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Success: Woznick gives her all to give back

Monica M. Walk Special to Action Reporter Media
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Editor's note: This article is one of 10 "success stories," from Action Reporter Media's annual Success publication. For more stories, find the section inserted in The Reporter on Oct. 25.



Habitat for Humanity President of Board of Directors, Julie Woznick sits on one of the many pieces of furniture in the ReStore store on Scott Street. Doug Raflik/Action Reporter Media

Gratitude for renewed health planted a deep desire for Julie Woznick to give back.

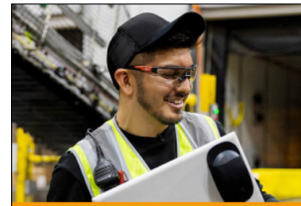
In 2003, she was diagnosed with thyroid cancer, which spiked a weight gain. A successful weight loss procedure performed in Costa Rica in 2009 was more than a physical transformation.

"I was given another chance on life," said Woznick, who had experienced her grandfather dying when he was in his 50s and her father dying at age 45. "I got a second chance and I wanted to pay it forward."

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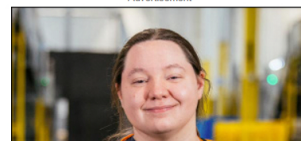
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Twin opportunities arrived in 2010, setting Woznick on her personal path of volunteerism. She completed Leadership Fond du Lac, the Association of Commerce program that joins area workers in team-building focused on improving the community, and she participated on a mission trip to rural Nicaragua, sponsored through Holy Family parish. Both situations led to enduring volunteer relationships and a commitment to do more.

“Leadership Fond du Lac keeps you in contact with the city’s needs,” said Woznick of her initial link to Habitat for Humanity and Big Brothers Big Sisters, both in Fond du Lac County.

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Annual elections were scheduled during her fourth or fifth meeting of the local chapter of the nonprofit housing organization Habitat.

“I said, ‘I’ll be secretary,’” recalled Woznick, adding, “I don’t know the word ‘No.’” She is in her third year as president of Habitat’s board of directors.

Her leadership role with the local Habitat group includes CEO-CFO tasks, such as participating in closing events for new homeowners and signing checks for payroll, as well as working on expansion of the ReStore, managed by Executive Director Paul Osterholm.

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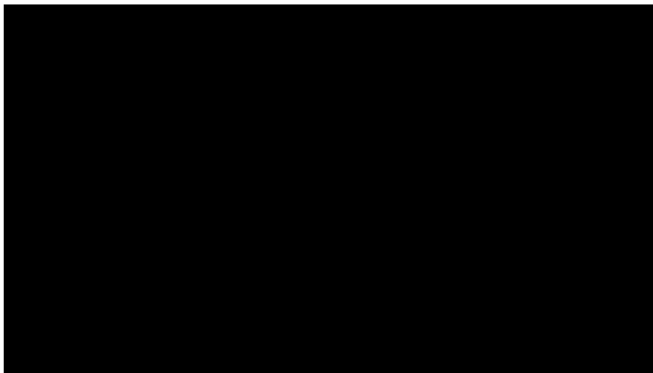
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“I have become a better person because of Julie,” said Osterholm, who has been running the store for three years. “She has a heart as big as the Star of Bethlehem. As much as she juggles her professional career and community doings — the woman is amazing. She is intelligent, caring and has empathy. She is a quiet leader in our community. The people around her become better people because of her leadership and humbleness. We are blessed to have her lead us in the community.”

Woznick also makes a board leadership commitment to Big Brothers Big Sisters of Fond du Lac County, where she holds the role of vice president and president elect.



Alicia Brewer, Nick Krueger, Julie Woznick, and Paul Osterholm talk over some papers in a back room at the ReStore, store on Scott Street. *Doug Raflik/Action Reporter Media*

“Our board is a working board.” Executive Director Tammy Young said of the

Our board is a working board, Executive Director Tammy Young said of the volunteers who support the organization's one-on-one mentoring of children. "They all need to jump in feet first and do fundraisers. Julie is instrumental in all we do. She sits on committees and volunteers her husband, Ray, who helps, too. We can count on her when we need something done."

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Board and committee commitments mean Woznick attends multiple weekly meetings, with meeting times ranging from 6:45 a.m. through lunch and evening events. She estimates she spends 10 to 20 hours weekly on volunteering.

