



Mary Jo Schawe Finds Joy In Helping Others

By Evelyn Beck

An only child, Mary Jo Murphy Schawe was just nine years old when her mom died. Then it was just her and her dad, a draftsman and later a furniture salesman. They didn't have much money, and her dad didn't go to church, but Mary Jo attended parochial grade school and high school in Hamilton, Ohio, with the tuition paid for by her parish. The influence of the nuns at her school helped her through difficult times. "The Church has always been my strength and support," said Mary Jo.

After high school graduation, Mary Jo worked as a bank teller until she met Dick Schawe at a local restaurant. They married in a Catholic wedding when Mary Jo was 20 and Dick was 25. They have four children—Maribeth, Kristin, Richard, and Terry—and eight grandchildren.

While Dick traveled a lot with his job in construction management, Mary Jo was a homemaker, a role she "loved every minute of," she said. When the construction company he worked for closed, Dick spent four years as a mill construction manager for Champion Paper until he lost that job due to the economy. So the Schawes retired to Anderson, South Carolina, where Dick taught safety and construction at Tri-County Technical College and Mary Jo worked at Belk as a sales associate in the home department.

In Ohio, Mary Jo was very involved in her church, especially in a spiritual enrichment program called Christ Renews His

Parish that included monthly prayer meetings and semiannual weekend retreats. "It was great," said Mary Jo. "I remember one woman who had been away from the Church for



Mary Jo Schawe

years. We encouraged her to make the program. I can remember the struggle of her going to confession after all those years and being able to come back to church."

Mary Jo also started a fundraising organization to benefit the local hospital; did a lot of cooking for events at the high school, which was located across the street from her house; served as a Girl Scout leader; and was in charge of an annual card party and style show at the retirement home for the Little Sisters of the Poor.

At St. Joseph's, the Schawes were members of the Garden Club, and Dick was part of the Men's Club until he became sick with Alzheimer's disease, the start of what Mary Jo calls "a 10-year journey" that ended when Dick died three years ago on Father's Day. "The Men's Club was just wonderful," said Mary Jo. "During his illness, they would come and take Dick out for lunch once a month. And they were pallbearers for his funeral. They were very supportive."

Today, Mary Jo continues to be involved at church, volunteering several days a month in the church office. She's also an usher and a member of the Welcome Committee, the Be-

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Schawe Counts Family And Friends As Greatest Accomplishments

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reavement Committee and the Saturday Servants. Plus, she hosts a weekly Bible study meeting in her home.

In the community, she volunteers at Hospice as an ambassador and a receptionist. "I help to ease the experience of having a loved one come in there," she said. She's also a member of the Philanthropic Educational Organization, which raises money to help young women attend college, and the Buckeye Club, a social group of people from Ohio. She also enjoys playing bridge, cooking, and gardening.

Quick to laugh and always ready to go to a concert or out to eat, Mary Jo has lots of friends. "She just enjoys life and loves being around people," said parishioner Brenda Thompson, who invited Mary Jo to join her Bible study group years ago. "After her husband passed away, how she really recovered was going out and helping people. She is a 'come to me mama.' I don't care if it's for advice, for consoling—if you want an honest opinion about something, she won't hold back on what she actually thinks. She is there to help, help, help."

Parishioner Paula Brenchak, who met Mary Jo while visiting newcomers years ago, has observed that desire to serve. "Mary Jo is on the bereavement committee on my team," said Paula. "She will offer to make multiple things. She's always willing to pick up the slack. That helps a lot when you're trying to round up a meal for a family."

And Mary Jo finds joy all around her. "She's fun loving," said Carol Rose, who plays bridge with Mary Jo. "She's not a downer. She always sees the best in things."

Asked to reflect on what has meant the most to her, Mary Jo said, "I guess my biggest accomplishment in my mind is my family and having so many dear friends. I really need to help others in any way I can, as I know I felt God's love from all those that helped me growing up. I have been truly blessed."

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