

6/19/07  
Sue Ratnoff

One of Sue Ratnoff's favorite places is her garage. Especially when the cars are somewhere else. There, in a well-organized jumble of tools and lathes and scraps of wood, she can follow her dreams of creating fine furniture.

"When I was in high school (in the 1960s), boys got to take shop," she recalled recently, "and I had to go to home ec. I could care less about how to run a sewing machine. I was dying to learn how to work a band saw."

In some ways, that attitude led directly to the Women's Fund and her role as a Founder. Ratnoff said she was attracted to the Women's Fund by a golfing buddy, who explained some of the organization's goals as well as the special needs of women in a largely rural state like New Hampshire. Ratnoff thought it over – and joined up

. "I like the fact the Women's Fund allocates its money to women," she said. "Because I think a lot of resources don't go to women. I just don't think women have as many opportunities as men."

As a teacher, she said she believes in educating young women to realize their full potential – learning such skills as auto repair or even how to use a band saw. "I want to level the playing field," she said. "I trust the Women's Fund to try to do that."

Ratnoff's \$25,000 pledge is contained in her personal trust to be handed over to the Women's Fund after her death. Conditions of the trust put the Women's Fund first in line, she said.

As a WFNH Founder, Ratnoff is not so much wealthy as frugal. "We have pretty simple tastes," she said. "We hold on to things for a long time." Her car, for example, is 10 years old. "It runs," she said. "That's all I ask."

Sue Ratnoff is a transplant to New Hampshire, born in New York where her father was a photo editor for the Associated Press, raised in Westchester County and educated in Washington, DC, and New Rochelle. After all that, she said she concluded she was definitely not a city girl. "I vowed to live in the country the rest of my life," she said, and she has.

She worked many years as an administrator in various high schools – Concord, Exeter, Goffstown – before making another big switch.

"I said to myself you are so far removed from what you started out doing. You don't see kids but every once in a while. Teachers don't know you. Kids don't know you. I need to get back to my roots."

When an elementary school job opened in Greenland, she took it, and for the last 11 years, Ratnoff and her partner, Lynda Beck, former vice president at Phillips Academy in Exeter, have lived in a quiet neighborhood in Exeter.

Furniture-making may seem a far cry from that day job as special education coordinator for the Greenland Central School, but Ratnoff has found a way to make room for both work and wood – as of July 1, 2007, she went onto half time at the school, sharing her job, 50-50, with another teacher and leaving time to set up her shop in the garage.

A lot of thought has gone into this. Ratnoff, who has honed her skills as a member of the Woodworkers Club of America chapter in Brentwood, said she will insulate the

place for year-round use. Equipment will be on wheels so it can be moved out of the way when cars take over the garage.

What will she do if she ends up with dozens of lovely homemade rocking chairs? “I won’t,” she said. “I’ll give them away.”

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