

Joan M. Elsesser
2000 Friend of Education

Throughout her long career as an art teacher, and as a church member; a volunteer, parent, and a grandparent, Joan Elsesser has always enthusiastically demonstrated her staunch commitment to children and education.

Nominator Kay Fanshaw states, "Because of Joan's influence, many district educational programs exist and others have grown into worthy alliances with the new. While teaching art in the Beaver Dam District elementary schools, Elsesser co-authored a state grant request for the Project Aware art appreciation program. Today, as a retiree, she continues to support the program, now in its eighteenth year, by volunteering for several AWARE components.

In 1992, Elsesser was a leader in the organization of a district/community visual arts festival, *Arts in the Middle*. In her retirement, as a member of the District Communications Committee, she helped develop *SHARE FAIR*, based on the *Arts in the Middle* concept. Elsesser was the *SHARE FAIR* Exhibit Chair in 1999 and 2000. Before retiring, she also introduced the *Art-to-Art* program, a nation-wide art exchange program that continues in the schools today.

Elsesser's retirement has opened the door to many more volunteerism efforts. As an original and current member of the *Character Counts in Beaver Dam* Steering Committee, Joan initiated the idea for the first *Make a Difference Day* campaign. Her involvement as a chairperson influenced donations of over 5000 volunteer service hours for the community. Joan is also a member of the Board of Directors for the *Dodge County Volunteer Center*, an active member and teacher for the *First Lutheran Church*, a charter member of the *Beaver Dam Area Arts Association* Board of Directors, and a member of the *Dodge County Retired Teachers*.

Because of her special love for those with special needs, Joan serves on a church committee that sponsors *Special Needs Weekends*. The weekend programs raise awareness about those with disabilities and special needs. Her volunteering resume also includes *TheParent Place*, *Overseas Teaching*, and teaching Navajo students in Arizona. This spring, Elsesser will travel to China for another volunteer teaching experience.

Like so many examples of her love for people, Elsesser's love for former students never stops. Diane Stieglitz, a parent of one of those students, attests, "She always sends Adam (now a sophomore) ... notes throughout the year, reminding him if he should ever need anything, just let her know If our world had more people like her, it would certainly be a better place."