

# A legacy of inspirational women

As I think about March being Women's History Month, I think how blessed we are to live in a community with a legacy of so many inspiring women.

Catherine Evans Whitener was a young woman whose ideas and entrepreneurial spirit were the foundation for our local industry. Our United Way began when Mrs. M.E. Judd made a bet with Lamar Westcott. Lulu Westcott shared this piece of history with United Way in 1992.

"At first the Community Fund was known as 'The Empty Stocking Fund' and only a few hundred dollars was contributed. Sometime, probably, in the mid-'40s (before March 1949 when Mrs. M.E. Judd died) she bet my husband, Lamar Westcott, that he couldn't raise \$4,000 — an unheard of sum. The town had a population of 3,000 people. For the first time, he organized the raising of the funds very much like it is today with businesses soliciting its employees, the doctors, the other doctors, etc. They raised the \$4,000, he won the bet."

Lulu continued to be involved with United Way and was presented the Alexis de Tocqueville Society award in 1997 in celebration of her 100th birthday.

Today, many local

female leaders continue to lead the charge and inspire change in our community. At our recent Annual Meeting and Volunteer Awards we were able to

honor two extraordinary women leaders and two young women who are creating a path for change for the next generation.

Debbie Macon has put her heart and soul into her community through her volunteer work. She and her husband, Bryan, chaired

the United Way campaign in 2018, raising over \$4.1 million! Debbie also volunteers with RossWoods Adult Day Center, Dalton First United Methodist Church and Believe Greater Dalton. Debbie has given countless hours to her community without ever expecting anything in return. She has built her life around giving back to others. Because of her commitment to volunteering and her true example of servant leadership, Debbie Macon received the Connie Woodward Award for Outstanding Volunteerism.

Melinda Flood is heavily involved at Murray County 4-H where she was once a student. Now she serves in several capacities. Whether chaperoning at Junior Conference for three days or working at service projects like the Chatsworth

Health Care Valentine's Celebration, Melinda is building a better future through her work with the youth at Murray County 4-H. Because of her dedication and commitment to her community, Melinda Flood received the Elaine Butler Award for Outstanding Volunteerism.

Lily Adams volunteered her time and talents with the Northwest Whitfield High School service learning class at several local nonprofits. She also is the student intern at Rock Bridge Community Church where she volunteers in the student ministry department helping prepare for services and plan church-wide events. Lily also served as a camp counselor at Winshape Summer Camps where she worked as a leader for the second grade group and as a dance teacher. Lily received an Elbert Shaw Memorial Scholarship. With her \$5,000 scholarship she plans to attend the University of Georgia.

Catherine Duffy volunteered her time and talents with the Northwest Whitfield High School service learning class at several local nonprofits. She also serves at ChristChurch Presbyterian where she helped lead vacation Bible school and serves as a tutor for a third grade student. Catherine plans to attend Kennesaw State University and major in nursing. Catherine's true passion for improving lives has led her to devote

her time to volunteering. Catherine received a \$5,000 Elbert Shaw Memorial Scholarship and the award for Youth Volunteer of the Year.

This year, the United Way Women's Leadership Council is bringing another inspiring woman to our Spring Symposium. Dana Spinola is the CEO and founder of fab'rik. She began fab'rik in 2002 around the concept of high-style clothing with an affordable price tag. In 2006, Dana began franchising with like-minded women and has since grown fab'rik to 40-plus stores across the U.S. Dana has always believed that clothing has the ability to change lives. In 2009, she launched the brand's nonprofit arm, free fab'rik, which provides free shopping sprees for women and girls in need. On April 24 at Walnut Hill Farm, Dana will share with us how we can create a life we love. Our Women's Leadership Council will also collect women's clothing at the event to give to those in need in our community. Event registration is open at [ourunitedway.org](http://ourunitedway.org).

I am so thankful to live in our community where so many, both men and women, have raised their hands and contributed their time, talent and treasure to build a better future for all.

*Amanda Burt is president of the United Way of Northwest Georgia.*



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