

Lou Petrovic: People Person

Written by Paul Blair, Sudbury Senior Center volunteer

A Sudbury resident for 52 years, Lou Petrovic serves as a volunteer "Greeter" at the Sudbury Senior Center. When people enter the building, one of the first people they encounter is this warm, outgoing man who instantly makes them feel welcome. It is said that being a "people person" is a quality that you are born with, it cannot be learned, and that certainly applies to Lou. When asked what he likes most about working at the Center, Lou says, "helping a great staff make seniors feel comfortable when they come into the Center."

Lou's long distinguished professional life, which continues to this day, has been defined by a commitment to encouraging and supporting business incubators and other organizations that promote the growth and success of entrepreneurs. Indeed, enabling and encouraging people has been Lou's lifelong mission, starting with his 25 years in higher education at UMass Lowell as director of external funding and then at UMass Dartmouth as assistant vice chancellor managing the University's interaction with industry. Today he is chairman of Action Innovation Network, a collaborative of technology business incubators and entrepreneur support organizations.

Lou is justifiably proud of his work in industry. He has a PhD in chemical engineering from Northwestern University, but his eyes light up and he becomes animated when talking about his role as a coach for girls' basketball for 42 years. Starting when his daughters were about 10 years old in the Sudbury town leagues, he went on to be assistant varsity, junior varsity and freshman coach for 13 years at Lincoln Sudbury Regional High School. Next, he became head coach and assistant varsity coach at four other high schools. Just this year he finished six years as assistant girls varsity coach at Framingham High School! When Lou talks about these coaching assignments and what they mean to him, his answer is revelatory and unsurprising for a man who has devoted his life to helping people. He says it was, "fun to learn from these young women and what they saw as their futures." He believes a very important part of coaching is to provide the players with the vast learning experience of working together towards a common goal and helping them figure out how to have fun doing so.

Now in his early eighties, Lou is still rolling and inspiring others with his work in the Senior Core of Retired Executive (S.C.O.R.E), a national organization that offers free advice and mentoring to would-be startup companies. He enjoys his life in Sudbury, taking long walks with his wife Judy, reading extensively, and travelling. Travel has indeed played a major role in Lou's life and defines his lifelong desire to connect with and help others.

Friendship is key for Lou. When asked about friendship, he describes a group he has been part of since he and three others pursued advanced degrees in chemical engineering at Northwestern University, starting in 1964. During approximately four years together, the group formed a strong bond. As they were about to receive their degrees, it became clear that they would be dispersing across the US - California, Washington DC, Chicago, and Boston. They wanted to maintain their friendship and decided on a model. They would meet physically every two years for a vacation and, to insure that they could do so, they would contribute money each month over the two years for the trip. "We named ourselves the *ChemESpenders* for the fact that we were spending money to do things," Lou explains. "It worked. We have met 27 times since 1966. Our trips covered the US and much of the world. Only one trip was cancelled due to the pandemic. Our wives, children and now our grandchildren enjoy the trips and the friendships. The outcome is an extended family in which we help each other for whatever is needed. And, we have a great time together! It's off to Montreal and Quebec City this September."

Lou Petrovic, a people person, and now someone I am proud to call my friend.