

Joe's Story



Joe Appel

There is always something special when you talk with someone who has a long time relationship with an organization. The understanding of history and insight that comes over time is something to be valued and cherished. To be part of the caring, nurturing, and growing that occurs while various challenges loom on the horizon. Here at the Berrien County Cancer Service (BCCS), we are privileged to have many volunteers who have sacrificed much time and energy. One such person is **Joe Appel**. Joe has been a long-time board member for BCCS, an amazing 54 years. He has recently retired

from the board but continues to volunteer and spread good will for the Berrien County Cancer Service. Here is his story as well as comments from Barbara Lane, RN who was a nurse for BCCS for 37 years and director for 28 years along with Rita Reid, a founding member and spokesperson for BCCS for many years.

Joe was invited by his employer, Dick Willard (of F & M Bank) to become the treasurer of the BCCS board around 1958. At that time, BCCS was located in a wooden house on Lake St. in the Silver Beach area. He related how Olove Colcord was the director and there were only 4-5 checks to sign. As time went by, the job grew and Joe found himself working on the budget and taxes, all with pencil and paper. At that time, there were separate United Ways for Niles, Buchanan, Benton Harbor and surrounding towns along with having to make presentations to each one of them. Rita Reid, commented, "What I remember most about Joe is that he prepared all the financial statements every year for United Way from the time he was elected to the time he retired. The preparation of the financial reports are very detailed. Joe and I would appear at the United Way. I would present the budget that Joe prepared and I was always very proud of the accuracy and quality of Joes' work." Barbara also expressed appreciation of Joe's work. "Joe always knew all the amounts of money in and out. He always presented a perfect budget to United Way." Despite changes in tax laws, sales tax and insurance, Joe had an excellent reputation with the auditors. He remembers one telling him, "It's all there, I don't even need you."

During these early years, BCCS faced location challenges. Joe could rattle off the various locations including Lester St. in St. Joseph, the Old Boy Scout building on State St., Red Arrow Highway just north of Glenlord Road, and then finally settling in the current location in 1987. This building had space, which was a change from some of the other locations. With space, loan closet could be developed and there would be room to have support groups and run fundraisers.

One such fundraiser that Barbara started in 1989 was Pennies for Patients™. It is one thing to plan a fundraiser and another to execute it. Again, Joe came to the rescue for the problem of how to count the pennies. Joe related how there was an old penny counter in a back room at the bank he worked named “Old Trustworthy”. He would sneak it out of the bank for a day then he and Barbara’s late husband, Don, would have to get it back. He and Barbara chuckled as they remembered the time a penny bag broke for Don, leaving him scrambling for \$50 worth of pennies while they were trying to haul all the pennies to the bank. It wasn’t easy to find someone who would transport thousands of dollars of pennies. One trucking company agreed to do it, but they lasted only 1 year. Finally Brinks came to the rescue and have accommodated BCCS each year since.

Despite all the time and energy that Joe contributed to BCCS, he still found ways to help in the community and with other organizations. He laughed about being the treasurer of 5 different organizations at the same time. “When I served on a board with school, church, the country club or other organization, I often was asked to be the treasurer.” Besides treasurer, he sometimes found himself outside of his comfort zone, like the time he carved 500 turkeys! His wife, Wilma, was also active with sororities, committees, and a charter member of the Band Boosters at Lake Michigan Catholic High School. Joe and his wife are the kind of people that make a difference in the community and wherever they go. When asked what kinds of things he is enjoying these days, he says he finds himself working in the yard, doing crossword puzzles, watching old movies on the computer, and spending time with his family. His grandchildren had the privilege of having “grandpa” teach them how to swim and ride a bike. His face became more serious as he spoke of a daughter who died of cancer and how he himself is a cancer survivor.

Joe, thank you for your time and dedication to the Berrien County Cancer Service. Volunteers are the backbone of our organization and you have been a constant support through the many years.

Written by:

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