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Laurie Olson is involved in a number of community organizations such as CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) where she serves as co-chair of the CASA Presents: Come Fly With Us fundraising gala hosted at JetAir Hangar in Ashwaubenon. The Business News photo by Eric Popp

A neighbor ‘helping neighbors’

‘Everyone has some talent to bring to the table,’ she says

Laurie Olson knew growing up on the east side of Green Bay that this is where she wanted to raise a family of her own one day, and the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay graduate has done just that, perpetuating what she sees simply as “neighbors helping neighbors.”

Olson, vice president-senior business banking officer at Investors Community Bank in Green Bay, now calls Ledgeview home, but her community involvement with CASA of Brown County, CP and Neighborworks Green Bay takes her throughout the city — and beyond.

Her involvement with CP dates far enough back that Olson jokes she’s a “lifer” with the organization; she estimates a solid 14 or 15 years. She has served in many roles including president, secretary, treasurer, and currently, board and finance committee member. Olson’s involvement was prompted by a family friend and neighbor who used CP’s services.

“I was so impressed with what they did for him on daily basis, hearing all of the fun things he would do during the day and how he looked forward to going each day, that I had to get involved,” she said. “As I learned more about the organization, I realized how many people CP touches in our community.”

As with most people, she was familiar with the long-standing CP Telethon but was amazed to learn all the daily touches the organization has with community members.

“It’s absolutely incredible and amazing how many children and adults attend CP and its different types of programming, from occupational and speech therapy to adult day services to early education/daycare and aquatics” she said. “I fell in love with it. I’m passionate about it.”

That’s a good thing as the current CP location in Green Bay is “busting at the seams” and in the midst of a building expansion right now. Olson is proud to have been part of furthering the community’s awareness of the organizations’ programming, as well as introducing CP to the Two Rivers and Appleton communities as well.

“It shows the need and the value that it continues to grow,” she said. “It’s been wonderful to watch the programming grow and develop to meet the needs of the clients throughout Northeastern Wisconsin.”

In addition to devoting time to CP efforts, Olson often puts her financial know-how to work for CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) of Brown County Inc. She serves as a board member and is on the organization’s finance committee and dedicates time to CASA because she acknowledges this organization isn’t as well-known as some of the larger non-profit organizations such as CP in the community. Olson is hands-on with budgeting and fundraising as are all other members of the board, and she is excited about the program’s latest development — expanding services into Marinette County and investigating other counties as well.

“The fund-raising component is absolutely critical because very little funding comes from anywhere else,” she said. One of the organization’s most notable fund-raising events is CASA Presents: Come Fly With Us, a gala hosted at the JetAir Hangar, for which Olson serves as co-chair. Funds enable the organization to do what it does best: providing a voice for abused and neglected children who are under the legal protection of the court system.

“Our volunteer advocates are the true stars of CASA. Without them we would not exist,” she said. “They provide a voice to kids who are caught up in the court system with parents who are in various places in their lives.”

CASA’s mission includes getting more exposure for the organization (they have teamed with Corey and Anna Linsley from the Green Bay Packers) as well as highlighting the impact it has for children in the community.

“It’s been rewarding to watch CASA continue to grow in Green Bay and succeed in another county and to get people on board and excited about what they can do in their own community,” she said.

As with other volunteer roles, Olson thinks she’s a good fit because of her passion as well as her financial management experience, fundraising skills, strategic focus and attention to detail. “In my current job, I work with so many different people — business owners, accountants, attorneys and so forth — and so I have a wide net of touches that I can use to get organizations’ names and needs out there,” she said.

NeighborWorks Green Bay is another organization with which Olson is proud to be affiliated as a general

volunteer and on its finance committee. She’s found that being involved with that organization syncs well with her belief in rehabbing different areas of the city to strengthen neighborhoods, promote home ownership and provide affordable housing.

“It’s about providing all the tools that many of us take for granted and helping people to purchase their first home,” she said. Olson has even looped her children in on it when working on specific rehabilitation projects doing clean-up. “When you drive down some of these streets now, and see how far they’ve come, it’s a total transformation,” she said. “I find it important because you have to have strength in neighborhoods to build strength community-wide.”

Involving her children in volunteerism and giving back is something Olson and her husband have made a concerted effort to do. She’s also been richly rewarded in watching NeighborWorks’ portfolio grow, providing additional attractive, affordable housing options in the community.

For Olson, it’s that “neighbor helping neighbor” mentality that was instilled in her as a child. Her parents taught her early the importance of positive values, a strong ethical compass, faithfulness, humbleness and giving of yourself to others. As a child, Olson helped elderly neighbors in the spring with their raking and lawn care.

She said she’s carried the same mind-set into her own family and both her sons have carried on the tradition. Her eldest son, a student at Michigan Technological University, is an Eagle Scout and volunteers in several organizations. Her younger son is part of the Badger volunteer network at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

“It’s pretty humbling as a parent to see them reach out into their new communities and help others, and I hope they carry it into their professional lives when they graduate as well,” she said.

Juggling a full-time job, husband, children and volunteer efforts has not be without its challenges, but Olson highly encourages community members to find a passion and pursue it. “I hear people say, ‘I need something to fill my cup; there’s something missing in my life,’” she said. “Everyone has some talent to bring to the table — every single person — and what it gives back to you when you volunteer it is beyond the work you put in, by far.”