

Parade Marshal Mary Baker

Dedicated to Building America's Future



Mary Baker

Since 1979 I have been privileged to work with children and youth in Columbus. I moved here from Ohio with no idea of the wonders that were going to unfold in my life in this great community. Two very significant decisions put me on this pathway of involvement and leadership roles with children and youth. The first choice was to join the Columbus United Methodist Church. I was given the opportunity to work with the Christian Education program as a Sunday School teacher and Youth Group leader. I also became deeply involved with United Methodist Women. This marvelous organization of over 800,000 women works tirelessly to turn faith, hope and love into action on behalf of women, children and youth around the world. The support and encouragement of the local UMW group and church led me to District, State and North Central Jurisdiction leadership roles throughout the years. It offered opportunities to work with women throughout the United States as they built a strong foundation for work with children and youth in their community, state, country and around the globe. One of the most significant connections to advocacy for children was the national Campaign for Children based on research from Children's Defense Fund. It was during this National campaign that I worked to seek out local possibilities for

programs that would be relevant and meet a need that was important to the community. The local UMW group became involved and spent many hours in research and meetings to determine what we could do. The result of many people's hard work and dedication, partnership with Kiwanis and a broad base of community support was Columbus Club House. This state licensed, nonprofit School Age Child Care program has been in operation since 1989. I was honored to be the director for over 20 years. During these years the program has grown from a 6 student afternoon program to one that serves up to 50 children for before and after school. They also offer a full day Summer Program. There is always a waiting list for all seasons! I currently hope to be connected with Club House as they move into the future and find ways to involve our wonderful community in efforts to face the challenges and changes that come along. My current job as Coordinator of Children & Youth Ministries at church provides marvelous opportunity to connect programs and projects for children and youth in many ways. Our current format of Vacation Bible School at the church offers an extended day program for children that need afternoon care. Club House families utilize that during a period of time when summer Club House is not in session. We also offer Movie Day on a regular basis as a networking opportunity for both programs. The connection has been one that extends to many other organizations and persons in our caring community.

The second decision in 1979 was to volunteer at Fuller Street Elementary (now Columbus Elementary). I was a volunteer for, and then leader of the Publishing Center program for students in kindergarten through 6th grade. Our volunteers worked with the district Reading Specialist Mary Lou Sharpee and school staff to create a book for all students to take home. It was the beginning of many marvelous experiences working with district administration and

staff. There was a great participation of individuals, business, and industry to provide supplies and services for the many many books! I was privileged to serve on Parent Advisory groups in elementary and middle school, Music Boosters, Drug & Alcohol Response Effort program, and multiple volunteer groups. One of my great opportunities to work with children was given when I was hired as a Teaching Assistant for Kindergarten through 3rd grade at the Columbus Elementary school. Every day was an adventure and gift! The experience of working with highly dedicated and talented teachers was not only a learning experience but also an honor.

I find the privilege of doing what I love has woven a rich tapestry in my life. The connections woven throughout experiences with children, youth and their families have been a blessing. My hobbies include leading workshops for women on a wide variety of topics, planning and implementing activities and events for children, and speaking for special programs regarding work with Club House and United Methodist Women. My favorite hobby is time with family!

Through all of my work and volunteer efforts my family has been, and is, a source of support and inspiration. My wonderful husband Larry is Director of Productivity at Faith Technologies. He has bravely dealt with all the flurry of activity that has been my life! My daughter Dee is employed at Creative Community Living Services. She and husband Dave Groh, sons Brady and Ethan live in Columbus. Their daughter Nicole and husband Russell Barlow live in Beaver Dam. Daughter Brandi and son Miles live in Franklin WI. She teaches 3rd grade at Pleasant View Elementary in Franklin. I am so very proud of my children and grandchildren. They bring joy to my life! I appreciate deeply their kindness and compassion for others and their sense of respect and care for all people.