

AWARDEE:

Phyllis Rathbun **Steuben County**



Phyllis Rathbun has dedicated decades of her life to her community. She started the Willing Workers 4-H Club of North Cohocton in 1953, coming home from college on the weekends to run her club meetings, Phyllis has continued to lead the Willing Workers for more than 65 years. The club focuses on life skills like cooking, sewing, and public speaking, teaching self-sufficiency, courage, tenacity, and service toward others. Many of the Willing Workers have been selected for leadership trainings or have achieved champion status on their projects. Phyllis has never turned away a child who wanted to learn from her. She has been recognized by New York State 4-H for her impact on youth, dedication, and advocacy as a “NYS Salute to Excellence Lifetime Volunteer Award” recipient. In addition to her work with 4-H, Phyllis has donated her time and talents to organizations such as the EJ Cottrell Memorial Library, Atlanta, NY, as a member and treasurer of the Library Trustees, and as the club secretary for the Atlanta-North Cohocton Community Development. She is an integral part of her faith community, serving as a Sunday school teacher, president of the United Methodist Women, church treasurer, and as member and treasurer of the church board of trustees for the North Cohocton United Methodist Church.

After graduating from Wayland High School, Phyllis, a lifelong resident of North Cohocton, attended SUNY Geneseo to earn her teaching degree. She spent the next 35 years teaching elementary students at Naples Central School. In 1957, she met her husband, Stan, to whom she’s been married for 61 years. Together they started a small strawberry farm in 1976. The couple had no children of their own, but Phyllis has nurtured students and an extended 4-H family for generations.

Regarding volunteering, Phyllis encourages everyone to pitch in without expectation of payment or recognition. She says “There is a feeling of satisfaction that comes from persistence and helping others.” She marvels that many 4-Hers, having struggled through a project, often attribute success in life to the fact that Phyllis had taught them how to overcome the obstacles in their path.