunteering here almost as long as I was a teacher,” says Massey, who indeed taught elementary school in the Wood River-Hartford School District for 27 years. “Before that, I did work for State Farm during World War II, although I had never worked directly with health insurance until I started doing this.”

As a SHIP counselor, Massey helped seniors understand their Medicare bills and other insurance issues. She was named the SHIP Volunteer of the Year for southern Illinois in 1998. The local SHIP office was also named the Office of the Year by the Illinois Department of Insurance in 2001.

Irene McLaughlin, AMH volunteer coordinator, said that Jeannette finished with 15,928 volunteer hours.

“She was here faithfully on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays helping senior citizens to get insurance companies to pay for things they said they wouldn’t,” McLaughlin said. “She averaged as much as 75 hours per month.”

Some people are so dedicated to their jobs that they're accused of sleeping at the office. Although a volunteer, Massey did exactly that on one occasion – although there were extenuating circumstances.

“Her home didn't have any power after one of the storms,” McLaughlin said. “So Jeannette got permission to come to the hospital and stayed overnight in the OASIS office.”

Carolyn Trammel of OASIS says that Massey got involved with SHIP to help others.

“Jeannette saw seniors worrying about bills and finances at a time when their health or the health of a loved one was in jeopardy,” Trammel says. “She wanted to help ease their emotional load.”

Massey said she got involved as a volunteer to stay active in a social setting after she retired and because she didn't want to sit at home alone. She has two children, three grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren – most of whom live in Alaska.

“I get a lot of thank you notes, gifts and cookies from people who are so grateful for the help,” she says. “The reward I received was the smile on their faces when they tell me I've taken a burden off their shoulders. That's my pay.”

The OASIS/SHIP office, located on Alton Memorial Hospital's ground floor near the Beeby Wing elevators, is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and still has a skilled set of volunteers on hand to help.

In addition to counseling and claim assistance, the SHIP office provides information on long-term care, prescription drug assistance and Medicare for people with disabilities. Appointments for this free service can be scheduled by calling 1-800-392-0936. Anyone interested in becoming a SHIP counselor should call Trammel at 314-653-4345.

PHOTO BY DAVE WHALEY

Jeannette Massey, front center, with OASIS co-workers, top row left to right, Kathleen Stice and Carolyn Trammel; Shirley Wheatley, left, and Cathy Bryant.