

# Building up and reaching out in a new community

Dedicated to working with Habitat for Humanity long before moving to the Pioneer Valley, Doris McLeod was an active member in the affiliate in her previous hometown in Michigan, and brought the skills she learned during her time there to Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity. In Michigan in the '90s, she worked lightly in fundraising but mostly in public relations as head of organizing and releasing their newsletter. These newsletters went out monthly, which took an extreme level of coordination. Additionally, there was a consistent struggle to get Habitat stories into the local newspaper and write an exciting press release.



*“Northampton would go out of their way to finagle whatever had to happen to get several houses on a piece of land... Community relations are so important to [making the Habitat model] work.”*

When Doris moved to the Pioneer Valley in 2002, one of the first things she did was look into the local Habitat affiliate to continue the work that she had started in Michigan. She described her involvement as, “behind the scenes, more with words than with hammers.” The first fundraising event that she was involved in was an antique and collectibles auction, where community members donated items and Pioneer Valley Habitat auctioned them off to raise funds for their next build. At the time, there were no “annual” fundraising events: all of the events were one-offs. When someone came up with an event, they planned it and executed it together. Her time with Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity happened during the movement from the founding system to a more professionalized operation. Doris remembers changes in the ways decisions were made and operations were performed happening when Sandy Belden arrived to the Board: “He came to the first board meeting in a suit and tie while everyone else was in jeans and a sweatshirt and he taught us how to be a board!” He developed a plan for the organization to build a professional portfolio so that they could start garnering “big money”.

Eventually, Doris's role at Habitat transformed and she became Secretary of the Board where she focused on formalizing policies that would align with the national organization. During her time, the Board also made efforts to build out standards and a succession plan, making it possible for future members of Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity to have guidelines to follow that matched some of the founding principles. Doris, Deborah Callahan, and Sheila Rainford worked together on many PR and community engagement projects, and the relationships built then still impact Pioneer Valley Habitat today. When looking back, a highlight for Doris was the shift from a good-hearted, yet amateur organization to a professional Habitat affiliate that is able to expand its reach beyond Northampton to the wider Franklin and Hampshire county area.