

Judge Joyce Draganchuk: Help on Wheels

“When you give someone your time, you tell them they are worth it.”

Ingham County Circuit Court Judge Joyce Draganchuk has been doing just that for more than 20 years through the local Meals on Wheels program.

Years before her election to the bench in 2004, Judge Draganchuk knew she wanted to do something for others. She initially volunteered for a literacy program as a tutor to adults in need, and then she eventually discovered Meals on Wheels.

Volunteering with Meals on Wheels entails delivering hot meals to local seniors in need during her lunch hour, and Judge Draganchuk’s regular delivery day also happens to fall on her busiest court day of the week.

“There are days when I feel too stressed to take the time to go on my deliveries. I feel the need to stay at my desk and work,” she admitted. “But then I go deliver the meals and all it takes is the first delivery to remind me that this is my most important work.”

Some clients are alone all day, she explains, and she may be the only person who comes to their home to see them.

“Their faces light up when I knock on their door,” she shared. “They ask so little and it means so much to them. And I cannot lie: it makes me feel 10 feet tall!”

In addition to MOW, Judge Draganchuk also serves on the board of WAI-IAM (pronounced “Way I Am”), which operates sober living houses where people suffering addiction can receive treatment and support. And she is not the only judge on the board; Eaton County Judge Julie Reincke also serves on WAI-IAM (see p. __).

She first encountered the founder of WAI-IAM, a former heroin addict, when he came before her in court on a robbery charge. Today, she notes that he is about 10 years sober, and when he asked her to join the board, she did not hesitate.

Judge Draganchuk credits her mother with instilling in her the desire to give back, although she gets as much out of it as she gives.

“Volunteering is ingrained in me. I was raised with a ‘that’s what you are supposed to do’ attitude,” she remarked. “When I am handing a meal to someone, for instance, there is a real one-on-one human connection and in that moment, it feels like the world is a beautiful place.”