

## Retirement spurs woman into volunteerism

by Elizabeth A. Stoltz | Staff Writer

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Joyce Routzahn, a longtime Middletown resident, is retired from teaching school, but still remains active in her community volunteering and educating others.

“What I’ve enjoyed most in my life has been what I’ve done in retirement ...,” Routzahn said. “It’s amazing what one can do after retiring.”

Her current project is establishing a hospice house in the Middletown Valley to help terminally ill patients who would otherwise have to travel to Frederick city to spend their final days.

Routzahn is planning an information session on the topic at 7 p.m., July 10, at Middletown Municipal Hall. In the meantime, she is making phone calls to find donors.

Ideally, the hospice would be located on a several acres with nursing care available. Each room of would have access to the outdoors.

“We need [a hospice] in our area so people can come here rather than having to travel,” Routzahn said. “It’s a whole new experience doing something that’s not here.”

Routzahn’s dream came about after several of her friends who lived in the Middletown Valley needed hospice care. Hearing their loved ones’ stories of sleeping on uncomfortable couches to visit a loved one who was gravely ill inspired her to create a hospice closer to home.

The hospice house isn’t her first endeavor into community activism. Routzahn started her volunteer career years ago, teaching youth how to read. Now she tutors three adults in reading with the Literacy Council of Frederick County.

Carolyn Gaver, who has worked with Routzahn for more than 30 years at the literacy council, said Routzahn’s passion for literacy has given many adults the power of reading.

“She is extremely dedicated to teaching people to read and promotes literacy,” Gaver said. “She always goes out of her way to talk about it and encourage others to help with the problem.”



Tom Fedor/The Gazette

Joyce Routzahn’s latest volunteer endeavor is attempting to establish a hospice house in Middletown valley.

Gaver said Routzahn's work extends beyond the Middletown area and her determination to teach others to read transcends boundaries.

"She's a very, very, very upbeat, positive and motivating type of person who always finds the positive side of a situation and makes an opportunity of it," Gaver said. "What a good dynamic, caring individual she is because she has made a difference in her community."

Routzahn is reluctant to share information about herself; instead she loves to learn about others.

"I don't enjoy telling my story; I enjoy hearing other people's stories," she said.

Routzahn is a member of the Middletown Valley Business Association and is helping to organize a health expo June 30.

She also helped organize a yard sale at her Linden Boulevard home in March to benefit Middletown Valley People Helping People. Funds raised went to help others in need living in the Middletown Valley.

Also with that group, she helps coordinate transportation for those who need to get to medical appointments, collects items for food baskets for needy families and finds drivers to deliver Meals on Wheels.

Dottie Engle, Routzahn's neighbor, also a member of Middletown Valley People Helping People, said she has known Routzahn for nearly 40 years. The two met when Routzahn moved to Middletown from Baltimore County to take care of her ailing father in the 1960s. Engle said Routzahn has excellent character and has done so much for the valley community.

"She's amazing," Engle said. "The wheels in her head never stop turning to think of new ways to help our community. She's always willing to help. She also does things that benefit people outside our community. She's a kind, caring and generous person."

Engle said Routzahn has always been a teacher, first teaching at a beautician school in Baltimore County before moving to Middletown. She spent a majority of her teaching career in Frederick County public schools, including at Valley Elementary, Engle said.

Routzahn now hosts workshops called "Tutoring Tutors How To Tutor," during which she teaches others how to teach reading. She also leads the workshops at area prisons.

When she isn't volunteering, Routzahn likes to take care of her outdoor plants and attend church and social groups.

"I like to stay busy and active in my community," she said. "I enjoy meeting people from different backgrounds. My life is of learning through conversations with different people."

Routzahn has won numerous awards for her volunteer efforts and was named to the Maryland Senior Citizens Hall of Fame in 2006. The former principal at Rock Creek School, Doris Remsberg, nominated her, for her work to helping students with special needs, Engle said.

She is amazed at the number of her neighbors who consistently volunteer, as she does.

“Nobody says you have to volunteer but it’s always beautiful when people want to help others,” Routzahn said. “The people here have good, caring hearts. There are people here who genuinely want to help others.”

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