

Judy Sjostedt

Executive Director

Parkersburg Area Community Foundation & the Regional Affiliate Foundations of Ritchie, Doddridge, Pleasants and Jackson Counties Chair, WV Community Foundations Consortium

Judy started with the Parkersburg Area Community Foundation (PACF) in June of 1999. Created in 1963, PACF is a modest-sized foundation (\$9.5 million in 220 different funds) covering ten rural counties, nine in WV and one in OH. PACF has adopted the moniker of “Our Community’s Foundation” to encompass the four county-level affiliate foundations that developed under its charitable umbrella in the past four years. Judy’s work in developing the regional affiliate operations has been supported with private foundation grants for staffing from the Claude Worthington Benedum and McDonough Foundations (PACF’s staff consisted of two full time employees in 1999 and today consists of three full time and four part timers).

Despite the fact that six of the nine WV counties under the PACF umbrella are labeled by the Appalachian Regional Commission as “economically distressed,” Judy remains optimistic about ferreting out funds to support West Virginia’s needs.

Judy arrived in WV in 1980, a new bride with a new life, seeking opportunities and finding few in a state suffering from years of persistent poverty. Her first WV job was as Equal Employment Opportunity Manager for the Internal Revenue Service state headquarters, recruiting female and minority candidates for IRS jobs. After being in the paid workforce and delivering three children in four years, she took three years off of paid employment to lose her mind chasing three toddlers (she has no memory of those years). When the third one entered nursery school and she couldn’t handle being home alone, she returned to paid employment as the International Employee Coordinator for a DuPont site, working with multi-national employees in the U.S. and abroad, facilitating international employees and their families’ integration into local communities and managing numerous cross-cultural crises.

After three years, with a corporate level human resources cutback looming, she set up a technical writing company and for the next few years was its President and COE (Chief & Only Employee). Her company held contracts with DuPont and Nova Chemical companies at sites in NJ, WV and OH, for training and technical writing services. While the work was quite lucrative, it bored her silly and she was in danger of leaving her family and taking off for Tahiti on a fast ship.

Technical work was absolutely failing to meet her personal desire to make the proverbial difference, so during this same period, she also served as a publicly elected leader – on the school board of a local system with 14,500 students and a \$91 million dollar budget – president for two of her eight years. This job piqued her interest in working to improve WV education so she closed up her technical writing company, took a vow of poverty and became the statewide partnerships in education program manager for the Education Alliance, a non-profit, statewide organization that paired business community interests with school systems across West Virginia.

It was in that position, traveling all 55 counties throughout the state that she first observed the tremendous poverty that still exists in many rural WV communities and the difficulties in traversing the state and felt called to act. She found it encouraging that in spite of the incredible poverty she found a sharing, neighborly character, regardless of what corner of the state she traveled.

Just as she was having a mid-life crisis and embarking on a month long trip to Korea (as part of a Rotary Group Study Exchange Team), local community leaders called her to advise that they would be seeking a

full time director for her hometown community foundation and inquired whether she was interested. Judy asked, "What's a community foundation?" And, the rest is history.

She deserted her family, ran off to Korea for a month, had the time of her life in her 40th year, came back to a family that still took her back, and got hired by the community foundation (who knew nothing of what she had done in Korea for the month). Not only that, but two years later got elected chair of the state's fledgling community foundation consortium. (They didn't know about Korea, either.)

She is now an absolute pillar of the community. She graduated from Assumption College in Worcester, MA, with a B.A. back when the dinosaurs roamed. She's been married for over 20 years to John Sjostedt and has three children, one at WVU-Morgantown, one at WV Wesleyan and one at Parkersburg South (who are great kids despite their mother being a manic workaholic). She received the 2001 WEALTH Award (Women of Excellence & Leadership Timely Honored) for her work with the Foundation from Altrusa and the YWCA of Parkersburg. She belongs to Rotary, Altrusa, the Junior League of Parkersburg, and St. Pauls United Methodist Church.

She apologizes for this bio being a two pager, but hopes that the reader has enjoyed it. As she is nearly a half century old, there is much more she could share about herself but probably shouldn't.

Judy's favorite quote is, "When you come to the edge of all the light you know, and are about to step off into the darkness of the unknown, faith is knowing one of two things will happen: There will either be something solid to stand on or you will be taught how to fly." (Barbara J. Winter said those remarks but Judy says that they're sure appropriate when it comes to building community philanthropy.)