

Tireless volunteer reaches out to embrace entire community
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BEDFORD — Years ago, Wendie Lunsford started volunteering at her children's schools and her family's church. Now with her children nearly grown, she's still volunteering, and her work is benefiting an entire community.

Lunsford, 43, a mother of two teenagers, a caregiver for her 94-year-old grandmother in Hurst and a stained-glass artisan, is a powerhouse of community service.

She leads Bible discussion groups at First United Methodist Church of Hurst, organizes teen discussion groups at L.D. Bell High School and helped found a children's library inside Mission Central food bank in Hurst.

But she is perhaps best known as someone people in Northeast Tarrant County can call on for any charitable project. If she can't do it, she often knows someone who can.

"Her sense of social consciousness is far beyond that of the average person," said Matte Thompson, a counselor at Bellaire Elementary School in Hurst. "She is just a caring, dedicated human being. She's a visionary. You can tell her heart is really in it."

In 2000, Lunsford was honored by the State Board of Education with a Heroes for Children award for her volunteer work, which averages 30 hours a week.

"I believe that if you want it good for your own child, you've got to want it good for all kids," she said. "You've got to want it for the whole community."

Brian Uzzi, a Northwestern University professor of leadership, calls people like Lunsford "brokers" for their ability to encourage sharing across social circles. Such people make up less than 15 percent of the population, he said.

So why is Lunsford such a rarity? People close to her said they can't tell for sure; the elements that help make a good community servant just seem to be part of her nature.

"I wish I knew the answer, because that's why we love her so much," said Monte Ramey, who knows Lunsford from church. "She truly has a nonperishable desire to help kids of all ages from elementary to high school, and everything she does is around that. Where it comes from, I honestly don't know."

'She just thrives on it'

Lunsford's husband, Lynn, writes for The Wall Street Journal. She works part time making commissioned pieces of stained-glass windows.

She describes her volunteer workweeks as unstructured — "I was just called up and asked, 'Would you do this?' and I was like, 'Sure!'" — with new projects welcomed as "opportunities."

At a recent parents night at Harrison Lane Elementary School in Hurst, Lunsford encouraged adults to pick up reading material for their kids and engaged shy students in conversation, quickly getting them to smile and open up.

Faye Beaulieu, a United Way project director, watched Lunsford from a distance.

"I think she just thrives on it, and it's just a sense of purpose for her," Beaulieu said. She said she made Lunsford part of the United Way's steering committee to capitalize on her drive and contacts.

Beaulieu, who is also on the Hurst-Euless-Bedford school board, said Lunsford often meets teenagers through her volunteer work. She then brings them along to her next project.

"Wendie rarely shows up by herself," Beaulieu said. "She's often got teenagers in tow because she's so invested in their understanding the importance of community service."