



GRINDSTONE AWARD



2016

Tom & Marie Herr

For Herrs, retirement means building on volunteerism

Kiwanis. Habitat for Humanity. AFS. Meals on Wheels. Berea Softball. Youth for Christ.

Those are just some of the activities that keep Tom and Marie Herr busy in the Berea community. Their reaction to being named the Grindstone Award recipients for 2016? "Total surprise," said Marie Herr. "Over the years, we've done some things, but not recently."

Those who nominated the couple beg to differ.

One nominating letter stated, "Neither of them is boastful about all they have done and still do for our community and its citizens. As a result, they are the kind of people whose outreach and community assistance are often overlooked."

Both Tom and Marie are retired from the Berea City School District. Tom was a guidance counselor and administrator at Berea High School, assistant principal at Ford Middle School and retired in 1994 as principal of Snow School at the Berea Children's Home, now known as Guidestone. He then worked part time for 13 years to manage the Berea Schools' child care program. Marie began her career as a kindergarten teacher and retired as a tutor at Big Creek Elementary School.

Retirement meant continuing their community involvement and adding to the list of activities.

Tom served as president of Kiwanis twice and annually heads up the scholarship committee. Marie, although not a member of Kiwanis, volunteers her time at club projects. Habitat for Humanity is sort of a second career for both of them. Tom builds and Marie works in the office. They became involved with Habitat through their church, St. Paul Lutheran Church, and their pastor, Rev. Tom Henderson.

They coordinated the building of the first Habitat house in Berea on High Street in 1994. Since then, Tom has worked on 30 Habitat houses. Currently, he's part of the crew renovating two homes in Cleveland.

"We're doing painting, dry-walling and vinyl siding," he said. "I'm not a construction guy," he said. "I'm more of a generalist."

Also at the church, Tom ushers and is on the summer lawn mowing crew. Marie volunteers in the church office and sings in the Praise Choir. She is involved with Love in the Name of Christ, a clearinghouse for those seeking help with utilities, food and jobs.

"We act as a referral service. We want people to know that the church is vital for those needing a bit of help," she said. For several years, Marie worked in the office of Cleveland Youth for Christ and shopped for Meals on Wheels.

The Herrs hosted an AFS exchange student from Norway in 1975-76 and have visited her family three times. In 2007, they traveled to China at the invitation of a Chinese exchange teacher they hosted. The teacher had spent a year with the Berea Schools. They also have traveled with the Road Scholar Program (formerly Elderhostel). The latest adventure was petting grey whales off Baja California this spring.

For several years, Tom umpired with the Berea Softball League while Marie kept score. During that time, Tom was the timer for the Berea boys' basketball team and he currently volunteers for the Berea Relays.

Neither is a native of northeast Ohio but consider Berea "the best place to raise our family." Tom hails from Tipp City, Ohio, and Marie from Washington, D.C. They met at Wittenberg College and have been married 56 years.

Their children are all graduates of Berea High School. Daughter Cathy Pausch lives in Collins, Ohio, with husband Steve and their six children. She is a substitute teacher and works as a part time counselor in a crisis pregnancy center. Daughter Sue Allen and husband Steve with their four children live in Atlanta. Sue is women's ministry director in a mega church and has written several devotional books. Son Andy is an economics professor at St. Vincent College in Latrobe, Pa. He and wife Pilar have two children.

"Family activities, volunteering and travel will continue to be our way of life," Marie said. "We are not just going to sit on our duffs," added Tom.

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