

Volunteer of the Year – Northwest Wisconsin

Debra Newago Proulx

Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council - Senior Companion Program

Governor's
Service Awards



Deb Newago Proulx is a long-time volunteer with the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council (GLITC) - Senior Companion Program, who is making a difference for others in her Red Cliff community. With a positive attitude and an outgoing, “can-do” personality, Deb provides needed assistance for individuals in need of support and companionship.

Deb has been helping one of the local elders for many years, providing companionship, transportation, general assistance in his home, and addressing other needs as they may arise. Deb “works up a sweat” to clean for the elder each week, making sure everything is in order before she leaves. With this client being an author whose writings include historical accounts on the Red Cliff tribe, she has used reading as an activity to build their connection. Many times when she visits or is providing transportation, she will bring homemade soup or other traditional native dishes to share with him to help maintain their connections to the community. During the times she could not see this elder in person during the COVID-19 pandemic, she actively worked to maintain their connection and provide companionship however she could through frequent phone calls and dropping off deliveries of groceries or handmade soups on their porch.



Of everything Deb does for this elder, his favorite thing is their “coffee time” spent around the kitchen table talking and reminiscing about friends in common, historic community members, and sharing stories of old times. He explains that Deb “keeps me going,” as she is very genuine and a person who always gives. He describes her as “tireless” and “true-blue Red Cliff” for her willingness to help him and other community elders when needed.

Deb also provides assistance and companionship to an elder with dementia, having stepped up in numerous ways to help them as their health situation was changing rapidly. Deb worked to ensure that this client could have medical services put in place and receive needed support. This came through numerous phone calls, providing rides, obtaining groceries, helping them to pay bills, and doing whatever else was needed to help keep this client on track.

Understanding how important it is to maintain connections in the community, Deb will regularly bring this individual to the noon congregate meal in Red Cliff. Due to the nature of dementia, this elder often speaks inappropriately, causing other community members to be concerned or offended, but Deb works to continually promote kindness, speaking with the other meal attendees and reminding them of the effects of dementia. Deb will also use this time to visit with each of the groups sitting across the dining area, and when she sees someone in need of help but reluctant to ask, she encourages them to visit the Red Cliff Tribal Aging Director in their office.

This desire to assist and connect others is clear throughout her service, with Wendy Rozhon from the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council - Senior Companion Program commending her dedication to the program, describing her as “a very willing volunteer with a helpful, “will do” attitude. She speaks highly of the Senior Companion Program, encouraging others to get involved.”

