



Photo by Mark Justesen

John and Helen Ward were recently honored as “Citizens of the Year” by the Mequon-Thiensville Chamber of Commerce.

Mequon couple call volunteering a ‘labor of love’

By Ed Zagorski
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Mequon - They’re retired, but the two of them are always working.

Whether it’s helping a friend with roof problems or restoring the Interurban Depot in Cedarburg, John and Helen Ward call what they do “labors of love.”

The two were recently honored as “Citizens of the Year” by the Mequon-Thiensville Chamber of Commerce.

John, 73, and Helen 71, both of Mequon have been married for more than 45 years and have two daughters with one living in San Diego, Calif. and the other in Sarasota, Fla.

But the two don’t have much time to worry about their daughters. They’re too busy volunteering their time.

“Why not volunteer? It gives us a chance to help others and to meet a lot of people,” Helen said. “We have never really thought of what we have done. It comes and goes.”

John laughed.

“It was a surprise for both of us,” he said. “I had no idea about it. It just means somebody is paying attention to us, which is nice, but we didn’t expect to be honored for doing what we enjoy.”

Helen offers her time to the Volunteer Services for the Visually Handicapped in Milwaukee to read books on tape for the blind. She’s not reading romance novels or weekly news magazines, but rather textbooks and technical pages.

“Some are very difficult especially when you have to interpret or describe the graphs or the pictures in the books,” she said.

Some of her volunteer work began long before she retired. For the past 23 seasons, she has worked for AARP’s tax program, helping seniors prepare returns and also serving as a program coordinator.

Her contributions are not just limited to crunching numbers like when she was working fulltime as an accountant.

Few people realize what catalysts Helen and John were, when the two were working to get the Interurban Trail through the city of Mequon.

While motoring through Mequon on their way home from church in 1974, John mentioned how “great” it would be to use the old interurban railway for a trail through Mequon.

Helen didn’t waste any time calling what was then Wisconsin Electric, which owned the property. Her phone call helped open six miles of trail in Mequon for walkers, runners and outdoor enthusiasts like the Wards, who are often biking on the trail.

“If you sit around and do nothing - you get old,” John chuckled.

So what do the two do in their spare time?

“We help people,” Helen said just as John chimed in, “Yeah, the phone does ring quite a bit around here.”