

Doris “Dolly” Iannicelli

Written by Kim Kreider Umble

Doris “Dolly” Iannicelli has seen many barriers and challenges for women in her almost 87 years of living in Lebanon County, but nothing has stood in her way of giving 110% to her community. As a life-long resident of the Lebanon Valley, Dolly has dedicated her life to the service of others. Her vivacious, energetic and engaging personality makes it easy to understand why she is admired, loved and respected by so many people.

Dolly began volunteering in the 1950’s as a way to keep busy while her husband, John who worked with the Air Force, was out of town. From the time she was in her 20’s she has been an active community volunteer. Aside from her church, much of her initial volunteering was done with the Girl’s Department of the YMCA. These volunteer efforts eventually secured her a position as program director with the YMCA, which she held for 25 years until she retired. Dolly was able to garner this position without a college degree. The quality of her work spoke for itself. Dolly was motivated to volunteer because she had such a strong interest in the children of the community. Her desire was to create an environment where kids would feel safe and loved. A true testament to her value, children now in their 60’s who remember attending the Girl’s Department say Dolly was like a mom to them.

Admittedly, in her early years of working Dolly acknowledges that it was a “man’s world.” She had to fight for benefits such as pay raises and retirement benefits.

As part of her employment with the YMCA, Dolly frequently attended district and national conferences. It was through these conferences that she would garner ideas to implement in the Lebanon Valley. During one such conference, Dolly learned the importance of keeping our senior population active and promptly returned to the community and initiated senior fitness activities in local nursing homes and elsewhere including everything from chair exercises to aquasize (exercise in water.)

Over the years, Dolly's volunteer investment covered the spectrum of ages from early childhood through the elderly years. There are many organizations throughout the years where she has been instrumental and influential as a volunteer including St. Mark's United Church of Christ, the Good Samaritan Hospital Auxiliary, and the Good Samaritan Health Services Foundation. She was an original member and driving force behind the establishment of the Community Health Council of Lebanon County and worked to launch many of their initiatives such as the dental clinic of the Good Samaritan Hospital. It was also through her advocacy and efforts that the 50 Plus festival, now in its 14th year, was established. Dolly originated the Holiday for Homemakers group in the mid 1950's which still exists today. The group was created to give women a place to gather and do things like exercise, play volleyball, perform service events and socialize.

When asked how she could balance family obligations with community work, Dolly's answer was simple. "I never really thought about it, she said," there was work to be done, and I just did it. I have been so blessed in my life and when you've been blessed you must share your blessings with others." Dolly notes that through her volunteer efforts she has received far more than she has given.

Perhaps Dolly's greatest joy is seeing the value of volunteering passed on to her children and grandchildren. It makes her happy to know that she has helped to instill a true sense of community in her daughters. One of Dolly's daughters, Kathy Andrews, serves as the executive director of the American Heart Association and volunteers her time with many community causes and organizations. Another daughter lives in New England and has worked and volunteered for many years in the health care and political arenas.

Quick to laugh and share a story, Dolly's enthusiasm for life and living is infectious. It's hard to be with her and not feel inspired. She is a master of quoting many motivating messages such as "if you give your children nothing but money, you give them nothing," and "you always have the power to choose, and change direction," and "do what you want to do and know that no job is beneath you." Dolly lives her daily life by quotes like these.

From working with thousands of children through the YMCA Programs to serving hundreds of senior citizens and volunteering countless hours with her church and

community activities, Dolly Iannicelli clearly serves as one of our Lebanon Valley pillars. She recognizes the gift of volunteering and passing on the torch to those who so aptly serve like her children and grandchildren and to quote Dolly "life is a marathon so let's keep running."