

Inspired by her mother's dedication

Long-time volunteer Deborah Callahan was always inspired by her mother's dedication to Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity. Throughout her life, Deborah has been connected to numerous community organizations, helping and uplifting her community. Deborah grew up in the Lutheran Church and continued her faith once she moved to Massachusetts, attending Holy Trinity in Hatfield. She is still an active member of the St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Holyoke and is heavily involved in the outreach committee there. Deborah also still has close ties to Longmeadow High School, where she taught for 36 years. Her reach across Western Mass transcended town borders, which is also showcased in her involvement at Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity.



"I so believe in the mission of Habitat. The thing that impressed me so much was how committed everyone was. People talk about how great an organization it is, but it only is one because of everyone involved."

Deborah credits her involvement to her mother, early volunteer Marge Lieneck. A longtime political activist and union negotiator, Marge became deeply involved at Habitat very quickly, and Deborah watched in awe of her mother's commitment and drive to the cause. To both Marge and Deborah, involvement at Habitat was an expression of faith: "it's what you're called to do." Deborah sees Marge's dedication as "a monumental example of how to live," both for herself and her children. Deborah's own involvement was first tagging along as her mother's sidekick, and later joining the early PR Committee. Through the committee, Deborah helped with the set up and release of the newsletter and led volunteer orientations, a role that transformed as digital media became more prevalent. Deborah highlights the biggest shift at Pioneer Valley Habitat as the moment the PVHH Board hired the first ever Executive Director, MJ Adams. In her eyes, MJ's leadership brought PVHH from "romantically inefficient" to a legitimate professional organization.

Through all the growth and changes, Deborah's favorite part of Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity stayed constant: the dedications, where PVHH welcomes first-time homebuyers to their new homes. She recounts a story of a woman who was in such shock for being chosen for a Habitat house that she hung up the phone in disbelief! Another family, immigrants from Cambodia who reconnected in Western Mass, became first-time homeowners, and Deborah remembers how moving it was to be a part of their house blessing. Deborah still lives in Northampton and enjoys seeing the "creativity and energy-efficiency" that goes into new Habitat homes today. She hopes that those in the community still perceive affordable housing as "our job," one that everyone can get involved in and advocate for today and into the future.