



Susan Dunning

Susan Dunning said goodbye to her management position in human resources (HR) at Sarnoff Corporation in 2005 and was ready for something very different. She had spent the last 25 years working in the corporate world, but volunteering to work with children was something she had always wanted to pursue.

So, in November 2005, when Big Brothers and Big Sisters (BBBS) of Mercer County came calling with a need to fill their executive director position, Susan accepted the job with enthusiasm and vigor. She thought it would be a unique way to positively affect the lives of many children in need.

The mission of BBBS-Mercer is to help vulnerable youth reach their potential. The organization does this by professionally supporting one-to-one mentoring relationships with an adult volunteer. It also measures the results of those relationships.

At the beginning of 2006, BBBS-Mercer had 105 active mentoring matches. Under the watch of Susan, alongside her hard-working staff and Board of Directors, the total had grown to 585 matches by the end of 2009.

The growing success of BBBS-Mercer has attracted national recognition. At the BBBS national convention in June 2009, it received a second straight Gold Standard Pinnacle Award. The award recognizes outstanding growth and quality programs in consecutive years. Mercer-BBBS became one of just two agencies nationwide (out of 400)

to receive that 2009 honor. Mercer's board was also recognized as the 2009 BBBS "Board of the Year" for mid-sized agencies.

Overall, BBBS-Mercer has been among the top five percent of all U.S. BBBS agencies for three straight years. So how did Susan help the agency reach these achievements?

Well, for one, all that HR experience really came in handy.

Susan often arranged for and participated in corporate training programs. Curricula covered financial planning, setting goals and strategies, and managing people and performance. She also worked with many forms of software and management systems. That helped her organize a consistent workflow for BBBS-Mercer and automate the office for growth.

"It's all about creating a strong infrastructure and having the right people," Susan says. "We've been building a very good team and Board. They've all helped the organization—and me—grow. There are also many other caring individuals, corporate partners and foundations who are part of our success, so I count my blessings every day."

Most children served by BBBS-Mercer live in single-parent homes, or with grandparents or guardians. Mentoring the kids means matching them with caring adults based on common interests. And those interests can be as simple as a shared love of baseball.

"Our mentors help children realize their strengths and talents, which builds self esteem," Susan said. "They open doors so the children can see a path to a brighter future. It is truly an honor to be able to watch so many children benefit from our program."

Heading BBBS-Mercer keeps Susan on the go. She attends many agency-sponsored and community events. She and her staff frequently reach out to universities, alumni groups, churches and service organizations. They're often invited by corporations to conduct recruiting seminars. Susan tops that off by networking with a large group of professional women most Wednesday nights at the Salt Creek Grille on Route 1.

Her schedule may be hectic, but the instinct to help may be something Susan was born with.

Susan's parents, Paul and Mary Krause, always found time to be very active in her hometown of Lebanon PA while raising eight kids. Her father, now 87, was an engineer by trade who coached youth sports and organized many youth sporting banquets. He also served as Chairman of South Lebanon Township for 28 years. At 84, her mother still volunteers for the church and takes communion to seniors.

Her four brothers and three sisters are also active members of their communities.

Susan and her husband, Joe, head of Mergers and Acquisitions and Tax for J.M. Huber Corporation, have four grown sons, three daughters-in-law and four toddler grandsons. The couple recently moved from Princeton to New Hope, into what she calls her "retirement home."

The way Susan speaks passionately about BBBS-Mercer, however, retirement is something that remains packed away in an unopened moving box. ■