

# Community Profile

## 'Tireless' community volunteer uses life experiences as stepping stones

BY ANDY COMBER

When you visit Joanne McMurren, you are greeted by the countless smiles of family and friends pictured in the scores of photographs that adorn her Woodslee home.

"I started taking photographs when I was eight years old," said Joanne, who at age 62 still has the original Kodak Brownie camera that captured so many moments from her life on film.

"It was always family pictures. Most of the time you wouldn't see me in the photo, because I was taking the picture with that little Brownie," she said.

Although all the images are treasured, Joanne is most fond of another photographer's work, a family portrait taken as a gift for her 60th birthday on June 5, 2004.

"I wanted a family picture, and I got it. It is my pride and joy," she said.

Born and raised on a farm in Pleasant Park, just north of Essex, Joanne was one of seven children born to Patrick and Amelia (Dahl) Renaud.

"My dad always called me Jo," said Joanne, who credits her parents and rigours of farm work for the stamina to stick to a job and see it through to the end.

"I've always been a people person, and believe each and every one of us could write a book about their life, because everyone has an interesting story to tell."

Joanne began her education at a two-room schoolhouse, SS#2 - Sacred Heart Catholic School. It was a time and place she would revisit - getting involved in a centennial celebration for the school in July 1995, after being approached by

other alumni, including Pleasant Park residents Ed Byrne and Tim McGuire.

"We knew Joanne would want to be a part of the reunion," said McGuire, who was a classmate at the school with Byrne and Joanne's younger brother.

"Joanne is a tireless workhorse when it comes to research, just the person you want to be a part of a project like that. She is organized and she is thorough. She tells you her

supply teacher as the family grew with the addition of three children, Michael, Tracey and Erin. Joanne measures the joy of her children as the highest point in her life, and the lowest point by the loss of her son Michael to a tragic accident in 1986.

"You have to carry on in this cycle of life," said Joanne, who has found strength from her faith and family during her most difficult moments in life.

years old," said Joanne, who spent the next eleven years toughing out some difficult jobs on the line at the mini-van plant in Windsor.

"Sometimes I would come home black and blue, but I am not a quitter," she said.

Retirement from Chrysler has not slowed life for Joanne.

"We have five grandchildren from age 16 to 7 - Jordan, Shelby, Tatum, Tyler and Tommy," said Joanne, who enjoys taking in all the family and school activities.

A Sunday school teacher and member of the Church of the Sacred Word in Woodslee, Joanne has continued to be active in the community. She has enjoyed sharing in past community projects hosted by Woodslee, including Canada Day, Doc Millen Day and the Year of the Veteran in 2005.

Most recently, Joanne is known for her role in revitalizing the Woodslee Friendship Club with friend Donna Roubos, who brought the challenge forward last summer.

"One of the members, Lloyd Dewhirst, said they were thinking of disbanding the club," said Roubos, now the club's president, "I thought, who else can I

*"Life has not always been easy, but I try to use each experience as a stepping stone to create a path of joyful memories."*

— Joanne McMurren

opinion and she wants you to share yours," he said.

After graduating from Essex High School, Joanne entered the new Windsor Teachers' College in 1962.

"I always wanted to be a teacher. We called our college class 'fabulous form five' - it was a great time," she said.

"It was overwhelming at first," she said, speaking of her first teaching job at a grade school in Belle River, where the classrooms were crowded with 40 or more students. "I didn't have a car, so I boarded there for \$7 a week."

On March 20, 1965, Joanne married Dave McMurren, a former classmate at Essex High.

"She chased me until I caught her," mused Dave, remembering their one-year courtship.

At the time, Dave worked at Walker Metal, which eventually was taken over by Chrysler.

"When we got married, I was on strike. We had \$50 for a honeymoon," he said.

Joanne continued to be a



PRIDE AND JOY - Family photos adorn the house of Woodslee resident Joanne McMurren, who is described by friends as a "tireless" community volunteer.

call? I talked to Joanne, and the two of us started a seek and rescue mission."

"Joanne is very much like me - full of energy - we work as a team," she said.

As the Woodslee Friendship Club's vice-president, Joanne organized a tribute to local war brides in the Year of the War Bride, 2006, presenting a new lucky horseshoe

to each war bride or surviving family, reminiscent of the ones found in their wedding bouquets.

For the future, one can expect more smiling faces to be added to Joanne's collection of photographs.

"I enjoy my life in my rural setting, surrounded by family and friends. What more does a person need?"

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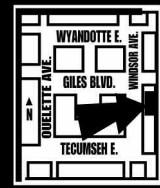
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