

Giving Women and Girls a *Helping* Hand

BY DOREEN PFOST

Photo by Jordana Snyder Photography

“All of the above.” That’s how Heidi Svec describes her role as Executive Director of the Women’s Fund of Greater La Crosse. Event planner, social media coordinator, marketer ... and that’s just the beginning.

The Women’s Fund, created in 1998, supports dozens of La Crosse-area programs and projects that all have one thing in common: They benefit women and girls and help them achieve their full potential in society and in life.

That’s a tall order for an organization with only one paid staff person, but Svec works with an engaged and active executive board and several committees that do much of the legwork for fundraisers, the Fall Luncheon, the Spring Fling and other event programming. Still, there’s always more to be done. “You’ve seen those job descriptions that end with, ‘and other duties as assigned.’ That’s kind of what my job is,” Svec says cheerfully.

One woman, many roles

On a typical day, she may work at the organization’s downtown office or from home, which is helpful for a single mom with three kids. After checking email, she makes a to-do list: “I’m a list-making kind of person,” she says. And that’s fortunate, because from that point on, there’s no “typical day.” In the office, there are administrative tasks like tracking donations and posting information on the Women’s Fund Facebook page or website. Away from her desk, you might find her speaking to a high school group or meeting with a board member at a coffee shop.


Svec also meets with potential donors and past donors to update them on what the Women’s Fund is doing. “My favorite part,” she says, “is hearing stories about how they

got involved in the Women’s Fund and why it’s important to them. It’s nice to meet these strong women who really paved the way throughout the years.”

She recently finished working with board members to read and evaluate this year’s grant applications. Her previous experience with grants was from the other side of the table, as a grant writer for Big Brothers Big Sisters. That perspective helps her and the board in the evaluation process; it also allows her to advise applicants on how to write stronger grants.

Extending a helping hand

And Svec is ever-aware of the effect these grants can have. “I know from personal experience that sometimes just having that helping hand can have an enormous impact on a woman’s life,” she says. For her, the helping hand came years ago from a program the Women’s Fund supports: the Self-Sufficiency Program at UW-La Crosse, which encouraged a young single mother to pursue a college degree—which led to a career of helping others.

Because of her own experience, Svec finds it especially gratifying at speaking engagements and other events to meet women and girls who have benefited from Women’s Fund grants and to hear their stories. But the best reward comes closer to home, where Svec explains her “all of the above” job to her kids and realizes she’s a good role model. “One day,” she says, “My daughter came out of her room and said, ‘Mom, you’re my inspiration.’” 

Doreen Pfost is a freelance writer in Elroy, Wisconsin, and an inveterate list maker.



Heidi Svec leads the Women’s Fund of Greater La Crosse.