

Susan Werner Thoresen
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There are some people in this world who, quite simply, get things done. WFNH Founder Sue Werner Thoresen is one of them. She's the kind of person who sees a problem, and, without hesitation, tackles it.

She has hosted a local public affairs TV show, written a book on financial planning, prepared management strategies and land use plans for all kinds of boards and town governments, studied workforce housing, raised two kids, Kristin and Erik, sat on a number of non-profit boards and commissions including Strawberry Banke, the League of Women Voters, the Society for the Protection of NH Forests, and the Wentworth-Coolidge Commission. She hired on as a financial advisor and later associate vice president for Morgan Stanley Dean Witter in Portsmouth, led seminars (as in "Smart Women Finish First"). And, oh yes, Thoresen also was elected to two terms on the Portsmouth School Board and as a delegate to the 1974 state constitutional convention, and chairs the citizens association on the Lake Winnepesaukee island where the family vacations.

"I have worked full time my entire life," she said. But she also gardens ("gardening is therapeutic"), makes jewelry (while doing the laundry), reads, plays a little golf, contemplates writing another book, and truly enjoys vacations on her island and playing in the sandbox with her grandchildren. She accumulated \$25,000 for a 5-year pledge to WFNH the old fashioned way: she earned it.

Sue Werner grew up in Davenport, Iowa, and met Bob Thoresen in graduate school at Syracuse University where she studied public administration, and he, city planning. After a stint in the Army, he took a job as planning director for Portsmouth, and they moved there in 1972. In 1977, he left city government to become a consultant – and to paint. He's now a development consultant, and president of the New Hampshire Art Association.

At the same time, Sue also was in the planning business writing up management plans and land use regulations for towns in New Hampshire and Maine. At some point, as she was driving down a dark country road after a late planning session, she said she began to wonder, "When I'm in my 50s and 60s, do I want to be doing this?"

It was 1990. The answer came in a surprise offer to join Dean Witter. She accepted, and quickly became a specialist in goal setting, risk, and asset management.

As Sue looks back, she sees two other events that helped point her to the Women's Fund. One was a 1970 brush with sex discrimination in Georgia where she worked in regional planning while her husband was in the Army. She was, she said, doing the work of three but paid less than a man. The one woman on the board said: "She makes enough money for a woman." Thoresen quit in protest.

A second came a decade later, where she tackled the needs of women and girls as head of the Seacoast YWCA. "A lot of organizations in Portsmouth now involved in social change came from that group," she said. In the end the Y's most successful projects were taken over by others.

When WFNH founding founders Barbara Zeckhausen and Molly Scheu talked of creating an organization devoted to those same needs, Sue joined up. "I believe a lot of

issues in the state involving women and children still are not addressed, and do not have enough funding.”

That’s what she’s about – funding. And one of her goals is to increase the size of the Women’s Fund endowment. It’s a big job. The theme from Sue’s term as head of planned giving for her Smith class of 1966 could be a theme for today’s Women’s Fund goals: “We’ve only just begun.”

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