Plus, she works full-time for Charter Communications. As a direct sales supervisor, she may work 60 hours per week, divided between the office and the door-to-door sales team in the field. The scheduling flexibility, and Woznick's 15 years with the company, makes it possible to attend the meetings supporting the volunteer work. Using Outlook's calendaring function lets her know where she is supposed to be, and when.

"I have to thank Charter for putting me through Leadership Fond du Lac," Woznick said of the experience that launched her volunteerism. She began working in the company's call center when her daughter was young, and was promoted through several positions. "I love my job, and they have been great to me. Charter is very supportive and cares about its employees."

Woznick's long tenure with the company also provides the vacation time she uses for mission trips.

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On a mission

Initially, the decision to go on her first mission trip was a personal puzzle.

"I just saw an ad in the church bulletin — 'Do you want to come to Nicaragua?' and I said, 'Yea, I do,'" Woznick recalled. "But I didn't know why I was there. Then, I saw the children. They were so happy with so little. My daughter was at St. Mary's Springs since pre-K. She and her friends are spoiled: They don't know what it is to be with no power or no food in the cupboards. I needed to bring students there, to experience another part of the world."

Woznick has since created and led four mission trips for youth, taking high school students and adults to Rosita, Nicaragua; Cebu City, Philippines; Sabana Yegua, Dominican Republic; and Tola Rivas, Nicaragua. Trip locations have been chosen through referrals and connections of participants.

"We need to do work. It's not a vacation," said Woznick. Students have cleaned, painted, built fencing and church pews, and provided nutrition programs, school skills and childcare. The work is completed with tools and materials funded by the students and in conditions that include spotty electricity and eight-hour workdays.

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“Ghandi said, ‘Be the change you wish to see in the world,’ and we can, thanks to Julie by organizing these trips,” said Jean Hintze, who has participated in two of the trips. Her three children have also participated, with the two older children going on two trips. “Most of us yearn to go back. At the end of the trip, the young adults who attend change. They have a new perspective on life, and respect and awareness for people living in poverty. Volunteering back in the U.S. becomes much more meaningful, to help those in need here.”

Springs High School theology teacher Carol Huck also sees that growth. “Students write about their perspective ... and examine their life,” Huck said. “It is eye-opening: They don’t see and know that kind of poverty.”

Huck noted that Woznick met numerous times with trip participants in preparation of the tips. “She was passionate about wanting to do this to expose students,” Huck said. “It is an incredible outreach of service.”

Traveling to do the mission work first requires work at home: The trips are self-funded and students are required to participate in service hours and fundraising. Participants regularly work at breakfast events at the local American Legion Hall, and provide the Mothers Day brunch at the site. They also work parking cars at Walleye Weekend.

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“The church is pleased with Julie’s efforts to give students an opportunity to serve the most vulnerable in our society and to give the students an opportunity to participate in the missionary life of the church,” said Pastor Ryan J. Pruess of Holy Family Catholic Community.

Volunteer Recognition

Woznick gives even more. For the past five years, she has created the program booklet for the annual Servant to the Poor Banquet held by St. Vincent DePaul. She and her spouse cater the holiday party for the Catholic War Veterans of Fond du Lac. Last year, they welcomed a high school foreign exchange student from Hungary into their home.

Woznick was honored with the Carl W. Tonjes Volunteer Award for her outstanding community work at the 2015 Cheers for Volunteers event. She was nominated by Osterholm. “It was the first award I ever won, or was even nominated for,” Woznick said.

Woznick credits her strength and determination to overcoming childhood adversity. “My mother was an alcoholic and money was an issue,” she said. “It’s how I became strong and independent. I moved out when I was 18. Don’t tell me I can’t do something. I’ll do it.”

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With her daughter in college, Woznick continues to look for more to do with her energy. "Idle time is wasted," she said. "I can't imagine sitting still. I care about what I do. I will give you 110 percent. I will give you all I have. I don't do it for recognition: I do it because it's the right thing to do, and I have the time."

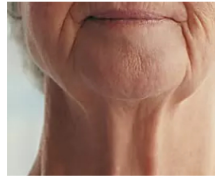


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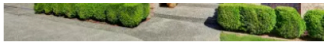
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