

Community Action "Icon" Pam Nelson To Retire September 1

by Glenn Tolbert

To many she's an icon in the social services world of Garrett County. She oversaw complete services for those who needed it. These services included transportation, education, and daily delivery of meals. For 38 years she worked in a variety of capacities at the Garrett County Community Action Committee Inc. (GCCAC) agency for the betterment of Garrett Countians who needed her the most.

"It doesn't seem real that I am retiring September 1st," said Pam Nelson, whose most recent position has been vice president of community services and family development for GCCAC. "This agency has been a major part of my life. I started here as a supervisor for the VISTA [Volunteers in Service to America] program. In that job I was an assistant planner, basically writing grants.

"One of the biggest changes that occurred at GCCAC was in 1984 when we incorporated the Area Agency on Aging and Garrett Transit Service," she continued. "We also added energy assistance programs."

Through the years, Pam has overseen the continually expanding client base, trying to help people from Garrett County's most vulnerable population.

"I will miss the challenges and the fact that there is always something on the horizon," she said, "something out there that may make people's lives better. I will also miss the energy of this agency. We work with a whole range of county residents, from helping the elderly to helping people buy their first homes. That's pretty major."

As with most careers, Pam said that there were many moments of joy coupled with times of disappointment.

"Most days when I got home I felt like I had accomplished something, and I planned for the next day's activities," she said. "Some days things did not go as expected, and you always had to look for ways to make things better; because if you didn't, you were stuck."

Kudos to Pam Nelson come from one of her directors, Pamela Hageman, director of the Agency on Aging.

"Pam has supported me in bringing together my education in aging issues and direct service experience to create foundation for Aging and



Nutrition services," she said. "With the many changes to programs, staffing, and funding, I have relied on Pam's knowledge and insight to help with transitions and new directions. She is a calm and reasoned voice in delicate or difficult situations; I will miss the opportunity to 'run things by her.' I have yet to find a topic or issue about which Pam has not been able to provide experience and wisdom."

Pam and her husband John, who is the retired county director of planning and land management, have two children – a married daughter, Lauren, who is a teacher in San Diego and the mother of a 10-month-old daughter; and son Michael, who is a Ph.D. chemist in Montgomery County.

Michael was married just last month in a ceremony at St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Oakland, at which Pam slipped and fell on stairs at the church and sustained a seriously broken arm. But she handled the accident much like she would have any other crisis at work, promptly undergoing surgery at Garrett Regional Medical Center and still making it to the wedding reception in time to dance with her newlywed son.

"Pam has given her whole career to Community Action and its purpose," said long-time GCCAC director Duane Yoder. "She has contributed more than anyone anywhere to Community Action's mission of improving the economic security and quality of life for low- and moderate-income persons in Garrett County, and as such helped make us a model in work we do around two-generation and community-development services."

"What makes Pam unique is her dedication combined with a quiet demeanor that enabled her to ride out numerous storms for over 38 years," Yoder continued. "She leaves a legacy and a path that will be a part of Garrett County for a very long time."



NOT EVEN A SHATTERED ARM sustained during the wedding of her only son Michael could keep Pam Nelson away from the reception, as she "quickly" underwent surgery at Garrett Regional Medical Center and arrived at the event in time to dance with the groom. Pam persevered in similar fashion throughout her nearly 4-decade career with Garrett County Community Action Inc., from which she will retire Sept. 1.